

Food Dignity

International law, Community, and the Environment

Nicholas Furrow

July 2011

Supervisor: Jan Klabbers

European Masters Degree in Human Rights and Democratisation

University of Helsinki

Faculty of Law

ABSTRACT

Food politics is divided into many camps. The legal advocates of the right to food focus on starvation in poor countries while public health professionals are concerned with rising obesity and diabetes in rich countries. At the same time, peasant movements and local and seasonal advocates are challenging industrial agriculture and searching for a more holistic relationship between farmers and community. This thesis is an attempt to bring together the food problems of rich and poor alike through the unifying idea of food dignity.

The concept of food dignity starts with a broad range of values that set a standard against which any individual or overall public policy decision can be judged. This is in contrast to the standard macroeconomic approach to food production and distribution.

Founded on the principles of international human rights law, respect for the political and philosophical importance of community, and understanding the importance of a balanced relationship between humanity and the environment, a core set of values emerges. A food dignity standard built on these core values of labor, health, education, self-determination, community, and respect for the environment can be applied to some of the most important food policy debates of the day.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FIAN	Food First Information and Action Network
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
IFA	International Fertilizer Industry Association
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
NGO	Non-governmental organization
R2P	Responsibility to protect
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
WHO	World Health Organization

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	1
LIST OF ACRONYMS	2
INTRODUCTION	5
CHAPTER ONE	
INTERNATIONAL LAW AS A SOURCE OF VALUES	8
From human dignity to food dignity	8
Limits and contradictions	12
Human rights are universally political	12
A technical language for special people.....	14
Examples from the field.....	15
The right to food	18
Labor conquers all	22
Health in body, mind, and culture	26
Education is the soul of society	34
From self-determination to food sovereignty	37
CHAPTER TWO	
THE FREE INDIVIDUAL AND THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY	43
Freedom through community	44
Competition, cooperation, and evolutionary theory	47
The baby is born into the doctor's arms	49
Berry's bullseye	50
Education and community	52
Measuring community values	55

CHAPTER THREE

ENVIRONMENT, ENERGY, AND TECHNOLOGY59

 Pessimism of the intellect but optimism of the will.....60

 Climate change61

 Peak oil63

 Fertilizer isn't the answer65

 Respect for the soil68

 All the eggs are in one basket70

 Technology and science73

CONCLUSION80

BIBLIOGRAPHY83

INTRODUCTION

Interest in food issues goes in many directions. On the one hand, shocks in global commodity prices of food staples have brought the issue of the world's poorest people, pushed towards starvation by increasing food prices, to the front pages of newspapers and magazines and into the consciousness of the general public. Along with the realization of the instability of the lives of people in rural parts of poor countries is the understanding that undernourishment, malnutrition, and death by starvation are always there, even when prices are stable. This tragedy, being out of sight to most people, has also been out of mind. On the other hand, there is a resurgence in Europe and the US of food movements based on local and seasonal ingredients, organic farming, fairtrade coffee, and bringing back to life traditional dishes that have lost out to generic hamburgers and kebabs. Food politics involves many other issues as well: there's the obesity epidemic in industrialized countries, concepts of nutrition and healthy eating that are complicated by so-called experts making divergent claims, and countless other food topics that are hotly contested.

Those interested in the politics of food tend to see most of the issues as unrelated to each other. People who care about the right to food and feeding the hungry are often unsympathetic to those focusing on improving local food culture in Europe, which seems trivial to them in comparison. Those seeking out the newest organic cafes are interested in improving their health through eating better, or perhaps in concepts of building community through more direct relationships with small farmers. They may not have much knowledge of or interest in massive starvation, however, which seems an issue of global politics for technical experts to figure out.

The language of global food issues is often macroeconomic with graphs and charts of population growth, quantity of fertilizer used, and yields per acre. There's also the language of human rights law, which speaks to the rights of individuals to have their basic needs met, and the obligations of states to implement the treaties they have signed. Looking at the local and seasonal movement, the language is of the poetry of summer

tomatoes, the pleasure of a renewed sense of taste, and appreciation for the knowledge of a traditional cheesemaker.

This thesis is an investigation into what can bring together different topics of food under one umbrella. By peeling back the economics lingo, the legalistic terminology, and the romantic poetry, and getting to the core of each issue and each position, a set of assumptions (sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit) about what values will lead to greater human well-being can be found. These values are judged against the standard of food dignity, which most of this thesis is an attempt to define and substantiate.

The goal of food dignity is to start from the ground floor and articulate a set of values based on the principles of human rights law, on understanding the importance of community, and on respect for the natural environment. These three pillars are the foundation that food dignity is built on and together they create a tool for reasoning through the politics of food. From the importance of individual choices in buying food, to insight on how food and education can work together, to analysis of large-scale food policy decisions, food dignity can give a perspective that is broad enough to show how different factors are interrelated, and in the process can help bring much-needed clarity to a wide range of issues in food policy.

Taking an approach of such a sweeping nature is both a challenge, in a thesis of limited scale, and an opportunity. Instead of doing a detailed survey of the scholarship in each area, key sources are relied on to be representative of certain kinds of thinking. This gives room for more lengthy analysis and reflection on values and their interlinkages, which is necessary to describe the meaning, and move towards application, of food dignity. Furthermore, the arguments would benefit from a greater number of concrete examples to help reinforce the points that are made. There is great richness in a variety of United Nations (UN) documents and other sources that would bring depth to the arguments. Again, due to limitations of space, the number of examples used is restricted in order to prioritize the full reasoning needed to build the philosophical and practical framework.

Indeed, the opportunity of food dignity is in its great breadth of values, and in the way this concept is an overarching tool offering insight on almost any topic dealing with food. The development of the idea of food dignity here is a response to excessively focused approaches in scholarship and argumentation on food politics. It is precisely because of the compartmentalization and narrowness of language and approach that generally characterize debate around food issues that there is the need for creative, inter-disciplinary thinking that points towards a unifying theory.

In terms of approach, I've made the conscious decision to write in an academic way tempered by journalistic style. My goal is to make the arguments as persuasive as possible and bring vibrancy to discussions often deadened with technical terms and which lose their power and immediacy due to constant qualification and weakening of points made. In the words of Isaiah Berlin, "Few truths have ever won their way against the resistance of established ideas save by being overstated."¹ This is as good a guiding principle as any in order to make the most useful contribution to the contentious field of food politics.

¹ Berlin, 2000, p. 120.

CHAPTER ONE

INTERNATIONAL LAW AS A SOURCE OF VALUES

Certain values of international law help form the basis of food dignity. Before reflecting on human rights law, however, it's helpful to consider the word dignity. If any word is the key word of human rights it is dignity, and putting this word in perspective will help describe how it can be understood in the context of food and food issues, and what it will mean in building the concept of food dignity.

From human dignity to food dignity

Dignity as a legal term appears in human rights treaties, in declarations from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and in statements from social justice activists. Appeals to dignity are also common in bioethics and philosophy. Furthermore, it's a useful word in informal conversation among people, on a wide variety of topics, about the worth of different kinds of behavior but without elaborate loaded meaning. The meaning of dignity, and the need to seek as precise a definition as possible, depends on the context.

According to medical ethics scholar Audrey Chapman, human dignity is used widely as a term but often under-conceptualized. She describes how “in a pluralistic society groups and communities hold a diversity of worldviews, social and religious values, and cultural understandings that inform and shape their interpretations of human dignity.”²

Ruth Macklin, writing in the *BMJ* (formerly known as the *British Medical Journal*), goes a step further calling dignity a “useless concept” that “means no more than respect for persons or their autonomy.”³

² Chapman, 2011, p. 4.

³ Macklin, 2003, p. 1419.

To avoid using the term as “rhetorical dressing”⁴ it has to be defined in a given argument if it is to stand on its own as a meaningful term. Chapman says, “There is an obvious need to develop a meaningful concept of human dignity, and preferably with specific criteria that could be used for evaluative purposes.”⁵ The same is true about the concept of food dignity. Indeed, the primary aim of this thesis is to develop a set of criteria that can be used to judge decisions concerning production, distribution, and consumption of food.

When speaking of human rights law, dignity refers generally to the “inherent dignity of the human person.”⁶ Food dignity will take a great deal from contemporary human rights law, including some of how the word dignity is used and understood. It will also take some meaning from historical usages of the word, and from the simple and informal, but often meaningful way the word can be used to describe worth in an everyday action or situation.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world”⁷ and in doing so gives a language and framework of understanding that is repeated extensively through later human rights instruments. The term inherent is worth considering for a moment. It’s like a term of faith, although perhaps more an expression of a commitment to political principle than it is a form of belief without evidence. While food dignity will rely on principles of human rights, which in turn rely on concepts like ‘inherent’ and ‘universal’, these terms are only indirectly important to defining and applying food dignity, and won’t generally appear when bringing the meaning of this concept to bear on a given contemporary food topic or debate.

⁴ Chapman, 2011, p. 4.

⁵ Idem, p. 8.

⁶ ICESCR, preamble.

⁷ UDHR, preamble.

A concept of human dignity that leads more directly into the meaning of food dignity comes from the enlightenment philosophy of people as beings of reason. Immanuel Kant can possibly be considered the father of the notion of human dignity used in the sense relevant to this thesis: “to treat people with dignity is to treat them as autonomous individuals able to choose their destiny.”⁸ So the idea of dignity here is about autonomy, about being able to choose one’s own direction in life.

In a comprehensive study of the meaning and implementation of human dignity in international law and the national law of a variety of states, Christopher McCrudden shows that, while there is great variety in understanding of the term, “A basic minimum content of the meaning of human dignity can be discerned: that each human being possesses an intrinsic worth that should be respected, that some forms of conduct are inconsistent with respect for this intrinsic worth, and that the state exists for the individual not vice versa.”⁹ This common ground found in legal usages of dignity has one significant flaw that food dignity will aim to correct. That is the focus on the individual, and not enough room for understanding the worth, the value, the dignity of community.

Philosopher and drafter of the UDHR Jacques Maritain expresses an understanding of human rights that “viewed rights not as espousing radical ethical individualism but rather as essential for the promotion of the common good.”¹⁰ Common good is the aim of food dignity, and this aim can be reached in part through attention to individual rights, but also through attention to quality of community, as will be explored at length in the following chapter.

The right to food depends on understanding what adequate food is. Adequate food is a complex and meaningful term in itself, but is limiting as an overall idea to bring together the full range of values and factors that run through food issues. Adequate

⁸ McCrudden, 2008, p. 660.

⁹ Idem, p. 723.

¹⁰ Idem, p. 662.

suggests only getting to a base level, a sufficient level, while the level of dignity of something can be terrible or wonderful, very low or very high. Furthermore, the right to food cares mainly about those not getting enough food, and there is little discussion around this concept of principles that might be useful in dealing with food problems in developed countries where hunger is less of an issue, such as Britain or Japan. While the importance of focusing on the poorest of the poor is not up for debate, a consistent standard is needed in all discussions of food dignity, something that can make sense of food and food values, from overweight people to underweight people, linking health, energy, the environment, trade, education, quality of work, and community. The suggestion of food dignity is that food problems of rich and poor alike are linked in ways that deserve more exploration. This thesis will begin the journey down a path that tries to deal with global food problems through starting with the right values as opposed to starting with a macroeconomic viewpoint of population and quantity of production.

The framework of food dignity requires broad thinking about food. The dignity in this case is of the values that are embedded in the food, from the seeds in the soil, to the farmer that harvests, to the processing and distribution, to the cooking and eating. The values of food dignity are understood by analyzing this chain of activity from seed to fork, but they are always concrete human values, not somehow intrinsic to and abstractly of the food itself. They are the human inputs and outputs, the meanings and repercussions of why and how food gets onto our plates. Each step from growing to eating food is complex and has elements that relate to human well-being, from environmental values to work conditions along this path, to the involvement of knowledge and education in choices of producers and consumers, to health implications of eating certain foods in quantities too small or too large. This thesis attempts to find a standard with enough of a range of starting values that the smallest individual decisions can be judged against one or more of them, and the largest public policy decisions can be judged on the basis of the balancing of the different factors.

The aim of developing a practical concept such as food dignity is not to find a tool that if applied will always produce definitive and unambiguous results. Rather, the hope is

that a clear sense of food dignity can point in a direction that makes sure that in any decision about food the full spectrum of human factors are fairly considered. The concept of food dignity explored in this thesis is not grounded in unshakable truth. This is not a drawback, however, in order to deliver a judgement that it is worthwhile and broadly supportive of long term human well-being.

Limits and contradictions

Human rights, as written down in treaties and declarations, as interpreted by experts and implemented by states, or as wielded by activists, are far from representing a golden standard of truth by which human dignity in different contexts can be measured. A number of books in recent years have documented the range of problems with human rights law and the larger international human rights movement. Rather than repeating the full range of these arguments, I'm going to focus on two issues here – namely the political nature of human rights, and the pitfalls of professionalizing an elite group of human rights experts that interpret, set limits, and officially implement. Drawing from academic sources on the subject, I'll also give examples from personal experience with human rights education and experts.

Human rights are universally political

Human rights often claim non-political status, to be understood from appeals to universality, to take one important example. Universality has overtones of faith, of belief without evidence, of denial of context and history in favor of a simple, supreme truth. They are taken as pre-political or stemming directly from rock-solid truths of human nature. But the instruments that human rights law is based on, and the language used, is formed in a highly political way through the practical political process of states forging a mutually acceptable treaty. Beyond the politics of their creation, their application is indisputably determined by states and their politics. Martti Koskenniemi puts the matter clearly, referring to a case from the European Court of Human Rights:

The point is not that such a statement should be seen as mistaken or cynical but that recourse to the language of ‘functions’, ‘objectives’, ‘general interest’ and ‘proportionality’ which seems so far removed from our intuitive association of rights with an absoluteness, or ‘trumping character’, against social policies, is simply unavoidable. Rights do not exist as such – ‘fact-like’ – outside the structures of political deliberation. They are not a limit but an effect of politics.¹¹

This is not to say that claiming human rights as universal is not a useful or good thing to do. Only that it is a political thing to do, and should be understood as such. The risks of wielding human rights as though they are the hand of a benevolent god are the risks of unwittingly being an instrument to larger political forces and powers. The alternative problem is being hyper aware of their political nature, and knowingly abusing them in favor of aims that violate their principles and intents. This puts many international lawyers and human rights activists somewhere between a “naive enthusiasm and a suave cynicism”¹² although in this space there is plenty of room for debate on their application being true to their principles, as there should be.

To understand how human rights concepts and mechanisms limit themselves for political reasons when the principles would suggest a broader application, it is illuminating to consider an example related to the emerging norm of the responsibility to protect (R2P), which allows that massive crimes committed by a state against its people would ultimately justify the use of military intervention by other states. In an address to the UN General Assembly on the subject, Noam Chomsky notes that “there is no thought of invoking even the most innocuous prescriptions of R2P to respond to massive starvation in the poor countries.” As to the scale of the number of children alone dying of lack of food each day, “in southern Africa alone, it is Rwanda-level killing, not for 100 days, but every day.”¹³ The human rights regime has lots to say on some things, but on the issue of starvation, the full range of its instruments and emerging norms are not used to criticize extensive and avoidable death and suffering. It’s hard not to see the death by starvation in the world as the greatest affront to human

¹¹ Koskenniemi, 2002, p. 86.

¹² Idem, p. 79.

¹³ Chomsky, 2009, p. 5.

dignity imaginable, yet while the right to food mechanisms and organizations do what they can, most of the human rights regime frets about other matters, which, while often critical, don't begin to approach the scale of the tragedy of starvation. The repercussions of applying the language of R2P in the context of starvation would have political and economic significance, in terms of trade and agricultural policy and practice. It's likely that economic considerations make the world's most powerful countries unwilling to allow discussion on these lines by human rights experts, advocates and defenders.

A technical language for special people

To those uninitiated in the technical terms of human rights, to pick up a human rights report or academic journal is to fight against eyes that start to glaze over and the desire to put it down and find something articulated with some passion, or at least with fewer acronyms. From references to the UDHR and interdependence, to the indivisibility of the rights in the divided ICCPR and the ICESCR, to the OSCE and minority quotas, to the gender mainstreaming practices of EULEX, much of the way human rights dialogue takes place comes from what Miia Halme calls "learning to talk like experts."¹⁴ It often takes someone trained in the treaties and the lingo to pick out those phrases that contain the critical bits that are advocating, condemning, or otherwise taking a stand (often an extremely meek one) relative to the larger debate.

Of course, it takes experts to guide in any field. A manual for electricians to fix a large building's air conditioning system is different from a manual for ordinary use that comes with a toaster oven. But this jargon and way of writing often goes too far, excluding the millions of people that will be influenced by the outcome of the debate from greater involvement. Expertise "emerges as a domain of individual mastering of skill and knowledge instead of as the result of collective, interactive and collaborative activity by a community of practice."¹⁵

¹⁴ Halme, 2008, p. 127.

¹⁵ Idem, p. 111.

Together the often misunderstood political nature of the human rights processes and the technocratic way in which the debate and implementation are carried out can form a marriage that goes against the best interests of the majority of the people the human rights laws and language are supposed to protect. These factors among others create the risk of reproducing “global relationships of dependency and victimization which are seen as responsible for much human suffering both today and in the past.”¹⁶ Human rights laws and policies can do more harm than good, depending on how and by whom they are carried out.

Examples from the field

To understand better the way human rights can work in practice, it’s helpful to look at a few examples from a part of the world that can be thought of as a testing ground for much human rights work – the Balkans, and Kosovo in particular. The United States Agency for International Development (US AID) estimates that in 2009 in Kosovo there were approximately 5,000 NGOs on the ground¹⁷, an astonishing number considering the relatively small population. Given this massive presence of organizations, many presumably armed with the language of human rights, it would be reasonable to expect that the population would be grateful for all these well-intended internationals, and would have a steadily increasing quality of life due to all the hours the experts are putting into resolving their problems and the bundles of money funding projects of all sorts. But the reality shows a mixed reaction at best.

A Pristina-based NGO focusing on supporting citizen activism while promoting government transparency and accountability recently produced a report titled *Trust me, I’m an International*. It goes through a number of issues linked with the human rights internationals and the peacekeeping troops that are supposed to protect the local people,

¹⁶ Halme, 2008, p. 17.

¹⁷ US AID, 2009, p. 1.

such as human trafficking to meet the outsiders' appetite for prostitution.¹⁸ Other issues of crimes being committed by international organizations and lack of punishment are treated in this document as well. The "culture of malpractice and impunity" that "continues to stifle a more productive partnership" between the internationals and the locals is named as a main cause for the lack of mutual trust and respect.¹⁹ The conclusion describes multiple self-interested actors "vying for influence under the cover of universal principles."²⁰ The report shows a reception by the locals that is hardly warm and grateful.

On the traditional European Masters Programme in Human Rights and Democratisation (E.MA) trip to Kosovo last winter, I was part of a group of students that visited the headquarters of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in the town of Prizren. One of the staff members there told a story about the challenges of communicating with locals who would drop in unannounced, looking for support on various problems in their lives. She described how locals would ask what the meaning of the OSCE employee's title, such as 'Human Dimension Officer', actually meant. This left the staff members fumbling for words that would explain clearly what they were intended to do. This was not because of language in terms of access to Albanian, as interpreters were on hand, but language in terms of human rights jargon, which, when attempting to put into simple, accessible language, was found to be surprisingly devoid of content.

Often the locals complaints were about not being able to find work. The response 'It's not in my mandate' was difficult for the locals to understand. After all, these foreign experts were from rich countries, and in Kosovo purportedly to help the people get their state in order, and support human rights. But in the frustration of trying to explain why they could do nothing to fix the most serious problems the people were complaining about, the common denominator of understanding was simply 'go away.'

¹⁸ Symonds, 2010, p. 13.

¹⁹ Idem, p. 15.

²⁰ Idem, p. 16.

The E.MA class also had an audience with a group from the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) officials. One of the human rights officers was asked how much the experts from the different large organizations, in her opinion, actually cared about the people of Kosovo. Did their “hearts beat for Kosovo” or were they often primarily interested in career advancement, aware that Kosovo looks good on a resume, and with an eye on joining a UN mission in Africa, for example. Shaken by the question, she said, “My heart does not beat for Kosovo.” She described how she was a technical human rights expert there to carry out the mandate, no more and no less. Passion, emotion, political engagement, and interest in the well-being of the people beyond narrow technical constraints were not part of it nor should they be in her mind.

Although these examples don’t deal with food, they show some of the significant problems of the human rights regime in action. It’s well worth starting with a critical perspective on claims that are cloaked in human rights language, to examine the political and economic interests that may be driving the claims. Ultimately, going back to the principles of the instruments that the claims are based on can help determine if the actual practice based on human rights rhetoric is in line with the originally intended values.

In the rest of this chapter, this thesis will quote from various human rights instruments and reports. The purpose will be to describe the values of human rights law, and how they can support and enhance the values of food dignity. The goal is not to then understand how to use existing human rights mechanisms to better advance these values. Rather the human rights language and references will generally be used only in the most stripped-down manner. The aim is to create a basis, a tool, a set of values that go along with the name of food dignity, which can then, with additional philosophical and environmental development, become the standard that decisions on food can be measured against.

In his closing remarks to the UN, Chomsky points out that, “Even though states do not adhere to the UDHR, and some formally reject much of it (crucially including the

world's most powerful state), nonetheless it serves as an ideal that activists can appeal to in educational and organizing efforts, often effectively.”²¹ Halme describes the human rights discourse as becoming “synonymous with global good will and promises of a brighter tomorrow.”²² These statements give the sense of optimism that takes human rights advocacy and laws to be a tool for bottom up action, rather than looking to the top of the pyramid, to the experts for their interpretation first. In this way, the weaknesses of human rights that are “institutionalized as a central part of political and administrative culture” can be avoided, and the “technocratic language that leaves no room for the articulation or realization of conceptions of the good” is put aside.²³ The space for articulation of the good, the dignified, is then created, and still anchored in something tangible and widely accepted as valid.

The right to food

Discussions about the right to food at their roots are about using international law to do something about the millions of hungry people in the world, estimated to be approximately 925 million.²⁴ A human-rights-based approach to food and nutrition is not the same as a needs-based approach. With a human-rights-based approach, rather than simple objects of charity the beneficiaries are active claim holders, and those who violate their claims can in principle be held accountable.²⁵

In a world that is increasingly rich in terms of productivity and absolute wealth, and which produces enough food in total to feed about twice the world population, the situation of massive hunger is hard for many to accept.²⁶ A recent campaign from the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) titled “One billion hungry and I’m mad as

²¹ Chomsky, 2009, p. 7.

²² Halme, 2008, p. 211.

²³ Koskenniemi, 1999, p. 99.

²⁴ see food price index at www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/wfs-home/foodpricesindex/en/

²⁵ FAO, 1998, p. vii.

²⁶ from the executive summary, A/HRC/7/5, 10 January 2008, p. 2.

hell” has drawn millions of signatories and gives a sense of how people understand the injustice of the situation and respond emotionally.²⁷

To approach world hunger as an issue of human rights, as an unnecessary and extreme attack on human dignity avoidable through changes in policy, is the business of the right to food, although it hasn’t been a very successful business. Philip Alston notes that “the right to food has been endorsed more often and with greater unanimity and urgency than most other human rights, while at the same time being violated more comprehensively and systematically than probably any other right.”²⁸ The World Food Conference of 1974 produced a declaration announcing that “within a decade no child will go to bed hungry... no family will fear for its next day’s bread.”²⁹ World hunger remained where it was, in the 800 millions, for the next decade. The UN tried again a quarter century later, although this time with a less ambitious goal: one of the key millennium development goals was to cut in half by 2015 the number of hungry people in the world.³⁰ Hunger rose more or less steadily in the following years. In fact, it would be a miracle if hunger in 2015 isn’t significantly higher than it was at the time the goal of halving it was set.

The principles of the right to food are largely good even though implementation has largely failed. The UDHR gives an important starting point to understand the underlying principles. “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services.”³¹ Food is mentioned in the context of a variety of other fundamental human needs, in a fairly sweeping statement about the basics necessary for human dignity. While this grouping of different elements in one sentence is considered by many international lawyers to be a weakness since it waters down the potential for clear implementation, in contrast, for food dignity, considering

²⁷ see www.onebillionhungry.org

²⁸ Alston, 1984, p. 9.

²⁹ from the editors’ introduction in Alston & Tomaševski, 1984, p. 7.

³⁰ see www.un.org/millenniumgoals/poverty.shtml

³¹ UDHR, Article 25, para. 1.

many factors together will be a strength in understanding what's at issue in any analysis of food values.

The vague nature of the right to food as written in the UDHR was repeated in the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which entered into force in 1976. Many international lawyers and NGOs, unhappy with the scale and persistence of worldwide hunger, called for more clarification as to the meaning and implementation of the right, and in 1999 the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights produced the General Comment 12, amplifying and explaining. There is lengthy discussion of the meaning of the term adequate food in this document that's worth reflecting on:

The concept of *adequacy* is particularly significant in relation to the right to food since it serves to underline a number of factors... *sustainability* is intrinsically linked to the notion of adequate food or food security, implying food being accessible for both present and future generations. The precise meaning of "adequacy" is to a large extent determined by prevailing social, economic, cultural, climatic, ecological and other conditions, while "sustainability" incorporates the notion of long-term availability and accessibility.³²

Adequate food is a complex concept, it turns out, that can't "be interpreted in a narrow or restrictive sense which equates it with a minimum package of calories" but rather must be looked at in cultural and ecological terms among others.³³ This is an important starting point for the concept of the interdependent nature of various values that will come together to form food dignity (which takes most of the values of the right to food, reinterpreting some, and adding others, and taking on a broader concept of application). As adequate food is defined by a wide set of values, so any implementation of the right to food by states "should address critical issues and measures in regard to all aspects of the food system, including the production, processing, distribution, marketing and

³² E/C.12/1999/5, 12 May 1999, para. 7.

³³ *Idem*, para. 6.

consumption of safe food, as well as parallel measures in the fields of health, education, employment and social security.”³⁴

There can't be enough food if that food is not adequate. And the path to adequate food is paved with health, education, jobs, and protecting the environment. Food First Information and Action Network (FIAN) recognizes in their statute that “in many countries, even where per capita foods production has increased, there exists [*sic*] large pockets of malnutrition and risk of famine” and that “the situation of the people afflicted by hunger and malnutrition arises from social inequality, oppression, neo-colonialism in all its forms and discrimination in particular against women.”³⁵ These statements, which help form the essential identity and mission of FIAN, take one side in the fiercely raging debate over whether hunger can be dealt with by emphasis primarily on quantity, or by emphasis on quality, distribution, culture, and political and economic forces. Although arguments on both sides of this debate will be considered in later chapters, as the concept of food dignity is developed, it's clear that the compass of food dignity points much more in the direction of FIAN's point of view than that of those stomping their feet and clapping their hands for more production with no consideration of environmental sustainability or harm to community and culture. There are multiple forces interacting in complex ways to produce world hunger and other global food problems; what's desperately needed when determining a steady course for the present is enough sense and vision to look back at history and forward to the likely future.

From looking at the foundational instruments of human rights, what begins to emerge is a sense of the interdependence between delivering enough food and respecting other cultural values of a society. This more nuanced notion may not at first seem directly related to feeding the hungry, which is the aim generally expressed when discussing world hunger. The idea of feeding the hungry is already flawed, however. It's a vertical concept of charity, whether voluntary or obligatory.

³⁴ E/C.12/1999/5, 12 May 1999, para. 25.

³⁵ FIAN, 1994, p. 2.

The prolific writer and journalist, Eduardo Galeano, known for his insight on Latin American politics, explains in a simple and clear way the need to reconceive the notion of charity. He describes real human relationships as horizontal not vertical - solidarity not charity. Even 'leadership' is a flawed idea to Galeano, as it implies the need of someone higher up the ladder to overcome the resistance of those lower down, while 'friendship' is a more human term.³⁶ This notion of horizontal relationships when it comes to food values will form an important part of food dignity, and has a basis in the right to food as well. The 2004 Voluntary Guidelines on the right to food from the FAO indicate the need for "broad-based" economic development that promotes "inclusive" agriculture and land use to "enhance the productivity of poor rural communities" and "share the benefits" as well as "enhancing the livelihoods of the urban poor."³⁷ Any strategies that states adopt to realize the right to food should be "transparent, inclusive and comprehensive, cut across national policies, programs and projects" and be "implemented in a participatory and accountable manner."³⁸ This kind of language is horizontal in nature and is repeated throughout the 2004 guidelines.

In building the concept of food dignity on the principles of the right to food, it's useful to look beyond the usual right to food sources to statements on other related fundamental human rights in order to strengthen the values that interlink. Values such as labor, public health, education, and self-determination are paramount to food dignity, and are well-rooted in human rights law, although interpretation of these values will need to be broader than the standard legalistic ones to fully express food dignity.

Labor conquers all

Both the UDHR and the ICESCR refer to the right to work. States are to recognize "the right to work, which includes the right of everyone to the opportunity to gain his living by work he freely chooses or accepts."³⁹ There is also a reference to "just and

³⁶ see the 2009 interview at www.democracynow.org/2009/5/28/eduardo

³⁷ FAO, 2005, pp. 10-11.

³⁸ Idem, p. 12.

³⁹ ICESCR, Article 6, para. 1.

favourable conditions of work” including fair wages.⁴⁰ Work freely entered into, and the quality of that work, is a fundamental value of food dignity. This is to be understood in agriculture in particular, but also in other areas such as food processing and distribution, as valuing both job creation and the quality of those jobs. Methods of farming that cut jobs in favor of increased mechanization are to be valued less (assuming that those jobs lost provided a decent life for the workers). Likewise, methods of farming that turn farmers into sedentary machine operators and generally decrease the amount of knowledge they access and the variety of action they undertake are to be valued less than methods of farming based on depth of knowledge, and the sharing and exchanging of knowledge with others for the sake of continual learning. There are environmental, cultural, and educational reasons to value such judgements, but in terms of work alone, the more variety and knowledge the farmer employs, the more pride and thus dignity the work provides. This is the sense in which “just and favourable” work will be understood in food dignity.

The title of this section comes from a poem on agriculture in Virgil’s *Georgics* that praises the virtues of working in harmony with nature. A ‘back to the land’ exhortation, the poem speaks of a farmer’s work in evocative terms from the melodies of tools at work, to the rich colors of the plants and trees, to the pleasure of skillfully weaving a basket indoors during a storm.⁴¹ Although there is the risk of romanticizing what can be tedious and hard work, it’s worth keeping in mind that agriculture can also be interesting, engaging and complex, depending on how it is carried out.

What is needed is a more human-based approach to labor and less of an approach that views labor simply as a commodity to be bought and sold. Even the FAO warns of “a world in which human values tend to be replaced by market values.”⁴² Karl Polanyi famously describes the problem of viewing labor and land as commodities. “Labor is only another name for a human activity which goes with life itself, which in its turn is not produced for sale but for entirely different reasons, nor can that activity be detached

⁴⁰ ICESCR, Article 7.

⁴¹ Virgil, 2002, pp. 1-42.

⁴² FAO, 1998, p. 21.

from the rest of life, be stored or mobilized; land is only another name for nature (...).”⁴³ Labor must be valued in this way, as primarily about the substance and quality of what people do with their time, because to include it in a market framework is “to subordinate the substance of society itself to the laws of the market.”⁴⁴ Labor can be so varied and interesting, with enough room for creativity that workers might rightly be called artists. In this way, people can “love their labour for its own sake, improve it by their own plastic genius and inventive skill, and thereby cultivate their intellect, ennoble their character, and exalt and refine their pleasures.”⁴⁵

Decisions based on food dignity will assess as more valuable a food business, a farm, or a restaurant that employs more people with good work rather than fewer, and favors the small business over the large, the independent over the corporate franchise. The smaller, more independent businesses are taken in this argument as more likely to have a broad set of values, to be more rooted in their communities, and to be less obsessed with generating as large a profit for the owners as possible over the values of labor, in quantity and quality.

It is often argued that the small business is on a continuum with the large and that, in accordance with the values of capitalism, such a business will aim to accumulate wealth and grow, spread, and franchise to accumulate even more wealth. But small business may have other goals than constant accumulation and growth. Thinking about a local butcher, corner store, or a small ecological farm, the owners certainly want to make a living. But ideas of expansion and accumulation are not necessarily on owners’ minds, if they even have a concept of ‘business models’ or ‘rate of return’ at all. They understand themselves as rooted in a specific community, as carrying out a basic and useful service for the people they serve, and they seek a decent life from it while considering a wide range of values in its operation.

⁴³ Polanyi, 1957, p. 72.

⁴⁴ Idem, p. 71.

⁴⁵ Humboldt, 1969, p. 22.

The most recent report from Olivier De Schutter, the UN special rapporteur on the right to food, discusses the potential of agroecology as a useful method of farming to support peoples' right to food. Agroecology can be understood as a blend of agronomy and ecology, which "seeks ways to enhance agricultural systems by mimicking natural processes, thus creating beneficial biological interactions and synergies among the components of the agroecosystem."⁴⁶ In terms of the impact of this type of farming on jobs, De Schutter observes that "while labour-saving policies have generally been prioritized by governments, creation of employment in rural areas in developing countries, where underemployment is currently massive, and demographic growth remains high, may constitute an advantage rather than a liability and may slow down rural-urban migration."⁴⁷ As for the quality of the jobs that can be created by a focus on smaller-scale ecological agriculture, "agroecology is also more attractive to farmers, because it procures pleasant features for those working the land for long hours, such as shade from trees or the absence of smell and toxicity from chemicals."⁴⁸

The well-known food writers and activists Frances Moore Lappé and Joseph Collins make the same link between labor and agroecological farming. They point out that "we are taught to measure productivity in terms of how few people it takes to grow food. Such a measure makes no sense at all in underdeveloped countries with vast, untapped human labor resources."⁴⁹ The same could be said for developed countries, where unemployment and underemployment are also serious concerns.

The validity of viewing a value such as labor in a varied, fundamentally culturally and environmentally complex manner, from the bottom up, can be supported equally well with international law, with political analysis, and with poetry. This manner of looking at the value of labor is directly at odds with market-based economic thinking. Depending on which approach an analysis takes, the meaning of labor, and the assessment of 'good work' or 'quality work,' looks very different. In fact, the narrow

⁴⁶ A/HRC/16/49, 20 December 2010, para. 12.

⁴⁷ *Idem*, para. 23.

⁴⁸ *Idem*.

⁴⁹ Lappé & Collins, 1977, p. 30.

economic view has little room for such complex considerations, as its currency is mainly quantity. And even quantity, measured in number of jobs, is often sacrificed for other economic values.

Health in body, mind, and culture

Health as a human right is mentioned in the UDHR, and expanded in the ICESCR, which refers to “the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.”⁵⁰ In terms of food, it’s easy enough to understand the link between getting enough food and decent health, as not eating enough leads to malnourishment and steadily worsening health ending with starvation and ultimately death. Health and food are also clearly linked in the obesity epidemic affecting industrialized (and increasingly also developing) nations. It’s widely accepted that diet-related illness is the number one cause of premature death in industrialized countries.⁵¹

In order to fully value health in a way that can apply equally to rich and poor countries, the concept of health in terms of adequate food, coming from the right to food, must be enlarged within the framework of food dignity to provide a set of health principles, ways of judging decisions about food and health, that can be applied to all nations’ food issues, including problems associated with people eating too much.

One way that food dignity can be used when understanding the health merits of dieting advice comes from focusing, in terms of good health, primarily on getting the right number of calories while also respecting the related values of food dignity (labor and community for example). This is more important than trying to parse the complicated discussions around the nutritional merits of precise foods. Anyone familiar with the rapidly shifting diet fads knows how complex it is to understand nutrition and ‘proper’ diet, since confusing and conflicting health claims compete from the sides of cereal

⁵⁰ ICESCR, Article 12, para. 1.

⁵¹ Duff, 2004, p. 164.

boxes and other processed foods, and books and articles making wildly different claims about a healthy diet abound. The Atkins diet promises weight-loss and better health through eliminating almost all carbohydrates from the diet, while allowing abundant bacon and butter. This diet claims that it “turns your body into a fat-burning machine” so you can “get an exit pass off the blood sugar rollercoaster” because this way of eating is more “nutritionally balanced” and is “backed by scientific research.”⁵² On the other hand, food commentator and medical researcher Dean Ornish, father of the Ornish Diet, advocates a low-fat diet that is almost exclusively vegan, and is high in whole grains and soy products.⁵³ Other diets that focus on ‘good’ and ‘bad’ carbohydrates, fats, and proteins are plentiful. Claims on products suggesting health benefits such as ‘fiber rich’, ‘heart healthy’, and ‘vitamin fortified’, are too numerous to mention and are not worth delving into in this discussion. When it comes to food and health, equilibrium of calories taken in relative to calories burned is what will be valued. As to the exact content of a diet, it must contain some fresh fruits and vegetables (a suggestion given by all), but otherwise can be widely varied, as the diets of people with different culinary traditions in different parts of the world clearly are. The values to guide eating will come in part from nutritional research, but mainly from related social, economic, and cultural factors.

A good starting point for a discussion about health, and how to understand it in the context of food dignity, is to define the term health. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), “Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”⁵⁴ This definition immediately goes beyond the idea of curing a disease, or in terms of food, of getting the right number of calories each day and the necessary nutrients. Body, mind, and culture are linked together, and each is only complete when considered together. While the WHO’s is generally a good definition of health, it’s worth noting problems with the concept of ‘complete’ well-being.

⁵² from the official Atkins website at www.atkins.com/Index.aspx

⁵³ Ornish, 2008.

⁵⁴ see the WHO website at <https://apps.who.int/aboutwho/en/definition.html>

The British scientist Magnus Pyke comments widely on food, science and society, often bucking conventional wisdom with considerable insight. He describes the difficulty of “defining health in all the changing environmental pressures and strains of an organism itself passing from infancy through adolescence to maturity, senescence and death.”⁵⁵ His point is that there is no finality of health, no ‘complete’ health in a body that dies a little bit more each day. That said, it’s easy enough to use the WHO definition in most political discussions of health, since understanding health not in absolute but relative terms is often intuitive. For example, it’s healthier to eat enough food than not enough, and healthier to eat less food than too much. Other more complex judgements about health and food can also be made with significant credibility, once certain factors that influence health can be understood.

The links between health and large-scale political and economic conditions, such as income inequality, must be understood in order to place a value on health in individual or broader food policy decisions. Recent medical research by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett has linked inequality with broad and serious negative effects on almost all the standard public health indicators. Their research shows that “Inequality is associated with lower life expectancy, higher rates of infant mortality, shorter height, poor self-reported health, low birthweight, AIDS and depression.”⁵⁶ The critical point is that good health is not nearly as much about the absolute wealth of the majority of the people (once the threshold for stable subsistence is crossed) as it is about the gap between rich and poor in a given society. The factors causing this correlation are convincingly explored by Wilkinson and Pickett, using exhaustive data from a spread of different countries.

Obesity is particularly singled out as linked to socio-economic inequality.⁵⁷ The problems of obesity are extremely serious, as it “increases the risk of hypertension, type II diabetes, cardiovascular disease, gallbladder disease and some cancers.”⁵⁸ A decision

⁵⁵ Pyke, 1968, p. 150.

⁵⁶ Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009, p. 81.

⁵⁷ Idem, p. 89.

⁵⁸ Idem.

about food that respects food dignity would be one that values equality of income, rather than one that redistributes income upwards to people and organizations that are already vastly wealthy. This simple logic would favor buying food from a small producer rather than a large one, if only because it puts money in the pocket of an organization that is less wealthy. The cumulative effect of many people in different areas favoring purchases from smaller (and in many cases more local) producers, rather than buying products made by enormous food companies, would have an effect of redistributing wealth in society, which in turn would increase public health. This result can be achieved just as well through such reasoning and behavior on an individual basis when buying food as it can be through policy makers deciding how to shape taxes and incentives for large versus small food growers, producers, distributors, and so on. What looks like a purely economic decision becomes one with health consequences as well.

The first sentence of the first article of the UDHR proclaims that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”⁵⁹ Equality is a value that threads through human rights law, although often it is understood in the context of equality of race, gender, and minorities having equal treatment under the law. Income inequality issues are inextricably wound up in all other equality issues, however. The calls for a more equal and fair world are plentiful and continuous from human rights experts, activists, and progressives, although their voices don’t carry as far as they might for the background noise of those chanting the mantra of economic growth above all else. For the purposes of food dignity, equality can have its place as an important element in public health, and also in quality of community, which I won’t linger on here as it is the subject of the next chapter.

The issue of inequality is a natural segue into equally broad health issues that are part of the “conflict between public health and corporate interest.”⁶⁰ One of the most glaring cases of this conflict can be seen in the rise and entrenchment of fast food and what it means to public health. But before looking into the issue, it’s helpful to get the bugbear

⁵⁹ UDHR, Article 1.

⁶⁰ Duff, 2004, p. 163.

of such health debates out of the way – the seeming dilemma between the individual choice perspective and the societal good perspective.

The discussion around food and public health is often broken down into two camps, one being the ‘health promotion’ argument, where the “relationship between food and health is understood in holistic terms of balance, variety, and moderation in dietary intake” with the aim of promoting good health in entire populations. On the other hand, the ‘medical’ argument is that a “population’s health can best be promoted by preventing and treating disease in individuals.” The two visions contrast on societal versus individual perspectives, on food as interlinked to other social forces like inequality and culture, or food as a commodity that can be “modified to assist the dietary reform process.”⁶¹ The notion of food dignity supports the ‘health promotion’ camp as it places high importance on community, and on looking at the political, economic, and educational forces that shape individual choices.

The proponents of the so-called ‘medical’ argument, which takes individual choices about food as coming from the deepest desires hidden in the core of human beings (and which advertising helps release from their mysterious hiding place), willfully ignore the complexity and variety of factors that influence how and why individual choices are made. “The production and marketing of food are significant examples of structural influences on food choices. While a great deal can be achieved by focusing on individual choices, if we ignore the food industry and its interests we get, at best, only a partial understanding of the problems of nutrition and public health policy.”⁶²

When looking at fast food, it doesn’t particularly matter which model is taken as the starting point, since the ‘medical’ model should be concerned with preventing disease first and foremost. Whether looked at as an individual choice problem or a societal good problem, the nature of the relationship between health and fast food is the same: if

⁶¹ Lawrence & Germov, 2004, pp. 122-23.

⁶² Duff, 2004, p. 149.

eating fast food causes obesity then it should be discouraged, individually and collectively.

In his book *The McDonaldization of Society*, George Ritzer analyzes a variety of fast food chains to understand the principles they rely on to generate their profits. Efficiency is one of the main driving forces of McDonalds and other fast food chains in what Ritzer calls “speeding the way from secretion to excretion.”⁶³ The forces at work in a fast food outlet are designed to speed the process at every stage. “With the food obtained, it is but a few steps to a table and the beginning of the ‘dining experience.’ With little inducement to linger, diners generally eat quickly and then gather the leftover paper, Styrofoam, and plastic; discard them in a nearby trash receptacle; and get back in their cars to drive to the next (often McDonaldized) activity.”⁶⁴ Finger foods make the food easier to eat more quickly, and the seats are often uncomfortable.⁶⁵

The problem here is a simple one but extremely serious. Eating fast causes people to take in too many calories by overeating. A recent article in the *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism* shows that eating fast leads to overconsumption and obesity, due to the rate of release of hormones in communication between the stomach and the brain.⁶⁶ The principle of speedy turnover that drives corporate fast food profits thus has serious negative health effects on customers. Food dignity, valuing individual and public health, and not valuing profit-making by large corporations, argues against fast food on these grounds (not to mention associated labor, environmental, and community issues).

Fast food commits another cardinal sin in terms of public health. The large sugary drinks that come along with most meals do more than add a certain amount of calories. Research shows that drinking even two sweet drinks a day dulls taste buds to sweetness and causes people to seek an even sweeter fix “creating a ‘vicious cycle’ as consumers

⁶³ Ritzer, 2004, p. 46.

⁶⁴ Idem.

⁶⁵ Idem, p. 117.

⁶⁶ Kokkinos et al., 2010, p. 333.

look for their next treat.”⁶⁷ — According to researcher Dr. Hans-Peter Kubis, “We are heading for a health disaster with rising obesity levels and the increasing incidence of type 2 diabetes. From our research it is clear to see how this situation may have created a cycle of sweet food and drink consumption. As taste satisfaction levels drop, the more sweet foods are consumed, contributing to these problems.”⁶⁸ —

Another problem with large cups of sugary drinks which fill the stomach, and generally with eating too much food at one sitting, is that the stomach becomes stretched out. Thus it begins to take more food to reach the sensation of being full, in a cycle that pushes into excessive consumption of calories. “This observation may partly explain why obesity is on the rise: popular demand has led to larger and larger platefuls of pasta, super-sized fast-food meals, and huge candy bars and soft drinks, and stomachs have adapted to accommodate them.”⁶⁹ — That the mechanism of large portions and large stomachs is self-reinforcing is supported by the evidence. To understand how the “popular demand” comes into being in the first place it’s helpful to recall the risks of ignoring the interests of the food industry by focusing too much on individual choices.

Given that sodas and sweet drinks are damaging beyond their easy-to-overdo liquid calories, it’s surprising that forces of education and public policy don’t try more actively to shape individual choices and the structural forces that influence these choices. Part of the problem is the mixed message given about sugary drinks and the companies that profit from their sales by the media. A recent Financial Times article profiling the top 50 women in world business puts them on a pedestal, as people to be admired if not envied.⁷⁰ — The first person on the list is the chief executive officer (CEO) of PepsiCo, who is profiled as someone of great character. But if increasing sales of Pepsi increase the suffering and premature death related to obesity, to praise the nobility of her role in society is ignorant at best and obscene at worst.

⁶⁷ Morris, 2011.

⁶⁸ Idem.

⁶⁹ Sizer & Whitney, 2002, p. 323.

⁷⁰ Hill, 2010.

Health is a human right, which entitles all of us to the “highest attainable standard” of physical, mental, and social well-being. Health is a virtue. Attempting to attain and maintain it is about personal choices, about lifestyle, and about relationships and responsibilities to others. Other forces that influence public health are political and economic and global, in terms of food production and distribution in particular. Much of the problem in addressing health issues through food is of an emphasis on quantity above all to feed the hungry. Quantity is king and queen. Quantity is quality, distribution will work itself out, and there’s no room for other factors. But this push for quantity hasn’t fed the hungry as promised, and is at least partly if not primarily to blame for the obesity epidemic.

A different understanding of the virtue of good health comes from the Austrian philosopher and social critic Ivan Illich. “Health designates a process of adaptation. It is not the result of instinct, but of autonomous yet culturally shaped reaction to socially created reality.” Human activities are “shaped and conditioned by the culture in which the individual grows up: patterns of work and leisure, of celebration and sleep, of production and preparation of food and drink, of family relations and politics.”⁷¹ The founder of Slow Food, Carlo Petrini, speaks of culinary pleasure as a virtue that can lead to health. “The pleasures of the table are the gateway to recovering a gentle and harmonious rhythm of life. Go through it and the vampire of advertising will lose its power over you. So will the anxiety, conformism, and suggestive power of the mass media that the shifting winds of fashion impose.”⁷²

Health as a basic value of food dignity will be understood with respect to quantity of food as enough but not too many calories. The way to get there is through production of the right foods in the right ways, and a more just global policy that insures a more humane distribution of existing food staples. But just as well, good health comes through culture, family relations, culinary pleasure and knowledge, and respect for labor and the environment, all of which elements relate to food. Understanding how these

⁷¹ Illich, 1975, pp. 167-68.

⁷² Petrini, 2001, pp. 24-25.

factors are intertwined will create a way of judging food decisions that better respect and promote broad-based human health.

Education is the soul of society

Education is a critical source of a society's health and vitality. It involves the pride of knowledge creation, the nurturing of talent and ability, the investigation of science, the arts, and humanities for the sake of contributing to human culture and to building on the achievements of the past. Education is fundamental for each individual to be able to develop their greatest worth, their abilities, their curiosity and power to create and contribute: essentially to realize their potential and lead satisfying lives. International law guarantees that everyone has the right to education.⁷³ This goes beyond the most important educational infrastructure of a society, primary education, and into secondary and higher education. "Technical and professional education shall be made generally available"⁷⁴ and states should take steps to create "vocational guidance and training programmes, policies and techniques" to bring about "cultural development and full and productive employment."⁷⁵ As to the purpose of education beyond getting people into work, and understanding the links between education and other basic elements of human dignity, the UDHR gives a clear-enough description. "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms."⁷⁶

One of the most important advocates of education as a human right is the former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson. Speaking of human rights generally she says, "It became very important to me as High Commissioner to emphasize that human rights are not only civil and political rights, freedom from torture, the right to life, fair trials, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, but also the rights to food, safe water, health and education. Absolute poverty is a deprivation of

⁷³ UDHR, Article 26, para. 1.

⁷⁴ *Idem*.

⁷⁵ ICESCR, Article 6, para. 2.

⁷⁶ UDHR, Article 26, para. 2.

the rights of dignity we are guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”⁷⁷ She called for the “cancellation of debt for the poorest countries because it’s crippling their capacity to develop their education”⁷⁸ and has “highlighted education as the highest priority of the human rights phenomenon.”⁷⁹

In terms of agriculture, education is critical to understanding appropriate farming methods in order to have a sustainable relationship with the fertility of the land. Bill McKibben, called the world’s best green journalist by *Time* magazine⁸⁰, spent time in Cuba investigating the agricultural system, noted for its use of non-energy intensive methods, such as integrated pest management (where instead of chemical pesticides as the kneejerk response to insects, the principles of prevention and observation followed by mechanical and biological interventions are used). Part of the success of the model comes from the massive investment in education on the part of the Castro regime; the ratio of teachers to students there is on par with Sweden’s, and a university education is basically accessible to all.⁸¹ In order to have an agroecological system like Cuba’s, education has to be sufficiently funded and valued as of utmost importance, since the currency of sustainable farming is knowledge. As McKibben puts it, “You don’t just tear down the fence around the vacant lot and hand someone a hoe, quoting him some Maoist couplet about the inevitable victory of the worker. The soil’s no good at first; the bugs can’t wait to attack. You need information to make a go of it.”⁸² The transmission of knowledge about how to make the land produce without relying on expensive and oil-intensive fertilizers, pesticides, and machinery, is at the core of developing an agriculture that respects the fullest range of values of food dignity.

Education about food can take many forms. The UN agroecology report focuses on the dissemination of best practices among farmers through farmer field schools, which have been proven to be successful in Central America and parts of Africa, as one key to

⁷⁷ Robinson, 2005, p. 22.

⁷⁸ Idem, p. 52.

⁷⁹ Halme, 2008, p. 6.

⁸⁰ Walsh, 2010.

⁸¹ McKibben, 2007, p. 76.

⁸² Idem.

improving the right to food of the poorest people.⁸³ The sharing of knowledge between farmers is one of the most critical ways to support greater food dignity, and is as important a process in South Africa as in Canada.

A different and no less critical form of food education involves having students visit farms. In Northern California, a growing amount of education about food includes bringing groups of school children to sustainable farms to participate in the work, and gain hands-on knowledge in the process. According to one farmer, “Kids today have no idea what food looks like in the ground and no idea that carrots don’t come from bags. The very act of showing them a carrot coming out of the ground and the way they light up is truly priceless.”⁸⁴ Both the farm, which might take a fee or receive some volunteer labor from the group of students, and the students (and through them society in general) benefit from this hands-on learning that teaches people the reality of where food comes from. The sharing of knowledge connects people to “the joy, sweat, and understanding in what goes into making a meal and bringing food to the table.”⁸⁵ Essentially, the small farms in this area are increasingly using relationship-based farming to educate students and their parents, and to share knowledge with other small farmers, the repercussions of which bring broader knowledge to society on a number of levels.

There are many other examples of how to consider and either appreciate or criticize ways in which education about food is substantially or superficially approached in different societies. The human rights principles quoted at the beginning of this section are primarily concerned with formal education provided by states, although for food dignity purposes, these statements only matter insofar as they show the great value of education before looking at the ways in which it can be carried out. Food education through formal schooling and through informal means will be explored further, in the following chapter on community, where some points about the nature of human

⁸³ A/HRC/16/49, 20 December 2010, paras. 32-33.

⁸⁴ Costa, 2010, p. 19.

⁸⁵ Idem, p. 182.

relationships can be clarified, shedding light on where and how food education can be most supportive of food dignity.

From self-determination to food sovereignty

One of the most basic human rights, and one given tremendous rhetorical support by a variety of government figures and opinion-makers, is the right to self-determination. While the other rights that have been discussed in this thesis are so-called economic, social, and cultural rights, considered by their detractors to be ‘soft’ rights that are more policy goals to be aimed for by governments than rights that individuals can claim, self-determination in terms of national sovereignty and the right of people to hire and fire their governments is widely proclaimed.

The purpose here is not to get into a legal discussion about the gap between rhetoric and reality when heads of state preach self-determination as the motivation for military intervention for example. Nor is it to criticize the implementation of this right in international law and propose better mechanisms to support the principles. The purpose is to strip back to the most basic principles, then extend them forward in a way that will enhance the concept of food dignity, and give a way to analyze some of the raging food debates in the world in terms of this principle and the associated principles upon which food dignity is founded.

For this discussion about self-determination, national sovereignty is not the starting point, but rather a more local version - the ability of farmers themselves and their communities to determine the causes of the food problems that affect them, and to decide on appropriate ways to resolve these problems. This idea is at the core of a growing movement around the term food sovereignty. The former special rapporteur on the right to food, Jean Ziegler, discusses the promise of the food sovereignty strategy in one of his final reports. He describes how states and NGOs have been “questioning the whole paradigm of free trade in agriculture” as the inequities of the system are devastating, “particularly for poor countries and poor people.” The current model

promotes “export-oriented, industrial agriculture that is displacing peasants and destroying family agriculture.”⁸⁶ Ziegler names neoliberal theory as a main part of the problem in achieving the right to food. He states that while “liberalization and privatization have progressed rapidly in most countries” this has created more harm than good in terms of the right to food since “more people than ever before suffer today from grave, permanent undernourishment.”⁸⁷ Neoliberal theory, which doesn’t recognize the existence of social, economic, and cultural rights, is supported by many governments and Inter-Governmental Organizations (IGOs),⁸⁸ although they often hypocritically give rhetorical support to human rights which their actions serve to undermine.

Even without the food sovereignty strategy, the principles of human rights law are clear in terms of self-determination. The ICESCR states that, “All peoples have the right of self-determination” in order to “freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.”⁸⁹ This is furthered in the same treaty in terms of people having the right to use their own resources for their own benefit. “All peoples may, for their own ends, freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources... based upon the principle of mutual benefit (...). In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence.”⁹⁰ As far as the corresponding obligations of states, the FAO interprets that they should “at the *primary* level, *respect* the resources owned by the individual” and give preference to that individual’s freedom “to make optimal use of her or his knowledge” to take the actions necessary to satisfy her or his own needs.⁹¹ The terms of self-determination as they would apply to small farmers in poor countries are quite clear. And although this language is rarely used in the context of small farmers in, for example, Germany, it would apply just as well and the implications in terms of policy, individual choice, and relationship to community, although starting from very different points in the case of a small farmer in a rich or poor country, will tend to converge.

⁸⁶ A/HRC/7/5, 10 January 2008, para. 71.

⁸⁷ *Idem*, para. 76.

⁸⁸ *Idem*.

⁸⁹ ICESCR, Article 1, para. 1.

⁹⁰ *Idem*, para. 2.

⁹¹ FAO, 1998, p. 4.

Food sovereignty as a concept has its roots in the global smallholders' movement. A thorough definition of the term is given by the Nyéléni Declaration, adopted in 2007 at the well-attended Forum for Food Sovereignty in Mali. "Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems."⁹² Local economies are given priority since food sovereignty "empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisanal-fishing, pastoralist-led grazing, and food production" as well as "inter-dependence between producers and consumers" and general respect for local autonomy. Although the declaration mainly has in mind the poorest of the poor countries, it might as well be the rallying cry of the education-oriented farmers of Northern California, who share the goal of good public health and a more direct relationship between producers and consumers.

One of the key points of this concept, often neglected by those understanding quantity of production as the source to fix all ills, is the insistence on using ecologically-sound and sustainable (or agroecological) methods, which value a long-term perspective. With this in mind, an appropriate solution to rural poverty in parts of Africa cannot be one that starts down an ecologically unsustainable path. This is the case not only because of the issue of not wanting to contribute to environmental damage that will eventually cause increasingly severe problems for everyone, it also follows from the point of view that if agricultural methods don't respect ecology, they can't respect other human values, even in the short term.

The economist Jeffrey Sachs, often looked to for insight on international development issues, makes a number of points that respect the complex and wide-ranging values needed to decrease rural poverty in poor countries. But while he says many things that are compatible with the arguments of food dignity, he fails to give enough room to issues of self-determination, taking positions that are sound in some respects but smack of elitism in others. Sachs says, "The poor know what to do but are too poor to do it.

⁹² see www.nyeleni.org

Since they can't meet their immediate needs (food, safe water, health care) they also can't afford to save and invest for the future. This is where foreign assistance comes in.”⁹³ The starting point is fine, but the conclusion that foreign assistance is the fix is jumping a few steps too far.

The UN framework of human rights law often uses the terminology of ‘respect, protect, fulfill’ to analyze the obligations of states in treaty implementation. Taking the ‘respect, protect, fulfill’ framework out of its legalistic context and using it as a practical tool for reasoning through to a determination of appropriate conduct in general can give useful and principled analysis. Foreign assistance is a type of charity, an expression of ‘fulfill’ in this context. First and foremost comes ‘respect’, however, which essentially describes the obligation to stop being complicit in creating the conditions that cause the problem that must now be solved. For this argument there’s no need to advance beyond ‘respect’. Before considering foreign aid, it’s necessary to understand the large-scale political and economic policies that are responsible for widespread suffering, and to withdraw support for such policies.

By ending complicity in policies that violate peoples’ right to food, the room is created for the poor to do what is best for themselves. The exact nature of large-scale trade and agricultural policies is not the subject of this thesis, although Ziegler’s warnings about neoliberalism are likely not far from the mark. The point here is that in a world of excessive food production that is distributed in ways that kill millions by causing them to undereat while killing millions by causing them to overeat, balance can indeed be sought through global policy initiative. Food aid can have a place, in the short and longer term; the purpose of this discussion is not to deny charity as something potentially life-saving and meaningful, only to knock it into second or third place conceptually.

FIAN explains that “the causes of people’s inability to feed themselves lie in the neglect and destruction of participatory rural social and food production structures and entail

⁹³ Sachs, 2008, p. 229.

environmental degradation.”⁹⁴ — Rather than counselling food aid as the first way to resolve problems, or focusing on using fertilizers to up yields, they encourage “tolerance in all fields of culture and the mutual understanding of all peoples.”⁹⁵ — As for the importance of participatory community food structures and their link to environmental degradation, the UN Millennium Ecosystem Assessment is clear that “Measures to conserve natural resources are more likely to succeed if local communities are given ownership of them, share the benefits, and are involved in decisions.”⁹⁶ —

Sachs calls for “establishing comprehensive school feeding programs using locally produced food (if available) to improve nutrition and educational outcomes, and to generate demand for local food production.”⁹⁷ — This is a good policy suggestion, and likely to support the welfare of local farmers and students. But he also calls for African farmers to proceed with “best-option technologies, notably with fertilizer and proper agronomic methods (for example row planting) (...).”⁹⁸ —

The use of the term ‘proper’ here is well worth noting. It assumes only one vision of farming, in which quantity trumps all, at the expense of traditional local practice. The marine biologist and conservationist Rachel Carson, whose now classic book *Silent Spring* brought concerns about damaging the environment to a wider public, comments on farming of the type Sachs advocates. “Single-crop farming does not take advantage of the principles by which nature works; it is agriculture as an engineer might conceive it to be. Nature has introduced great variety into the landscape, but man has displayed a passion for simplifying it.”⁹⁹ —

In line with a quantity-first approach, Sachs calls for “mass distribution of improved seeds” and fertilizers that “have a spectacular rate of return” as part of a “quick-impact strategy” that gives a “boost to productivity” in the form of the “hallowed Green

⁹⁴ FIAN, 1994, p. 3.

⁹⁵ Idem.

⁹⁶ UN Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005, p. 3.

⁹⁷ Sachs, 2008, p. 251.

⁹⁸ Idem, p. 231.

⁹⁹ Carson, 1962, p. 20.

Revolution that initially lifts smallholder farmers out of subsistence.”¹⁰⁰ There’s no room for the self-determination of the farmers here, no attempt to hear the voice of their cooperatives or of NGOs that seek out their opinions and can speak with some empathy to their problems and wants. There’s only the loud and clear voice of ‘expert’ opinion.

This is at odds with the FAO’s advice:

Recognition of human dignity means, for example, that international organizations need to respect and build on traditional knowledge and practices in producing food rather than imposing alien production methods and models. Such an approach requires humility and interest in others; the most deprived are regarded not only as fellow human beings but also as experts in their own environment and lives. Once this concept is recognized, development can no longer be approached as a series of projects designed by outside experts, but requires the cross-fertilization of ideas and resources and the mutual respect that contribute to reducing hunger and fostering human dignity.¹⁰¹

It’s better to start from a position of respect, of patiently trying to appreciate local custom and the importance of autonomy of decision making. A rush to fulfill the needs of others, through charity and insistence on what one group of people sees as the most advanced methods, risks ignoring the root causes of problems, and the complexity of interlinked factors. This takes us back to Galeano’s maxim about real human relationships through solidarity not charity, horizontality not verticality, and friendship not leadership.

¹⁰⁰ Sachs, 2008, pp. 230-231, 251.

¹⁰¹ FAO, 1998, p. 21.

CHAPTER TWO

THE FREE INDIVIDUAL AND THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY

While human rights law and the right to food give valuable principles, they suffer from one primary point which is necessary to add in order to build the concept of food dignity – there’s too much focus on the individual and not enough on community. “The focus on individuals and people who come to think of themselves merely as individuals blunts articulation of a shared life.”¹⁰² In human rights law, there’s not enough room for expression of the “continuity of human experience, of overlapping identities.”¹⁰³ The links between people are fundamental to individual and group well-being and must be clarified and explained.

Speaking soon before the vote to adopt the UDHR in 1948, the Yugoslav delegate made the point that the declaration failed to appreciate notions of how humanity is collectively interdependent.¹⁰⁴ The tension that would build in the cold war further cemented the way human rights would be a wedge to elevate individualism against ideas of collectivism. Human rights scholar Samuel Moyn explains that human rights “almost immediately became associated with anticommunism.”¹⁰⁵ A tool in an ideological war, the human rights regime was unable to fully consider and develop the concepts and language basic to recognition of community.

In order to get closer to the heart of what it takes to enhance human well being through food values, it’s helpful to reflect on what it means to be an individual and what it means to participate in community. To gain insight, ideas can be taken from political science and from the philosophy of human nature, although perhaps the most powerful and concrete appreciation of the importance of community can come from simple practical reflection on daily life.

¹⁰² Kennedy, 2004, p. 15.

¹⁰³ Idem, p. 16.

¹⁰⁴ Moyn, 2010, p. 71.

¹⁰⁵ Idem.

Freedom through community

The nature of the relationship of the individual to the group has long been a source of debate in political science and in human rights law. Arguments in favor of the primacy of the free individual versus arguments in favor of the primacy of community appear to diverge; they seem to present two different foundations to build visions of society on. But by looking into human nature in terms of the relationship between individual freedom and cooperative behavior, rather than focusing only on one or the other, important insights can be reached.

Michael Sandel describes the discontent of many people with modern democracy. He names two basic concerns that people have. “One is the fear that, individually and collectively, we are losing control of the forces that govern our lives. The other is the sense that, from family to neighborhood to nation, the moral fabric of community is unravelling around us.”¹⁰⁶ He describes both a lack of self-government and the deterioration of community as being of serious concern to many people.

The arguments for the raw individualistic spirit, the personal freedoms and civil and political rights that keep the state from interfering in a private life, have powerful sway. But increases in what appear to be personal freedoms haven't brought people the sense that they are in control of their lives. The same ideology that seems to proclaim that individual freedom is to be protected above all else resists notions of community and society. Or, at the least, they hold that societies don't exist in themselves but only to the extent that people might freely and knowingly enter into relations with others. This point of view opposes community as something pre-existing that people have bonds and obligations to. This type of mentality would be compatible with lowering taxes, deregulation in general, and turning as much control as possible over to the individual and away from the state (at least in theory - in practice a large militaristic state is supported by many who profess this view).

¹⁰⁶ Sandel, 1996, p. 3.

In seeming opposition are those who argue for the modern welfare state, a state that also gives entitlements of a social and economic nature. This mindset would be in support of a social safety net, taking the view that unless people have their most basic needs covered, like enough to eat, some form of health care, and a roof over their heads, they are not able to put to use their individual rights and freedoms. But this still doesn't get to the heart of what group bonds mean, or can mean, in terms of individual freedom.

According to Sandel, "Unless persons regard their identities as claimed to some extent by their role as participants in a common life, it is not obvious on what grounds they can affirm the obligations the modern welfare state expects them to fulfill. But it is just this strong notion of membership that the unencumbered self resists."¹⁰⁷ Without some kind of joint responsibility and moral connection between fellow citizens, on what grounds should the state provide the basics of human dignity, given that these basics come from some form of redistribution of wealth, and thus imposition on certain individuals?

The problem is in the notion of the 'unencumbered self' and perceptions of personal freedom. If personal freedom is put to use and is developed and exercised in fundamentally individual ways, it's possible to understand the vision of a person with no strings attached as appropriate for building a philosophy of human behavior on. But any example from the real world shows people working together and linked in all kinds of ways that go beyond some idea of a contract that is freely entered into. A child does not choose the parents they are born to, nor do they select their teachers and classmates directly, for example. Rather pre-existing circumstances and the choices presented by community and by convenience determine the bounds of their available choices.

Only by looking to collaborative conduct as a source for full and free individual expression can this tension be eased. Marx and Engels describe the relationship between community and individual freedom, saying that, "Only in community with

¹⁰⁷ Sandel, 1996, p. 119.

others has each individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions; only in the community, therefore, is personal freedom possible.”¹⁰⁸

Marx is describing the source of the discord between what appears to be personal freedom in rhetoric and in law, and at the same time the fact that people feel, in an intuitive and emotional but none-the-less real way, that they are not fully free, but are moved by forces beyond their control. This frustration is at the base of strong political currents, although a coherent idea of where to look for remedy is lacking, leaving the unhappiness and frustration of many ripe for misdirection and exploitation.

The enlightenment philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt describes the nature of the individual as emerging from community and society. The individual “by the union of the past and future with the present is produced in society by the mutual cooperation of its different members”; thus the individual and society are not just interlinked but produce each other. Relations between individuals are strongest when they succeed at “combining their personal independence with the intimacy of the association”¹⁰⁹ in a union where everyone strives to develop their “own inmost nature” and for their own sake.¹¹⁰

The essential revelation in Humboldt’s reasoning is that freedom and liberty of the individual are not correctly understood as being restricted by participation in society, but rather as coming directly out of quality of interaction and depth of community structure. He explains that “the most diverse individuality and the most original independence coexisted equally with the most diverse and profound associations of human beings with each other” in an expression of the most absolute form of liberty.¹¹¹

It’s worth putting emphasis on the nature of the bonds between people that will best support individual freedom. If relationships are of authority and obedience, or

¹⁰⁸ Marx & Engels, 1970, p. 83.

¹⁰⁹ Humboldt, 1969, p. 11.

¹¹⁰ Idem, p. 13.

¹¹¹ Idem, p. 137.

otherwise have a strong power differential, they're unlikely to offer a free and collaborative relationship of the type that can lead to the fullest development of natural abilities and thus to some larger kind of happiness and satisfaction. "And indeed the whole tenor of the ideas and arguments unfolded in this essay might fairly be reduced to this, that while they would break all fetters in human society, they would attempt to find as many new social bonds as possible. The isolated man is no more able to develop than the one who is fettered"¹¹² At issue here are relationships of a non-coercive nature as the basis of the ability of people to develop their best instincts, coming back once more to the importance of horizontality, solidarity, and friendship.

As to human nature in a more general way, Humboldt says the basis is "To inquire and create – these are the centres around which all human pursuits more or less directly revolve."¹¹³ These impulses are to be developed and encouraged through interaction with others, with pre-existing communities, with the formation of new community structures, and through respectful and balanced group relationships.

Competition, cooperation, and evolutionary theory

Competition is often held up as a natural and useful force, ultimately one that is beneficial to society at large, and a value that is generally opposed to cooperation. Darwin's theory of evolution was seized upon by industrial barons of the time to justify crushing weaker opponents and generally to support the idea that might makes right. In the words of John D. Rockefeller Jr., destroying the competition is not evil at all but "merely the working out of a law of nature and a law of God."¹¹⁴ This was little more than an easy justification for selfish behavior at the expense of others, and Darwin was the first to reject such connections of his theories to conclusions in the realm of ethics.

Darwin's ideas about evolution were expanded by Peter Kropotkin, an evolutionary theorist writing at the turn of the 20th century, in terms of mutual aid, and how the

¹¹² Humboldt, 1969, pp. 99-100.

¹¹³ Idem, p. 76.

¹¹⁴ quoted in Singer, 2000, p. 11.

relationships and reliance of animals in the wild enhanced their ability to survive. According to Kropotkin:

The animal species, in which individual struggle has been reduced to its narrowest limits, and the practice of mutual aid has attained the greatest development, are invariably the most numerous, the most prosperous, and the most open to further progress. The mutual protection which is obtained in this case, the possibility of attaining old age and of accumulating experience, the higher intellectual development, and the further growth of sociable habits, secure the maintenance of the species, its extension, and its further progressive evolution. The unsociable species, on the contrary, are doomed to decay.¹¹⁵

Even if natural selection were to show trends of competitive genes advancing in certain species, it does not follow that this means it is more natural for people to be individualistic and competitive rather than cooperative and at their best in group structures. The complexity of human culture, the logical and expressive qualities of language, and other cognitive abilities unique to people and their societies, make it absurd to try to look at one of many possible human behaviors and call it more natural on the grounds of evolutionary theory. It's not as though humans with their propensity for competition or cooperation might be understood from their actions in the way that is believed to apply to muskrats or pelicans.

Not that biology with evolutionary theory can be shown to be irrelevant to understanding human nature and to crafting an appropriate social policy, only that "it leaves the ethical decision up to us, merely offering to provide information relevant to that decision."¹¹⁶ While it's possible to take information from evolutionary theory into consideration, it's hard to translate it into any kind of reliable, direct account of why human behavior is a certain way or what would be a more 'natural' or 'evolved' behavior. Plenty of evidence exists to justify almost any point of view, making evolutionary theory practically useless in assigning value to individual versus group conduct.

¹¹⁵ Kropotkin, 2008, p. 177.

¹¹⁶ Singer, 2000, p. 15.

The baby is born into the doctor's arms

Perhaps the most obvious way to understand the importance of groups in shaping people's personalities, their development, and their customs, comes through thinking about how people enter the world. To give an illustrative example (and one not intended to be universally applicable, as childbirth is handled differently in different countries) a baby is born into the arms of a doctor with the father to one side, and an aunt to the other. From the very beginning, the newborn is in a group, a family, and a community. And the hospital whether public or private is likely to be close to the town where the family lives, part of the community fabric of the town. There's no state of nature here, no primal individual, only a person brought into existence in the context of a family and community.

In reflecting on a person's development, pragmatic philosopher and educational reformer John Dewey writes about the newborn and the relations between people that immediately begin to shape that individual in custom and habit:

Each person is born an infant, and every infant is subject from the first breath he draws and the first cry he utters to the attentions and demands of others. These others are not just persons in general with minds in general. They are beings with habits, and beings who upon the whole esteem the habits they have, if for no other reason than that, having them, their imagination is thereby limited.¹¹⁷

The limitation of imagination in this example is not a complaint about some loss of individual freedom, but rather a part of the construction of any given cultural conduct, which has co-constructed values and ideas, often hard to have perspective on from the inside.

Moving from family towards the broader community, the importance of a variety of community structures comes into focus. Turning again to Dewey, "The family into

¹¹⁷ Dewey, 1922, p. 58.

which one is born is a family in a village or city which interacts with other more or less integrated systems of activity, and which includes a diversity of groupings within itself, say, churches, political parties, clubs, cliques, partnerships, trade-unions, corporations, etc.”¹¹⁸

—

If family and community are immediately part of the reality of the development of the individual, it follows that increasing the quality of interrelationship in these group structures would benefit the individual. Accordingly, forces that either denigrate or are indifferent to these group structures are likely to have negative or at best neutral effects on the development of the individual.

Turning to issues related to food, it’s not surprising given the primacy of group structures that eating habits are shaped in families and communities. Not just eating habits, also knowledge of cooking and of the nutritional contents of different foods, and also the relationship with growing and producing food are characteristics of individuals with their starting points coming from group structures. These food-related factors all have dynamic back-and-forth involvement with the health of communities and the individuals which compose them.

Berry’s bullseye

To understand the values embedded in food, it’s necessary to extend the discussion beyond the individual and community, beyond society even, to the very production of the food, which has its start always in the same place – the cultivation of land. All the food people eat, whether carrots to be washed and eaten raw, sugar cane that will sweeten sodas, or corn that will be fed to cattle to make burgers, begins with plants in soil, managed by humans, in the process called agriculture. It might seem reasonable to locate agriculture within the bubble of society, as something done for and by society, or actors within society, and leave it at that. But it’s clear (and ever more clear in a world of increasing environmental degradation) that agriculture can’t be understood as

¹¹⁸ Dewey, 1922, p. 61.

separate from nature, from the natural world, the natural environment. The role of fires in some parts of the world and floods in other parts on global food prices make that clear.

The farmer and writer Wendell Berry presents the simple but useful idea of a bullseye pattern of expanding concentric circles to understand how to relate the person at the smallest scale to the natural environment at the largest scale. The person is at the center, within the family, within the community, within society, within agriculture, within nature. Agriculture here is at the interface between society and nature, the point where human activity, the human need to make enough food, meets the natural world with its bountiful but finite resources. The systems are nested and rely on each other. As Berry says, “So long as the smaller systems are enclosed within the larger, and so long as all are connected by complex patterns of interdependency, as we know they are, then whatever affects one system will affect the other.”¹¹⁹

Changes in the relationship between agriculture and nature can have immediate and important repercussions through the systems of society, community, and family. And likewise changes in the values and operations of human group structures influence agriculture and nature. This may seem obvious, and indeed it will be to many, but it’s a critical point to make in building a concept of food dignity that pays attention to the effects (positive, negative, or neutral) of food choices and food policies on communities.

One of the most important civil society movements born out of a sense of the loss of community coming from changing food values is Slow Food. It was founded “to counter the rise of fast food and fast life, the disappearance of local food traditions and people’s dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from, how it tastes and how our food choices affect the rest of the world.” This statement looks to the local community and loss of tradition and also looks outwards to where the food comes from, and how food choices affect people even in remote parts of the world. Slow Food

¹¹⁹ Berry, 1991, p. 119.

describes itself as a grassroots organization of people who are “linking the pleasure of good food with a commitment to their community and the environment.”¹²⁰

Indeed, the effects of decisions around food and human welfare can’t be measured with any accuracy without valuing community as fundamental, for the health of the individual as much as for broader society, since the rings of the bullseye that connects the individual to nature are nested in one another, and the central rings are those of community and society, in which the individual can be found, and through which the individual must interact with nature.

Education and community

In reflecting on the importance of community and the relationship of food to community, it’s worthwhile to think about school and the education of children. In 2010, chef Jamie Oliver gave a Technology Entertainment and Design (TED) talk on the subject in the context of his campaign against obesity in America and elsewhere. He focused not only on the issue of needing healthier school lunches, but on the importance of food education, of knowledge about cooking and healthy eating. He said, “We’ve got to start teaching our kids about food in schools, period.” He suggested the goal of every child leaving school knowing at least 10 recipes for healthy cooking as a measure to end the “child abuse” that is going on in schools from the lack of education about food.¹²¹ Oliver is correct that it’s critical to bring food education into the school to improve community health, and generally bring food awareness back to Main Street and into local communities. But food can have a role in education in a more fundamental way as well.

Dewey was a school teacher early in his career, and is perhaps most famous for his thinking on schools, education, and society. He thought of hands-on interaction with food as a starting point to teach about science, history, and other disciplines. He

¹²⁰ see Slow Food International website at www.slowfood.com/international/1/about-us

¹²¹ Oliver, 2010.

describes how “As one enters a busy kitchen in which a group of children are actively engaged in the preparation of food, the psychological difference, the change from more or less passive and inert reciprocity and restraint to one of buoyant outgoing energy, is so obvious as fairly to strike one in the face.”¹²²

He proposes integrating cooking into education, not for a specific public health purpose such as trying to reduce obesity through knowledge of healthy recipes, but for the vitality that interaction with food and cooking will bring to the individual and to the whole educational experience. On cooking and craftsmanship he says, “We must conceive of them in their social significance, as types of the processes by which society keeps itself going, as agencies for bringing home to the child some of the primal necessities of community life, and as ways in which these needs have been met by the growing insight and ingenuity of man.”¹²³

The countless people who have taken an interest in cooking through TV shows and glossy books that give more space to photos than to recipes tend to view cooking as fashion. The shows are to be watched as entertainment, and the books are to sit on coffee tables. While an occasional recipe may be tried, the books are there to stimulate food daydreams rather than to educate about the substantial community and environmental values that are embedded in the ingredients, preparation, and eating. Although Oliver has started campaigns to improve public health through cooking and food knowledge, he is more the exception than the rule.

Take Gordon Ramsay, the owner of multiple Michelin-starred restaurants around the world, and prolific writer of cookbooks. Although occasionally making statements on or taking part in campaigns around social or ecological values, his books are embedded with values of fashion that focus on fancy presentation and novelty of ingredients. One of his most recent books, *Gordon Ramsay's World Kitchen*, refers to how food is increasingly “innovative and exciting” with “exotic” ingredients widely available from

¹²² Dewey, 1915, p. 12.

¹²³ Idem, p. 11.

“far-away lands”.¹²⁴ — There’s only the most superficial reference to the tradition and community aspects of the dishes (and practically no mention of ecological values) as he spins through recipes from 10 different regions of the world, relying heavily on meat and dairy, with photos showing dishes so carefully arranged that few home cooks are likely to be able to reproduce them. The book credits the involvement of a creative director, photographer, food stylist, props stylist, and designer, but no researcher to investigate the history, nutrition, community, environmental or health impacts of the dishes.¹²⁵ — The purpose of this example is to show that what seem to be books about knowledge of food, intended to educate, are hardly concerned with learning about food in a profound way, but in promoting food and cooking as superficial entertainment.

Going beyond Ramsay’s fashion, and even Oliver’s focus on teaching healthy recipes, children can be more broadly engaged through food to learn about the world around them. Dewey writes about turning education from passive to active, of ‘drawing out’ instead of ‘pouring in’, by giving the children something tangible and immediate to begin with then from there moving into lessons about history or chemistry. “The life of the child would extend out of doors to the garden, surrounding fields, and forests. He would have his excursions, his walks and talks, in which the larger world out of doors would open to him.”¹²⁶ —

Given the importance of group behavior and of community life in realizing the fullest capacities of the individual, and remembering Humboldt’s insight that each person is inclined above all to “inquire and create”, it’s not hard to recognize that the school can be at the center of this, and food, something so immediate in the life of every child, of every person, can have a crucial role. As Berry has shown us, agriculture happens at the intersection of society and nature. The individual, the family and community, can only operate thanks to the functioning of agriculture and within its limits.

¹²⁴ Ramsay, 2009, p. 7.

¹²⁵ Idem, p. 256.

¹²⁶ Dewey, 1915, p. 36.

Not only is it clear that food, from growing and harvesting, to cooking and preparing, to eating together, has an important role in community, it is possibly the most important factor. It can also be a catalyst to education in ways that are little explored, a vehicle to connect and interlink other areas of human inquiry and endeavor. Take for example the baking of bread as a segue into a lesson on history or biology. The children having had the tactile experience of kneading the dough and having watched it rise before their eyes (before changing character again when baked into a crusty loaf) will be curious and attentive to discussions of the actions of microorganisms such as yeast, or to a lesson on the history of grain as a source for human sustenance. Food, when considered in its chain of existence from the field to the plate, can be used to unleash and encourage vibrant forces in education, to support “the growth of the imagination in flexibility, in scope, and in sympathy, till the life which the individual lives is informed with the life of nature and of society.”¹²⁷

Measuring community values

It's easy enough to recognize the importance of ecological issues to food; the ever-expanding organic movement is founded in large part on this, and organic products are readily available. It takes no detailed explanation for many people to understand that food production has a relationship with the environment and can be done in more or less environmentally damaging ways. Also the labor values behind food are more and more recognized through the fair-trade movement. Many customers will pay more if they have reason to believe that the work conditions of the farmers were decent.¹²⁸

But community values are often not considered by producers or consumers with the same importance. Products with explicit environmental values often pay little or no attention to aspects of community in their production and distribution. Organic eggs may well be produced on a factory farm, sending money vertically to a corporate office

¹²⁷ Dewey, 1915, p. 56.

¹²⁸ Elliott & Freeman, 2003, p. 33.

in another country. The companies producing this organic food need not have a concept of or commitment to community values.

On the other hand, buying food from a small corner shop run by a family, or by an owner who lives in the neighborhood could present the reverse situation. The food sold in this shop might be entirely factory-produced, with no positive ecological or labor values to speak of. But the establishment of meaningful human rapport that comes from regular exchanges with the shopkeeper, and the meaning of spending money on food this way where more of the money will remain in the community, is significant. This is an example of an interaction around food that is lacking in certain important values, but still positive to some degree in terms of community.

It takes a degree of flexibility to understand how to use cooperative and community food values as a standard. But it's important to do so; the factor here is not a superficial fetishization created by some group with an agenda or something that can't be understood enough to put on the scales of balance next to other values. One of the key points coming out of this discussion is the importance of collaboration in aspects of food culture. This is easily understood in terms of dinner parties, where the collaboration takes the form of some guests bringing the wine, others bringing flowers, while the host buys the ingredients, cooks the meal, and accommodates the group.

Political philosopher Gerald Cohen uses the example of a camping trip to describe how collaboration can often be natural and appropriate, as in this context “even the most *antiegaltarians*, accept, indeed, take for granted, norms of equality and reciprocity.”¹²⁹
Cohen continues:

You could imagine a camping trip where everybody asserts her rights over the pieces of equipment, and the talents, that she brings, and where bargaining proceeds with respect to who is going to pay what to whom to be allowed, for example, to use a knife to peel the potatoes, and how much he is going to charge others for those now-peeled potatoes that he bought in an unpeeled condition from

¹²⁹ Cohen, 2009, p.5.

another camper, and so on. You could base a camping trip on the principles of market exchange and strictly private ownership of the required facilities. Now, most people would hate that.¹³⁰

Collaboration can be intuitive, as in the case of cooking together on a camping trip, and it can also be strategically furthered by introducing food and drink. In a discussion of collaborative law as an alternative dispute resolution model to the more adversarial approach of going to court, Sheila Gutterman describes the importance of food in bringing people together in a comfortable way. “Though businesslike, the setting should be comfortable – or as comfortable as a conference room can be. Providing food and drink has been proven to ease the tension. Above all the collaborative process must feel safe.”¹³¹

Collaboration is also in the trade of food. Any interaction beyond an individual eyeing the price, the ingredients, and otherwise reasoning through a purchase of food on their own, changes significantly when they interact with another person, even if this is only in the most basic form of a supermarket worker leading a customer to that aisle where the pickles they seek are shelved. This gives already some kind of positive feeling to the customer that they have been appreciated by the store, a positive feeling coming from the human interaction. Taking this further to buying bread in a bakery, an indecisive customer might ask the baker what type of bread is suited to make into croutons. The baker will make a few suggestions, guiding the customer, and the customer will quite possibly follow their lead. This is a collaborative exchange, and one in which the customer gained knowledge when the baker described the merits of sourdough rye (which could become too hard) versus baguette (which should become light and crunchy) in the toasting of croutons.

In terms of food, it is obvious that many nearly universal values of food culture are directly supportive of values of group structures. Parents with an extreme rightist politics are just as likely to insist on nightly family dinner with the children as families

¹³⁰ Cohen, 2009, pp. 5-6.

¹³¹ Gutterman, 2004, p. 41.

with an extreme leftist persuasion. The same would stand for the pleasures and meaning of eating with friends and associates. It doesn't matter if the people in question are corporate executives leaving a board meeting or field workers leaving a union meeting, they are just as likely to head to a restaurant or bar to solidify their friendship and the meaning of their shared experience by eating and drinking together.

This was as valid in the ancient world as it is today. In a discussion of the pleasures of conversation with friends while eating and drinking, Plutarch comments that “the most truly godlike seasoning at the dining-table is the presence of a friend or companion or intimate acquaintance (...).”¹³² — As the importance of food to bring people together is not specific to an era, it is also not specific to any one culture. There is rich anthropological scholarship describing the importance of food and relationship in different cultures. Nguyen Xuan Hien has done extensive work on the importance of rice in kinship in Vietnam. He writes, “The image of the core family seated around a tray of food and a large pot of rice, rather than individual portions, and eating together, expresses this sense of the ‘harmonious, orderly family community’ in the traditional Vietnamese countryside.”¹³³ —

The word companion comes from the Latin meaning “together with bread.” Expressions of the importance of eating in company, of breaking bread or of sharing rice, are too many to count. It is the combination of communication, collaboration, shared pleasure and experience, and the sense of greater fullness of individuality that can all come from appreciating and valuing the community aspects of food.

¹³² quoted in Smit, 2008, p. 15.

¹³³ Hien, 2007, p. 244.

CHAPTER THREE

ENVIRONMENT, ENERGY, AND TECHNOLOGY

Beyond the principles of human rights law and the understanding of the critical importance of community in human well-being, the relationship of humanity to the natural environment deserves special consideration. If climate change and global warming are the effects of human activity, and the overwhelming scientific consensus for more than a decade points in that direction¹³⁴, then the unsustainability of human affairs as they are now, from food to many other areas, is clear. As terrifying as the prospect is, no one can with any certainty say that the most pessimistic scenarios resulting from diminishing oil reserves and from climate change won't come to pass, the consequences being terminal for human life. Even many rosy predictions point to unprecedented hardships of migration of masses of people, reduction of biodiversity, depletion of fresh water, and possible collapse of a globalized food system based on existing climatic conditions and extensive use of fossil fuel in fertilizers, pesticides, and transport. This disturbing scenario is apparent without even considering the risks of wars over ever-diminishing resources, in a world with multiple nuclear-armed states.

In a discussion of energy, environment and food dignity, the focus will be on issues of food, and how to make decisions that will stop the rush to potential destruction, and turn food growing and distribution into a sustainable, circular process that, if not able to replenish the damaged soil and aquifers, can at least stop their degradation. Environmental sustainability is in synergy with the values of labor, health, self-determination, and community, and to respect any one of these values is generally to respect the others. But perhaps environmental considerations deserve even more emphasis, more importance when putting food decisions on the scales of judgement. They are not just one factor among many; the survival of human life depends on taking environmental issues seriously. Ecologist Carl Safina points out that “As we click through the turnstiles and starting gates of catastrophes unimagined just a few years ago – the likelihood that hundreds of millions of people will be displaced, that the seas will

¹³⁴ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), 2001, p. ix.

dissolve their own coral reefs; fresh water scarcity, ocean depletion, flooding cities, gushing oil, and agricultural shortage – we can begin to see that it's no longer just about saving Polar Bears or the last wild places.”¹³⁵

Since the consequences of not restoring balance in the human relationship to nature are so severe, almost beyond the ability to comprehend, environmental values take precedence whenever they can. Food dignity must call for dramatic international policy action and changes in individual behavior, giving greater respect for agriculture that doesn't further climate change, if the exploitative processes of the industrial era are to be reversed.

Pessimism of the intellect but optimism of the will

Part of the challenge in considering environmental scenarios with such uncertainty as to when and what will happen as the earth heats and oil supplies falter, and what mitigating responses might come from scientific and technological advances, is in understanding the degree of pessimism or optimism of any given claim. To go too far in the direction of pessimism is to be overwhelmed and depressed by what looks like a situation out of control with no prospects to turn things around. A fatalistic attitude develops, and hedonism and abandon become appropriate as guiding principles. To go too far in the direction of optimism is to be caught in free-fall waiting for the parachute that hasn't been made yet to open. A useful way to reason pessimistically without getting lost down the well is given by the French writer and historian Romain Rolland (although it is usually attributed to Antonio Gramsci).¹³⁶ Rolland's message is to have pessimism of the intellect, but optimism of the will. In an environmental context, this advice suggests looking critically and without fear at the terrible but plausible realities, but to believe in the ability to improve things, to see a better day, if only because it's possible to choose this belief.

¹³⁵ Safina, 2011, p. 265.

¹³⁶ see endnote 8 in Gramsci, 1992, p. 474.

For food dignity, this will be the balance to strike - taking seriously the ever increasing amount of scientific evidence showing possible coming catastrophe, but believing that changes in individual choices and overall policy will be a meaningful way to restore a decent future for humanity. Both extreme pessimism and extreme optimism will be tempered. But if error is to be made, it should be on the side of pessimism. If the optimists are wrong, then the crash will be devastating, as the long-term reductions in consumption of natural resources necessary to soften the blow will have been ignored in the fever of technological fantasy. If the pessimists are wrong, and societies have switched to less energy-intensive but more knowledge and labor-intensive agriculture and food culture, then nothing is lost. There will be more and better jobs, more knowledge, better health, more variety in local crops and cuisine, and more community through food interactions and education.

Climate change

The starting point for a discussion of the risks of climate change and shocks to the oil supply is not to prove through exhaustive data that the risks are real. There are mountains of evidence, growing every day, showing ways the earth is changing more rapidly than expected in the face of increases in greenhouse gasses caused by human activity. While some of the key risks and causes will be mentioned, most of the focus of this chapter will be to explore insightful thinking about what these now inevitable changes to the global climate and natural systems mean in terms of the values of humanity. It's through uncovering and understanding the mistaken values that better values respecting food dignity can be substituted. From better ecological values come an understanding of a better way of managing agriculture and other elements of supply, distribution, and food culture.

The global climate is changing rapidly. One of the most important and reliable sources of information on climate change and its causes is the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Its most recent assessment, from 2007, showed that eleven of

the previous twelve years were the warmest years on record.¹³⁷ Snow and ice in the Arctic and other places is melting, and spring is coming earlier and earlier. The most important greenhouse gas is carbon dioxide, which, as the result of human industrial activity over the last couple hundred years, has increased in atmospheric concentration dramatically. Methane is another important greenhouse gas which has also increased “predominantly due to agriculture and fossil fuel use” in addition to nitrous oxide, the increase in which is “primarily due to agriculture.”¹³⁸ Greenhouse gasses cause the climate to warm and agricultural methods are greatly to blame for their emission.

Human activity has, in all likelihood, already caused sea level rise, changes in wind patterns, increased hot and cold, risk of heat waves, and heavy precipitation. Given the high probability that fossil fuels will be “maintaining their dominant position in the global energy mix to 2030 and beyond”, climate change and global warming will continue unabated.¹³⁹ According to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, human activity has brought the planet “to the edge of a massive wave of species extinctions, further threatening our own well-being.”¹⁴⁰ The message from these sources and countless others is that humanity is warming the planet, which increase in temperature is disrupting natural systems in ways we are only just beginning to understand, from species extinctions to increasingly extreme and unpredictable weather events which destroy crops, devastate cities and countryside, and will cause mass migrations of people. This is due above all to the burning of fossil fuels.

Safina describes the relationship between people and the burning of natural resources to produce energy. “Since first becoming human, we have been burning things to harness energy. To become fully human we’ll have to fully come out of the cave, quench the fires, and harness nonburning energy.”¹⁴¹ Of course, even a switch to clean energy sources (which is not predicted any time soon) won’t stop the climate change process.

¹³⁷ IPCC, 2007, Section 1, para. 1.

¹³⁸ Idem, Section 2, para. 2.

¹³⁹ Idem, Section 3, para. 1.

¹⁴⁰ Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005, p. 3.

¹⁴¹ Safina, 2011, p. 70.

Environmental scientist David W. Orr points out that “Even in the near term it is already too late, however, to avert significant disasters, and that is a difficult message to convey without inducing paralysis or denial even among those willing to listen.”¹⁴² Nobel laureate Paul Crutzen has described modern times as the beginning of a new epoch – the Anthropocene, in which humans dominate.¹⁴³

But this unrivalled power that humans have over the earth has not given rise to thoughts of long-term well-being. The mentality is one of taking without thought to sustainability, to replenishing the earth, to participation in something more important than the desire for short term gain. Safina describes how “We’re all wired into networks we have never understood: the shared air and water, our seas, and all the rest of nature. And now we all participate in a handy system that simply says we don’t have to pay it back.”¹⁴⁴ This irresponsible behavior will in essence dump the problem of climate change on future generations. “We will stand before whoever is able and willing to judge, and perhaps the silence of extinction, as a generation that willfully and unnecessarily imposed egregious wrongs on all future generations, depriving them of liberty, property, and life.”¹⁴⁵ The picture that emerges is one of short term thinking that doesn’t understand the importance of the natural world enough to value the maintenance of its systems. And by not understanding the need for equilibrium in natural systems, the well-being of humanity is in the process of being sacrificed.

Peak oil

Beyond the threats to humanity from climate change, there is an even more immediate specter that hangs over society, as people in the US and Europe fill their gas tanks and shop for discount steaks from intensive production and apples from a distant country. This is the theory of peak oil, which describes the peak of the bell curve of oil production, after which oil production enters terminal decline. Demand on the other

¹⁴² Orr, 2009, p. xi.

¹⁴³ Crutzen, 2009.

¹⁴⁴ Safina, 2011, p. 171.

¹⁴⁵ Orr, 2009, p. 73.

hand will aggressively increase in all likelihood.¹⁴⁶ If the history of oil “is the chronicle of a death foretold”¹⁴⁷, then the beginning of peak oil is the moment of reckoning, the quiet before the storm. In a world where “globalization has been fuelled by cheap and abundant energy, traded as a commodity on a free market, increasing conflict over scarce energy would undermine the very foundations of the world-wide social, economic, and political normalization processes that have been observed over the past few centuries.”¹⁴⁸ Peak oil is denied by many despite its hard-to-escape intuitive truth value. As for those who are committed to it as a reality, or who entertain the possibility that it will occur, the likely outcomes are uncertain but grim. Looking to the historical record, Jörg Friedrichs of Oxford University predicts the rise of “predatory militarism, totalitarian retrenchment, and socioeconomic adaptation as three possible trajectories.”¹⁴⁹ Predictions of the effects of peak oil often point to more wars and rapid shifts in geopolitics. None of this inspires confidence for the future well-being of humanity.

One of the most important books on Peak Oil is Richard Heinberg’s *The Party’s Over*. Heinberg convincingly argues that “Society must engage in a crash program of truly radical conservation if we are to avoid economic and humanitarian catastrophe as industrialism comes to its inevitable end.”¹⁵⁰ In an effort to reduce and conserve it’s possible that dramatic, new political structures will be needed, such as a form of “eco-socialism” in which people “seek better cooperation to deal with not only each other but with the resource limits within which Nature has ordained us to live.”¹⁵¹ For the purpose of food dignity, bearing in mind both climate change and peak oil, methods of agricultural production and distribution which require intensive use of fossil fuels will be looked at in the harshest light.

¹⁴⁶ Leder & Shapiro, 2008, p. 2850.

¹⁴⁷ Friedrichs, 2010, p. 4562.

¹⁴⁸ Idem.

¹⁴⁹ Idem.

¹⁵⁰ Heinberg, 2005, p. 4.

¹⁵¹ Campbell, 2002, p. 206.

Fertilizer isn't the answer

One of the key debates in food politics is the question of whether fertilizer use does more harm or more good. There are all kinds of fertilizer – organic, inorganic, synthetic, chemical, mineral, and the list goes on. What matters here is the type of fertilizer that has been used to dramatically increase crop yields and is at the center of the debate – synthetic nitrogen fertilizer. Before looking at the arguments for and against fertilizer use, it's helpful to begin with establishing the common ground. Fertilizers have made a staggering difference in agriculture and have shaped many aspects of human life on earth. “The discovery of synthetic nitrogen changed everything – not just for the corn plant and the farm, not just for the food system, but also for the way life on earth is conducted.”¹⁵² Fertilizers have changed food and society, allowing for massive population growth and a fundamental revolution of relationship with the land. This much is not disputed.

Nitrogen is the building block on which life re-creates itself. Amino acids, proteins, and nucleic acids all depend on it.¹⁵³ Traditionally farming relied on the use of legume crops, which fix nitrogen in the soil naturally, and crop rotation where different and complementary crops are grown in different years to keep the soil's nutrient levels in balance. But with the arrival of cheap nitrogen fertilizer, this custodial relationship to the soil changed, and fertilizer could be trucked in, smeared about, and the plants would grow furiously.

The fertilizer industry, often speaking in unison with the FAO, takes an unsurprisingly optimistic viewpoint on nitrogen fertilizer. “Fertilizer is known to be a powerful productivity-enhancing input” that is a way to increase food production. “Increased food production/availability can, in turn, be seen as an objective for the agriculture sector in the context of contributing to the broader macroeconomic objectives of

¹⁵² Pollan, 2006, p. 42.

¹⁵³ Idem.

society.”¹⁵⁴ — The focus is always about increasing productivity, and about macroeconomic objectives. The question of exactly who benefits from these macroeconomic objectives is an important one, which won’t be answered here, although given the basic truth that there is twice the food to feed the world but close to one billion hungry, this approach can’t be satisfying the ‘macroeconomic objectives’ of the hungry very successfully.

In order to make the nitrogen compounds that compose fertilizer, large amounts of heat must be used for the constituent elements to combine properly. By importing nitrogen fertilizer into the farm, the embedded energy from the burning of natural gas in that heating process is brought as well. “When humankind acquired the power to fix nitrogen, the basis of soil fertility shifted from a total reliance on the energy of the sun to a new reliance on fossil fuel.”¹⁵⁵ — The fertilizer industry report addresses this issue with typical nonchalance. It explains that the “natural resources required for the manufacture of fertilizers are sufficient for several centuries to come”¹⁵⁶ and that there’s no problem with the huge volume of natural gas used in production, as it is the “cleanest of fossil fuels – practically sulphur-free and with less nitrogen oxide and carbon dioxide emissions than both coal and oil per unit of energy produced.”¹⁵⁷ — Such a point, cloaked in comparative technical analysis, is unlikely to make environmentalists break out in song, however. As natural gas contributes to global warming, is a not a renewable resource, and is subject to unpredictable future price fluctuation, its intensive use in fertilizer production is hardly an issue that can be brushed aside.

Most mainstream arguments call for more and more fertilizer to be used all over the world, and in particular to be introduced more intensively in the poorest parts of Africa. The organization One, cofounded by Bono, aims to fight “extreme poverty and preventable disease, particularly in Africa, by raising public awareness and pressuring political leaders to support smart and effective policies” and claims to work closely with

¹⁵⁴ FAO & International Fertilizer Industry Association (IFA), 1999, p. iii.

¹⁵⁵ Pollan, 2006, p. 44.

¹⁵⁶ FAO & IFA, 1999, p. iv.

¹⁵⁷ Idem, p. 29.

African policy makers and activists.¹⁵⁸ The goals and strategies used by One are broad and politically-aware and focus not only on effective aid, but on trade reform and holding government leaders accountable for decisions that harm the poor. But on agriculture, One goes the way of intensive inputs, calling for more fertilizers as part of the solution.¹⁵⁹ The language used is that of food security, not food sovereignty. But without food sovereignty the interests of the world's most powerful states, and private corporate concentrations of wealth, can shape the way agriculture shifts and communities change, marginalizing the desires and needs of the local people.

Why Bono and his organization don't look to the advice given by the special rapporteur on the right to food on this issue is unclear. The agroecology report, quoting substantial current evidence, warns against intensive external inputs (fertilizers) in favor of agroecology as a way to raise productivity at field level.¹⁶⁰ Perhaps De Schutter's voice is drowned out by publications from other sources such as the World Bank. In a report on fertilizer use in Africa the World Bank declares lack of interest in detailed theoretical analysis, announcing the goal of supporting "innovative strategic interventions to improve fertilizer market performance" through efficiency-oriented guidance.¹⁶¹ As to the strategic interventions, the discussions center on topics such as the "slow emergence of the private sector" and "entry points for overcoming weak or ineffective demand for fertilizer."¹⁶²

From an environmentalist perspective, nitrogen fertilizers can't be the way forward given the huge amount of energy from fossil fuels (not to mention non-renewable minerals such as phosphate and potash)¹⁶³ that goes into their production. If the peak oil predictions are correct, then any agricultural systems that have become reliant on intensive use of fertilizer are subject to price shockwaves, and the first people to lose access to the fertilizer because of lack of purchasing power will be rural farmers in poor

¹⁵⁸ see www.one.org/international/about/

¹⁵⁹ see www.one.org/c/international/issue/1115/

¹⁶⁰ A/HRC/16/49, 20 December 2010, paras. 16-17.

¹⁶¹ Morris et al., 2007, p. x.

¹⁶² Idem, p. vi.

¹⁶³ FAO & IFA, 1999, p. iv.

countries. And once a farmer has gone from a circular soil fertility process to one based on continually importing fertilizer, it will take time to rebuild the soil's capacity to regenerate itself naturally, given the biological complexity of soil.¹⁶⁴ Even if the peak oil predictions are wrong, the intensive use of fossil fuels in making fertilizer produces carbon dioxide, and pushes ever more towards climate catastrophe. There are plenty of other potential problems with fertilizers which won't be delved into here, but are worthy of serious consideration, including trace mineral depletion, overfertilization causing 'fertilizer burn', the presence of pathogens and other organisms causing disease, soil acidification, the presence of persistent organic pollutants (POPs) such as Dioxin, heavy metal and radioactive element accumulation, and increased pest fitness.

Respect for the soil

There is an important naturalistic issue beyond just the environmental damages of importing fertility as a method to boost productivity. This has to do with understanding the value of the soil itself, and understanding the importance of the relationship between society and soil. The repercussions go beyond ecological issues, and touch on knowledge, labor, and community – many of the primary values of food dignity.

Berry writes that, "We cannot speak of topsoil, indeed we cannot know what it is, without acknowledging at the outset that we cannot make it. We can care for it (or not), we can even, as we say, 'build it', but we can do so only by assenting to, preserving, and perhaps collaborating in its own processes."¹⁶⁵ Richard Bardgett, professor of ecology at the Lancaster Environment Centre in England has contributed important scientific insights to the study of soil biology. He explains that throughout history, although few things have been more important to humans than their relationship with soil, ecologists have only recently begun to take a closer look at the deeply complex ecological nature of soil habitat.¹⁶⁶ The variety of the below-ground diversity in bacteria and fungi, and the nature of the interplay of soil biota, gives soil a "bewildering

¹⁶⁴ Bardgett, 2005, p. 184.

¹⁶⁵ Berry, 1991, p. 169.

¹⁶⁶ Bardgett, 2005, p. v.

physical complexity that occurs across a range of spatial and temporal scales.”¹⁶⁷ He warns of the risks of disturbing this microscopic jungle of life through increasing the intensification of agriculture. The nature of interdependence between plants and soil is still not well understood, although it is clearly a delicate equilibrium. More research into soil and more respect for its processes are needed as “soil remains the least understood, and perhaps most abused, habitat on Earth.”¹⁶⁸

When agriculture becomes primarily a quantity-oriented process, where the costs and amounts of fertilizer, pesticide, and diesel to power tractors, threshers, and fertilizer spreaders are the primary concerns of the farmer, the relationship with the soil has broken down. The farmer’s work has become less dignified as the level of complexity of knowledge has become much more linear, while the knowledge of crop rotation, of erosion prevention, and of integrated pest management practices that are the alternative, are lost. The quality of the labor the farmer does decreases, the respect for and knowledge of natural systems decreases, and instead of a place that can be a site of school visits, of pride in how the produce is grown, the farmer is but a cog in a giant industrial wheel, ground down under the market forces calling steadily for more and cheaper.

Berry puts it simply. “The word agriculture, after all, does not mean ‘agriscience’, much less ‘agribusiness’. It means ‘cultivation of land.’”¹⁶⁹ As to the power of agroecology to improve the quality of the soil, the evidence continues to mount. The UN agroecology report describes recent research on sustainable farms showing that they “had on average 40 per cent more topsoil, higher field moisture, less erosion and lower economic losses than control plots on conventional farms.”¹⁷⁰ The goal is abundance which flows from the soil, through the work of the farmers, and out to the community, respecting the integrity of the soil and the values of food dignity in the process.

¹⁶⁷ Bardgett, 2005, p. 183.

¹⁶⁸ Idem, p. 189.

¹⁶⁹ Berry, 1991, p. vii.

¹⁷⁰ A/HRC/16/49, 20 December 2010, para. 28.

All the eggs are in one basket

One of most bizarre discussion around food politics deals with the concept of food security. Although used in different ways as a term by different organizations, it basically means that families and people are food secure when they have enough to eat and are not afraid that they will starve in the near future. The typical approach coming from the food industry, mainstream media sources, and others is that more production through more and better inputs, and more trade liberalization is the only reliable way to improve food security for the poor. The other camp argues for local production for local consumption as much as possible (often in line with the food sovereignty strategy) and for poor countries to back off from neoliberal international trade policies. This is a visceral response to the reality that grain produced in poor countries flows to the rich countries which are so much more wealthy in relative terms that they will pay more to feed the grain to cows and pigs than the starving can afford to pay to keep their families alive.

In 2008 and again in the early months of 2011, global food prices have spiked for a number of reasons.¹⁷¹ Causes likely include financial speculation, fires in Russia and Australia, crops being used for bio-ethanol, and crops being diverted to feed animals for increasing meat production. Whether or not all of these factors can be substantiated as being truly relevant causes doesn't matter for this argument (although the evidence is persuasive on all counts). What matters is that there is increasingly only one food system in the world, and predictable as well as capricious and unexpected forces can quickly send prices soaring. And if the system is all based on fossil fuels, then the risk of collapse is real. If the system fails, there is no resilience, no back-up plan.

The term food security is used continually in food discussions, often with loaded political ideology hiding behind what seems like an unobjectionable technical term. The fertilizer industry report says a main goal of government should be to “increase

¹⁷¹ see food price index at www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/wfs-home/foodpricesindex/en/

food security and the availability of agro-raw materials to industry”¹⁷² although the nature of the link is not explained. A recent report on global food production and world population from *The Economist* recognizes that, although there is abundant food production, the answer to the world’s food problems is more production. “The world may indeed be growing masses of calories. But the food is not where it needs to be (...). Pushing up supplies may be easier than solving the distribution problems.”¹⁷³ In this one sentence the issue of distribution is brushed aside so the focus can be on more important issues like getting African farmers to use improved seeds and fertilizers.¹⁷⁴ This highly counterintuitive, yet often repeated ‘wisdom’, is unfortunately widespread.

The Economist report makes no mention of international law, food sovereignty, or any of the most important voices making counter-arguments except in passing. The report points out that “although the concerns of the critics of modern agriculture may be understandable, the reaction against intensive farming is a luxury of the rich. Traditional and organic farming could feed Europeans and Americans well. It cannot feed the world.”¹⁷⁵ In this twist of logic, the blame for the hungry in poor countries is put on critics of the industrial system, a group of rich and decadent people apparently.

Never mind that perhaps the most important group criticizing industrial agriculture is Via Campesina, a movement which “brings together millions of peasants, small and medium-size farmers, landless people, women farmers, indigenous people, migrants and agricultural workers from around the world.”¹⁷⁶ Via Campesina’s message is quite clear. They call for people to “bury the corporate food system” and to oppose land grabbing where fertile land is taken from peasants and “converted into massive agribusiness operations by private investors who want to produce food supplies or agro-fuels for international markets.” Via Campesina launched the idea of food sovereignty, after all, and are committed to showing how peasants’ agriculture can feed the world.

¹⁷² FAO & IFA, 1999, p. 1.

¹⁷³ *The Economist*, 2011, p. 5.

¹⁷⁴ *Idem*, p. 15.

¹⁷⁵ *Idem*, p. 5.

¹⁷⁶ see the ‘organisation’ and ‘main issues’ sections of viacampesina.org

Political scientist Robert Paarlberg repeats the message of the food and fertilizer industries that more agribusiness and more high-input production is needed. He argues that “food production in Africa today is far less than the known potential for the region” because African farmers “use almost no fertilizer” and don’t plant with “seeds improved through scientific plant breeding.” Not surprisingly his conclusion is that “too little has been invested in developing that potential.”¹⁷⁷ Ideas of preserving and respecting culture, of improving knowledge of ecological farming, or of forming networks of small farmers are just not serious to a ‘realist’ like Paarlberg. As for the possibility that decreasing grain-intensive food consumption in rich countries will serve the interests of the poor he is dismissive. “The idea that reducing meat consumption in rich countries can help hungry people in poor countries has ethical appeal but only limited practical effect. If beef consumption in rich countries declined, commercial demand for animal feed would decline as well, resulting in less grain being produced.”¹⁷⁸

The reality is quite different. As the UN agroecology report describes, ecological agriculture has strong and largely unexplored prospects for the poor. If Europe and the US switched to agroecology, and to a strategy to feed themselves, the poor in distant lands would likely benefit. The grain now produced in poor countries would be more available to feed the populations who live there. And perhaps the excessive meat and calorie consumption in rich countries would be tempered without the ability to grab the grain of the rest of the world at rock bottom prices (relative to the wealth of the people in rich countries). A decrease in meat eating in rich countries would decrease the greenhouse gas methane released by cows, helping to slow climate change. And in terms of health, the lives saved in rich countries from decreased consumption of calories could be considerable, while the poorest in poor countries would be able to afford food staples, often grown in nearby fields, which are now beyond their reach.

¹⁷⁷ Paarlberg, 2010, p. 15.

¹⁷⁸ Idem, p. 18.

Taking into account the current dynamics of the global food system and how they tend to worsen rather than help the situation of the poor, there's no reason to believe that more of the same will produce a different result. The most obvious way to enhance food security is to break the system down into many smaller local and regional food production and distribution systems. Then if one area's food prices are affected by a natural or human-made disaster, there are no global prices to destabilize, and regional cooperation can shift resources around to make up for temporary deficits. This is a basic point of any rational investor. Putting everything in one basket is foolish and insecure. Spreading the resources around in a diversified way is clearly a wiser strategy.

Technology and science

The idea of turning back the clock to older ways of living with the earth - to hunter-gatherer societies, or just to pre-industrial societies - is hard to imagine given the current population of the earth. How could there be space and resources for everyone to forage for a living or grow any significant amount of their own food? Furthermore, the shape and nature of cities and suburbs which are built around the automobile, and in general the character of modern culture in almost all ways makes an about face on technology seem so unlikely as to be beyond imagination. While there are some that do think of this issue in a linear way - that what is needed is to back off from technology and science and recede into an earlier age - the great majority of people considering how to deal with the consequences of global climate change and energy crisis look to science and technology. The conclusions on what to expect from science and technology and how to use them in an appropriate way can vary dramatically, depending on the starting values of the person doing the reasoning.

Before looking at different ways of reasoning through an appropriate and sustainable role for science and technology, it's worth looking at how the issue is addressed in the fundamental instruments of human rights law. Unlike the values of health, labor, or self-determination, the very starting principles of what role science and technology

should play in development can be read in different ways and don't give a clear set of values on which to interpret an appropriate direction.

Associated with the right to take part in cultural life, people have the right "To enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications"¹⁷⁹ while states must insure the "diffusion of science and culture."¹⁸⁰ These statements can be seized for an argument to give subsidized fertilizer to rural farmers and encourage them to stop using traditional methods in favor of monocultures and row planting. After all, despite the problems of fertilizers, they do increase yields and so represent a scientific progress in some ways. On the other hand, an argument supporting agroecology could use the same statements to call for investment in greater networks to share the knowledge of ecological farming, landscaping techniques to reduce runoff, or integrated pest management techniques. The relationship to cultural life could be argued here to support the need to preserve traditional crops and agricultural methods, while introducing new knowledge to help increase yields and reduce losses.

In terms of everyone's right to an adequate standard of living, also guaranteed by the ICESCR, states should "improve methods of production, conservation and distribution of food by making full use of technical and scientific knowledge, by disseminating knowledge of the principles of nutrition and by developing or reforming agrarian systems in such a way as to achieve the most efficient development and utilization of natural resources."¹⁸¹ Again two different visions of farming, based on different understandings of the better use of science and technology, can both be supported. Perhaps highly mechanized farming based on fertilizers and pesticides can be seen as efficient, but only in the short term, since, when cheap oil runs out, they are no longer viable. The Covenant gives no indication here as to as to whether short term results or long term prospects are to be more highly valued. The door is open to quite different understandings of what an appropriate usage of technical and scientific knowledge entails.

¹⁷⁹ ICESCR, Article 15, para. 1.

¹⁸⁰ Idem, para. 2.

¹⁸¹ Idem, Article 11, para. 2.

The Nobel laureate and co-founder of string field theory, Michio Kaku, is a representative voice on one side of this debate. Kaku sees himself as a spokesman for the scientists who may be lacking the social skills, the articulate voice, or the time to take place in the larger public debate around the future of the earth. “The scientists, the insiders who are actually creating the future in their laboratories, are too busy making breakthroughs to have time to write books about the future for the public.”¹⁸² This statement sets a tone which runs through his recent book, *Physics of the Future*. The scientists working on the future of energy production, which will make possible an end to reliance on fossil fuels, and open the doors to all kinds of innovative hi-tech ways to deal with climate change, form a group of expert heroes. What we need to do is sit back and relax, encourage more government and private funding for their work, and wait for their breakthroughs to give us the wonderful future we may not deserve, but which thankfully they are willing to share with all of us (through market mechanisms which will allow them their due profit of course).

The defining values of this approach to the future of science, technology, and energy are a belief in markets, in neoliberal capitalism in one form or another, and a supercharged dose of optimism. Kaku makes his perspective on these values clear from the get-go. “History, we are told over and over again, is written by the optimists, not the pessimists.”¹⁸³ So much for the wisdom of Rolland and Gramsci. As for a belief in markets, the language of investment and economics tends to accompany Kaku’s description of each new emerging technology, which will emerge when it does because of the profit motive and the quest for glory.

It’s worthwhile to consider the concept of an ‘emerging technology’ before looking at other science-based approaches to the future, founded on a different set of values. The hundreds of scientists Kaku profiles seem mainly to share his optimism. The breakthrough, the discovery, and the innovation are always right around the corner.

¹⁸² Kaku, 2011, p. 3.

¹⁸³ Idem, p. 8.

Yes, the world today is run on fossil fuel. But there are dozens of hi-tech energy producing methods that will be here at any moment. Using electromagnetism to create nuclear fusion for example has been very difficult for those who have tried, due to the complexity of the behaviors of compressed gases. “This is the fundamental problem that has dogged physicists for fifty years. Until now. Physicists now claim that the ITER [International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor] has finally worked out the kinks in the stability problem with magnetic confinement.”¹⁸⁴ If we look to an alternative technology also aimed at causing nuclear fusion, fusion by laser, the scientists are apparently equally close to massive breakthrough. At the US National Ignition Facility, director Edward Moses admits that in the past there were plenty of false starts. “But this, he believed, was the real thing: he and his team were about to realize an important achievement, one that will enter the history books, the first to peacefully capture the power of the sun on earth.”¹⁸⁵ Or perhaps the nuclear sceptics would prefer to follow what’s happening with research on antimatter, which “releases a billion times more energy than rocket fuel” when it combines with ordinary matter.¹⁸⁶ Or it would if it were something that was actually done rather than something somebody can imagine happening some day.

It’s worth pointing out that Kaku has been an outspoken voice against climate change deniers and is also an important advocate for a world free of nuclear weapons.¹⁸⁷ But when it comes to the future of energy and science, he’s as steadfast a market enthusiast as they come, and doesn’t bother to temper his optimism.

A different perspective comes from Carl Safina whose work has focused on marine stewardship and ecological conservation. Unlike Kaku, who gives little thought to values that link people to nature, or to the related values important to food dignity, such as labor and community, Safina understands science and technology as a tool that must be used based on an appropriately human set of values. “Technology has carried people

¹⁸⁴ Kaku, 2011, p. 242.

¹⁸⁵ Idem, p. 240.

¹⁸⁶ Idem, p. 287.

¹⁸⁷ see the 2011 interview at www.democracynow.org/2011/4/13/dr_michio_kaku_on_physics_of

beyond our planet. But what can keep us here on Earth? Science, technology, and the right values each provide only part of what we need. Science without ethics is blind, and ethics without science is prone to errors.”¹⁸⁸

Safina was influenced by the naturalist Aldo Leopold, whose poetic and insightful writings on the relationship between people and nature are as valid today as when he was writing in the 1940’s. He describes the issue as “man the conqueror versus man the biotic citizen; science the sharpener of the sword versus science the searchlight on his universe; land the slave and servant versus land the collective organism.”¹⁸⁹ While Kaku has his hopes pinned on the secrets of the atomic nucleus, Safina and Leopold are anchored in the reality of the soils and the seas. Food dignity embraces science and technology in this naturalistic vein. They are best used to find better ways to cooperate with nature, to grow agroecologically, to minimize consumption of natural resources. For even if a clean energy source of unprecedented power becomes a reality, there is no guarantee that it will be widely available or be able to replace fossil fuels before climate catastrophe becomes climate collapse. And without a changed relationship between people and nature from one of dominance to one of respect, there is no reason to believe that environmental degradation will slow or reverse in any case.

Another way to consider the issue is to look at history, and how scientific and technological improvements have not helped slow environmental degradation. In fact, many technological advances have only increased the speed with which humanity may be coasting towards the cliff’s edge. Leopold points out that “few educated people realize that the marvellous advances in technique made during recent decades are improvements in the pump, rather than the well.”¹⁹⁰ Synthetic fertilizers are a case in point.

As for energy production, nuclear power has been a reality for decades already. The risks of such a power source are clear after the Fukushima Daiichi disaster of 2011. But

¹⁸⁸ Safina, 2011, p. 322.

¹⁸⁹ Leopold, 1949, p. 223.

¹⁹⁰ Idem.

nuclear power, even without the risk of meltdown, has an even dirtier reality which it can only hide in the closet (or actually in basement pools of water) – the thousands upon thousands of barrels of nuclear waste. After the US government had spent \$9 billion preparing the Yucca mountain disposal center for nuclear waste in Nevada, Obama cancelled the project in 2009 because of uncertainty of its ability to work in the long term.¹⁹¹ If the past in terms of nuclear power through fission can give any indication as to the future of nuclear power through fusion (or other hi-tech energy production methods), there may well be unforeseen complications and challenges that are not so easily overcome.

One of the main reasons for articulating a concept like food dignity, is to show that even if the optimistic scenarios about the advance of science and technology to solve the looming disasters of peak oil and climate change come to pass, what of the future of jobs for the poor in the Spain or Malaysia or anywhere else? For technology is not just about producing clean energy, it is also about finding ways to minimize labor, through artificial intelligence and robotics for example. If this happens in agriculture, what happens to the level of knowledge of regular people, who used to know how to farm the land, or how to make things in factories? The rising income inequality in the US and elsewhere¹⁹² does not speak to a future where all will share equally in the benefits of the technology. And if the worst off suffer, so do the rest of us, as the linkages through health and community are real.

If the natural world is nothing more than a commodity that can be thought of in economic terms, and the ingenuity of the markets will solve the problems of climate change and the need for renewable energies, then it's appropriate, when asked what the future will bring, to think of internet contact lenses which will recognize people's faces and show us their biographies.¹⁹³ Asked what to do about diminishing fossil fuels, the prospect of sending satellites into orbit to beam the sun's energy back to earth¹⁹⁴ thus

¹⁹¹ Kaku, 2011, p. 221.

¹⁹² Stiglitz, 2011.

¹⁹³ Kaku, 2011, p. 43.

¹⁹⁴ Idem, p. 252.

giving unlimited clean energy might seem as good an option to expect as any other, and it requires no change in lifestyle in the mean time. As for climate change, which is already a reality and is likely to become more severe, there's always the 'doomsday device' that can be shot into the atmosphere, scattering pollution everywhere to darken the skies and lower global temperatures.¹⁹⁵

System dynamics professor John Sterman is not convinced about the possibilities of a technical fix to the problems of global warming. He argues that "there is no purely technical solution for climate change. For public policy to be grounded in the hard-won results of climate science, we must now turn our attention to the dynamics of social and political change."¹⁹⁶ People need to change their relationship to the earth and to each other into one of conscious custodianship. In terms of agriculture, one of the greatest sources of greenhouse gas, this would be about a different understanding of the land, which would not lessen the importance of science and technology in any way. It would only direct science and technology in ways that will support better human and naturalistic values. Leopold puts the issue as well as anyone:

We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect. There is no other way for land to survive the impact of mechanized man, nor for us to reap from it the esthetic harvest it is capable, under science, of contributing to culture.¹⁹⁷

In terms of food, respecting the soil, working it with knowledge and care in ways that involve minimal energy and inputs - hand in hand with the elements of education through food and community through food - can improve peoples' lives without relying completely on what may be science fantasy. Science in the service of a supportive relationship to people, the soil, and nature is the kind of science that should be invested in and pursued on the other hand.

¹⁹⁵ Kaku, 2011, p. 232.

¹⁹⁶ Sterman, 2008, p. 533.

¹⁹⁷ Leopold, 1949, p. viii.

CONCLUSION

The first chapter of this thesis describes a number of guiding principles coming from international human rights law. Since the UDHR and the ICESCR are so widely used in appeals to human rights principles, they are the primary instruments from which values that are part of food production, distribution, and other aspects of food culture and politics are defined and considered. The specific values that are focused on are those of labor, health, education, and self-determination. Considering them in terms of both the undernourished in the world and the overnourished, the importance and relevance of respecting the values as defined remains the same. What is good quality labor in one part of the world is good quality labor in another. Bringing food into the education process is as important in Denmark as in Bolivia. And taking the primary principle of good health as a search for equilibrium of calorie intake, the focus turns to a more just global trade policy that can undo the forces leading some to consume too much while others starve.

Perhaps the most important idea of chapter one, finally beginning to come of age in the field of international law, is the concept of food sovereignty. A natural extension of basic principles of self-determination, food sovereignty speaks to a more localized system run by farmers and not by agribusiness. The meaning in terms of links between the farms and the consumers, the increase in food security from movement towards many smaller self-sufficient systems, and the repercussions for education and community that come from the productive land and nearby populated areas being linked to each other would be positive and would be considerable.

The second chapter describes philosophical and political ideas of the relationship between the individual and community. By understanding the individual's freedom as essentially being enhanced and enabled by participation in quality community interactions, the importance of community becomes clarified. Building relationships based on respect and friendship makes people stronger as individuals. Although community values are rarely considered in issues of food politics, they are very much a

part of the reality of the day-to-day life of regular people, who appreciate and value eating and drinking together. These small-scale interactions of community and food can be also be considered in food purchasing, food processing, and back to the cultivation of land.

The third chapter looks at the importance of environmental considerations in food politics, in particular in the face of the frightening prospects of climate change and peak oil. Arguing for dramatic reduction in the use of fossil fuels in industrial agriculture and in transportation, concepts of agroecology and naturalistic ways of valuing the relationship between humanity and fertile soil are explored as alternatives. There is a focus on defining the values that can guide an appropriate use of science and technology. Cultivating the awareness of a balance between optimism and pessimism is described as an important analytical tool to discuss environmental issues of great complexity and uncertainty.

One of the most important ways to respect food dignity is to follow, through individual action and government initiative, the idea of contraction and convergence. If the people of the world are equal in inherent dignity, then there should be movement towards actual equality in terms of access to food. This involves less consumption, and less consumption of grain-intensive foods such as meat and dairy in rich countries, and more consumption, and to a certain extent, more consumption of more-intensive foods, in poor parts of the world. But the meeting point, where the rich and poor converge in food intake, must be at a level that doesn't require too much from the rapidly depleting soils of the earth. As for how to get to this convergence, food dignity suggests that this will happen through respecting the labor, health, and education values of food as much as possible. Through greater knowledge, a better relationship with nature, more respect for community, and more dignified and interesting agricultural work, movement towards contraction and convergence will begin.

There are extensions in many directions that have not been explored in this thesis but that would yield fruitful and interesting connections if pursued. The link between

respect for agriculture based on the values of food dignity and peace is one such issue. Humboldt notes that “Always accustomed to produce, never to destroy, agriculture is essentially peaceful” and if farmers work the land with compassion it will “dispose their hearts to a cheerful submission to custom and law.”¹⁹⁸ A well-known community kitchen in New York City, Eat Restaurant, which sources its ingredients exclusively from producers with which it cultivates a relationship of respect and cooperation, also mentions this link in their manifesto. “When living under an industrial and warring nation, consumerism is encouraged, and ingredients are voraciously consumed from every corner of the world which burns more fuel than necessary and creates a globalized market that detaches our society from our natural surroundings.”¹⁹⁹ From an improved respect of the values of human rights that are embedded in food dignity, as well as from a search for greater community and environmental values, food and agriculture can contribute to a more peaceful world.

Nuance of thought should be the order of the day, not fear from economists pointing their finger at graphs of population and production designed to create panic, and in that panic to turn the dilemma over to the agribusiness corporations, ready to diligently produce more and faster. Balanced thinking on food requires thinking from small to large, from individual health to community well-being, from how children are taught about food to the degree of sensitivity farmers have for the soil and the seasons. Although complex, the values embedded in food and the values surrounding food issues can be understood and can be judged. By reasoning more broadly, but with concrete criteria in mind, decisions more supportive of human dignity, of food dignity, emerge, and the depletion of society and soil can become the rebirth of vitality and harmony.

¹⁹⁸ Humboldt, 1969, p. 23.

¹⁹⁹ Colon, 2010.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alston, Philip, 'International Law and the Human Right to Food', pp. 9-68 in P. Alston & K. Tomaševski (eds.), *The Right to Food*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1984.
- Atkins Nutritionals Inc., official Atkins diet website, available at www.atkins.com/Index.aspx (consulted 11 July 2011).
- Bardgett, Richard, *The Biology of Soil*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Berlin, Isaiah, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment*. London: Random House, 2000.
- Berry, Wendell, *Standing on Earth*. Ipswich, England: Golgonooza Press, 1991.
- Campbell, Colin J., 'Petroleum and People', pp.193-207 in *Population and Environment*, volume 24:2, 2002.
- Carson, Rachel, *Silent Spring*. Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1962.
- Colon, Jordan, 'How We Eat', Eat Restaurant, New York, unpublished brochure, 2010.
- Chapman, Audrey R., 'Human Dignity, Bioethics, and Human Rights', pp. 1-10 in *The Amsterdam Law Forum*, volume 3:1, 2011, available at ojs.uvu.vu.nl/alf/article/download/177/367 (consulted on 9 July 2011).
- Chomsky, Noam, Statement by Professor Noam Chomsky to the United Nations General Assembly Thematic Dialogue on the Responsibility to Protect, pp. 1-5, available at www.un.org/ga/president/63/interactive/protect/noam.pdf (consulted 9 July 2011).
- Cohen, G.A., *Why Not Socialism?*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Costa, Temra, *Farmer Jane*. Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, 2010.
- Crutzen, Paul J., 'Can We Survive the "Anthropocene" Period?', in Project Syndicate, 5 June 2009, available at www.projectsyndicate.org/commentary/crutzen1/English (consulted 10 July 2011).
- Dewey, John, *Human Nature and Conduct*. New York: Random House, 1922.
- Dewey, John, *The School and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1915.

- Duff, John, 'Setting the Menu: Dietary Guidelines, Corporate Interests, and Nutrition Policy' pp. 148-169 in J. Germov and L. Williams (eds.), *A Sociology of Food and Nutrition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Elliott, Kimberly A. & Freeman, Richard B., *Can Labor Standards Improve Under Globalization?*. Washington DC: Institute for International Economics, 2003.
- Food and Agriculture Organization, Food Price Index, available at www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/wfs-home/foodpricesindex/en/ (consulted 11 July 2011).
- Food and Agriculture Organization, 1.000.000.000 People Live in Chronic Hunger and I'm Mad as Hell, campaign information and petition available at www.onebillionhungry.org/ (consulted 11 July 2011).
- Food and Agriculture Organization, *The Right to Food in theory and practice*. Rome: FAO, 1998.
- Food and Agriculture Organization, Voluntary Guidelines on the right to food, 1995, available at [ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/meeting/009/y9825e/y9825e01.pdf](ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/meeting/009/y9825e/y9825e01.pdf) (consulted 9 July 2011).
- Food and Agriculture Organization & International Fertilizer Industry Association, *Fertilizer strategies*. Rome: FAO and IFA, 1999.
- Food First Information and Action Network, The FIAN International Statute, amended 1994, available at www.fian.org/resources/documents/others/fian-international-statutes/pdf (consulted 9 July 2011).
- Friedrichs, Jörg, 'Global energy crunch: How different parts of the world would react to a peak oil scenario', pp.4562-4569 in *Energy Policy*, volume 38, 2010.
- Galeano, Eduardo, Interview with Amy Goodman on Democracy Now, 28 May 2009, available at www.democracynow.org/2009/5/28/eduardo (consulted 11 July 2011).
- Gramsci, Antonio, *Prison Notebooks Volume 1*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.
- Gutterman, Sheila M., *Collaborative Law*. Denver, Colorado: Bradford Publishing Co., 2004.
- Halme, Miia, *Human Rights in Action*. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2008.

- Heinberg, Richard, *The Party's Over*. Gabriola Island, Canada: New Society Publishers, 2005.
- Hien, Nguyen X., 'Glutinous Rice, Kinship and the Tet Festival in Vietnam' pp. 242-265 in M. Janowski & F. Kerlogue (eds.), *Kinship and Food in South East Asia*. Copenhagen, Denmark: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2007.
- Hill, Andrew, 'The Top 50 Women in World Business 2010', in *Financial Times Weekend*, 11-12 December 2010.
- Humboldt, Wilhelm von, *The Limits of State Action*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1969.
- Illich, Ivan, *Medical Nemesis*. London: Marion Boyars, 1975.
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2001: The Scientific Basis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, available at www.grida.no/climate/ipcc_tar/wg1/pdf/WG1_TAR-FRONT.pdf (consulted 9 July 2011).
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Fourth Assessment Report: Climate Change 2007*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, available at www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/publications_ipcc_fourth_assessment_report_synthesis_report.htm (consulted 10 July 2011).
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, UN General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI), 16 December 1966, in force 3 January 1976, No. 14531.
- Kaku, Michio, interview with Amy Goodman on Democracy Now, 13 April 2011, available at www.democracynow.org/2011/4/13/dr_michio_kaku_on_physics_of (consulted 11 July 2011).
- Kaku, Michio, *Physics of the Future*. New York: Doubleday, 2011.
- Kennedy, David, *The Dark Sides of Virtue*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.
- Kokkinos, Alexander et al, 'Eating Slowly Increases the Postprandial Response of the Anorexigenic Gut Hormones, Peptide YY and Glucagon-Like Peptide-1', pp. 333-37 in *The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism*, volume 95(1), 2010, available at jcem.endojournals.org/content/95/1/333.full.pdf+html?sid=050345c5-3aae-4557-913c-a0f1047d73e8 (consulted 9 July 2011).

- Koskenniemi, Martti, 'The Effect of Rights on Political Culture', pp. 99-116 in Philip Alston (ed.), *The European Union and Human Rights*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Koskenniemi, Martti, 'Human Rights, Politics, and Love', pp. 79-94 in *Finnish Yearbook of International Law*, volume XIII, 2002.
- Kropotkin, Peter, *Mutual Aid*. Charleston, South Carolina: Forgotten Books, 2008.
- Lappé, Frances M., & Collins, Joseph, *Food First*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977.
- Lawrence, Mark & Germov, John, 'Future Food: The Politics of Functional Foods and Health Claims', pp. 119-147 in J. Germov & L. Williams (eds.), *A Sociology of Food & Nutrition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Leder, Frederic & Shapiro, Judith N., 'This time it's different', pp.2850-2852 in *Energy Policy*, volume 36, 2008.
- Leopold, Aldo, *A Sand County Almanac*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1949.
- Macklin, Ruth, 'Dignity is a useless concept', pp. 1419-1420 in *BMJ*, volume 327, 2003.
- Marx, Karl & Engels, Frederick, *The German Ideology*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1970.
- McCrudden, Christopher, 'Human Dignity and Judicial Interpretation of Human Rights', pp. 655-724 in *European Journal of International Law*, volume 19:4, 2008, available at ejil.oxfordjournals.org/content/19/4/655.abstract (consulted on 9 July 2011).
- McKibben, Bill, *Deep Economy*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007.
- Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, *Living Beyond our Means*, 2005, available at pdf.wri.org/ma_board_final_statement.pdf (consulted 9 July 2011).
- Morris, Michael et al., *Fertilizer Use in African Agriculture*. Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2007.
- Morris, Steven, 'Two sugary drinks a day can dull taste buds, study claims', in *The Guardian*, 9 June 2011, available at www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2011/jun/09/sugary-drinks-dull-tastebuds-study (consulted 9 July 2011).
- Moyn, Samuel, *The Last Utopia*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010.

- Nyéleni Declaration, adopted at the Forum for Food Sovereignty in Sélingué, Mali, 27 February 2007, available at www.nyeleni.org/ (consulted 11 July 2011).
- Oliver, Jamie, talk at Technology Entertainment Design conference, Monterey, California, February 2010, available at www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/jamie_oliver.html (consulted 11 July 2011).
- One International, official website available at www.one.org (consulted 11 July 2011).
- Ornish, Dean, 'The Never-Ending Diet Wars', in *Newsweek*, 16 July 2008, available at www.newsweek.com/2008/07/15/the-never-ending-diet-wars.html# (consulted 9 July 2011).
- Orr, David W., *Down to the Wire*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Paarlberg, Robert, *Food Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Petrini, Carlo, *Slow Food*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.
- Polanyi, Karl, *The Great Transformation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1957.
- Pollan, Michael, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2006.
- Pyke, Magnus, *Food and Society*. London: John Murray, 1968.
- Ritzer, George, *The McDonaldization of Society*. Thousand Oaks, California: Pine Forge Press, 2004.
- Ramsay, Gordon, *Gordon Ramsay's World Kitchen*. London: Quadrille Publishing Ltd., 2009.
- Robinson, Mary, Human Rights and Ethical Globalization, lecture at University of San Diego, 31 March 2005, available at www.sandiego.edu/peacestudies/documents/ipj/Programs/DLS/RobinsonPDFBook.pdf (consulted 9 July 2011).
- Sachs, Jeffrey, *Common Wealth*. London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2008.
- Safina, Carl, *The View From Lazy Point*. New York: Henry Holt and Company LLC, 2011.
- Sandel, Michael J., *Democracy's Discontent*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996.
- Singer, Peter, *A Darwinian Left*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2000.
- Sizer, Frances S. & Whitney, Eleanor N., *Nutrition Concepts and Controversies*. Belmont, California: Thomson Learning EMEA, Ltd., 2002.

- Slow Food International, official website, available at www.slowfood.com/international/1/about-us (consulted 11 July 2011).
- Smit, Peter-Ben, *Fellowship and Food in the Kingdom*. Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2008.
- Sterman, John D., 'Risk Communication on Climate: Mental Models and Mass Balance' pp. 532-533 in *Science*, volume 322: 5901, 2008.
- Stiglitz, Joseph E., 'Of the 1%, by the 1%, for the 1%' in *Vanity Fair*, May 2011, available at www.vanityfair.com/society/features/2011/05/top-one-percent-201105 (consulted 10 July 2011).
- Symonds, George, 'Trust Me, I'm an International', FOL lëvizja discussion paper, 1 November 2010, available at levizjafol.org/images/uploads/files/Trust_me,_I_am_an_International.pdf (consulted 9 July 2011).
- 'The 9 billion-people question', pp. 3-18 in *The Economist*, 26 February 2011.
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, General Assembly resolution 217A (III), 10 December 1948.
- UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *General Comment 12*, 12 May 1999, E/C.12/1999/5, available at www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/0/3d02758c707031d58025677f003b73b9 (consulted 9 July 2011).
- UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Jean Ziegler*, 10 January 2008, A/HRC/7/5, available at daccess-ddsny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G08/100/98/PDF/G0810098.pdf?OpenElement (consulted 9 July 2011).
- UN Human Rights Council, *Report submitted by the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter*, 20 December 2010, A/HRC/16/49, available at daccessddsny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G10/178/49/PDF/G1017849.pdf?OpenElement (consulted 9 July 2011).
- UN Millennium Development Goals, available at www.un.org/millenniumgoals/poverty.shtml (consulted 11 July 2011).
- United States Agency for International Development, *The 2009 NGO Sustainability Index*, pp. 123-128, available at www.usaid.gov/locations/europe_eurasia/dem_gov/ngoindex/2009/kosovo.pdf (consulted on 9 July 2011).

- Via Campesina, official website, available at viacampesina.org (consulted 11 July 2011).
- Virgil, *Georgics*. Translated by A.S. Kline, 2002, available at www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/VirgilGeorgicsI.htm#_Toc533589841(consulted 9 July 2011).
- Walsh, Bryan, 'Eearth by Bill McKibben', in *Time*, 26 April 2010, available at www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1982309,00.html (consulted 11 July 2011).
- Wilkinson, Richard & Pickett, Kate, *The Spirit Level*. New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009.
- World Health Organization, Definition of Health, available at apps.who.int/aboutwho/en/definition.html (consulted 11 July 2011).