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Food Ethics: Traceability in the Restaurant

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1. Introduction

The subject of food ethics, one that belongs to the field of practical or applied ethics, has recently enjoyed a surge of interest from philosophers. Issues concerning animal rights and welfare, environmental degradation, consumption, human exploitation, hunger, and sustainability, among others, all fall under the scope of or are finely enmeshed with food ethics. Although a 2011 study from the United Nation estimates that a full third of all food produced for human consumption is wasted, food waste has received much less attention than many of these others[1]. Sustained ethical consideration about restaurants and the various actions that comprise the day-to-day operations in them is even scarcer. Because food waste is prevalent—but entirely avoidable—it is a serious ethical problem; further, since restaurants have a substantial role in the food system, and are themselves very guilty of much food waste, the manner in which chefs and restaurateurs comport themselves to their work is quite an important issue in food ethics. It is an unfortunate oversight on the part of scholars working in food ethics to have failed to address this.

This paper seeks to begin to address this gap in the literature. Very much of the work published on food ethics is done from the point of view of a consumer ethic. This is helpful to a point, because we expect the marketplace to respond to consumer choices. Of course, any person who has given the food system more than a cursory glance is immediately and painfully aware of how rife with wrongdoings it is. For pragmatic

[1] This isn't to say that waste is ignored (it is, of course, closely related to hunger and sustainability problems); only that it has received less individual, isolated attention.

reasons, then, work needs to be done which focuses on the professional ethic. Although there is little chance that the CEOs of Hershey or Mars will stop purchasing cocoa beans harvested with the slave labor of children in response to ethicists writing about the suffering and exploitation involved in the process, it is a mistake—for obvious reasons—to put all of the blame or approbation on the chocolate consumer.[2] Those focusing on consumer ethics don't actually fail to blame the producers, but their work focuses on the consumer; the result is that ethical discourse focuses on what the individual consumer is doing, and the producer largely gets a free pass.

If this is doubted, take the recent essay contest by *The New York Times* for example: "Calling All Carnivores. Tell Us Why It's Ethical to Eat Meat: A Contest," which reminds the reader later in the article: "This is a very specific contest. Don't tell us why you like meat, why organic trumps local or why your food is yours to choose. Just tell us why it's ethical to eat meat."[3] The question in food ethics that is receiving attention from one the most popular newspapers is entirely focused on whether the individual consumer ought to eat meat. This, to be blunt, strikes me as ridiculous, because it ignores the origin of wrongdoing: the owners of the farms and those that *do* the mistreating. Of course, that this wasn't the focus of the question posed to readers of *The New York Times* is telling. It suggests that the editorial board assumes that this isn't a hotly contested (or interesting) question. But why not? As I have mentioned above, I think this is the result of the preoccupations of scholars working in food ethics. Recent trends in the food industry suggest that consumers are slowly being persuaded to

[2] If this isn't obvious, see Schwarz (2010)
[3] Kaminer (2012)

change their behavior, and buy *better* foods, despite their often costing more. If consumers can be moved to change purchasing behavior by factors outside of the market, then we should expect nothing less of the producers. Like for the consumers, however, sustained ethical discourse concerning the producers in the food industry is a prerequisite for change.

To that end, the focus of this paper is the responsibilities the producer (as opposed to the consumer) has to avoid generating waste in restaurants. The 2011 study from the UN cited above distinguishes between food loss and waste, depending on the point in the food supply chain where the food becomes unfit for human consumption. The study's distinction, whether appropriate or not, suggests that determining ethical responsibility of food waste is difficult. I argue that chefs, as producers, are ethically culpable. The producer in the restaurant is of a unique kind: because restaurant food purchasing typically differs from consumers in quantity only, they are also a type of consumer. Each restaurant is different in very many ways: sometimes they are chef owned, sometimes owned by a single entrepreneur or a group of investors with varying levels of knowledge about the culinary world. I intend for this paper to be helpful for any culinary professional considering ethical issues in their work, but I will refer to the chef when talking about the culinary professional. This is for the sake of simplicity.

Thesis outlined

The thesis of this paper is threefold: (1) restaurants and the work of chefs are worthy of sustained ethical considerations, (2) there are two ethically distinct

(but related) forms of waste in restaurants, one of which contributes to the other, and (3) an expansion of Christian Coff's traceability—*robust traceability*—can be implemented to discover and ameliorate waste in the restaurant, the result of which is an ethically superior, higher quality restaurant that is more profitable. That chefs can reduce unethical behavior while simultaneously raising profits makes food waste an especially egregious offense.

First, the nature of the restaurant business makes it highly relevant to the food ethicist. To talk about the nature of the restaurant is not to make claims about how all restaurants *are*. Rather, it is to make claims about how all restaurants need to be in order to become successful, profitable, and maintain the longevity of the business. To do this, restaurants must fill up and turn over their tables *often*. The profit margin on a dish is typically around thirty percent of the cost: so serving 100 thirty-dollar meals in an evening will bring in about $1000 in profit. This isn't a small amount of money, but it serves to illustrate just how many times the same actions must be repeated to make a restaurant successful, which means that the actions of the chef cannot be considered in isolation. When we begin to think about chefs throwing away not just one "ugly" carrot, but also hundreds or thousands *a year*, the magnitude of the situation becomes clear.

Second, there are two types of waste that the chef or culinary professional will encounter on the job. The first kind of waste occurs when the chef fails to bring a dish to it's fullest potential. In other words, *bad cooking* leads to this first type of waste, which I am calling "Chef's waste": the potential for a wonderful meal—the captivating flavors and aromas, the attentive but unobtrusive service, the fond memories of the food and

conversation—all are lost, wasted, when the chef doesn't execute his job. The second kind of waste, which we may call "Resource waste", happens when resources (particularly food) are discarded that would have been consumable had it been handled differently (e.g. served fresh to avoid the need for refrigerated transportation, served sooner to avoid spoiling, portioned smaller, etc.)

Chef's waste may seem insignificant compared to Resource waste, but it is in fact a major contributor to Resource waste. I will show in the examples to come how a reduction in Chef's waste leads to a reduction in Resource waste; how a reduction in Chef's waste improves the quality of the food served; and finally how a reduction in Resource waste improves the ethical standing of the chef and restaurateur, and of course, profitability.

Thirdly, to illuminate the presence of ethical failures in the restaurant, particularly waste, robust traceability will be applied to potential cases in restaurants. Christian Coff's suggestion of applying ethical traceability in the food sector is the basis from which robust traceability is developed. Traceability is the act of or ability to trace a foodstuff to its origin, and the ability to evaluate the ethical status of something based on the trace it leaves of its production history. The production history includes all of the relevant details concerning a thing's ethical status. Because acting ethically is often a battle of finding the relevant information, traceability is an important tool for any agent.

The problem

Simply put, the problem that concerns me here is waste in restaurants. Despite the large amount of interest shown in food ethics, few philosophers are spending time

thinking about restaurants and the sizable role they play in food habits throughout the industrialized world. Questions about how we ought to treat animals and the environment come before questions about how we ought to manage our restaurants, but the latter are equally as important: vegetarian or not, eating in restaurants is the norm for many. I am here focused on waste, but the role restaurants play in ethical issues does not stop here: there is among others obesity epidemic, over fishing of certain species, and negligent work habits in the food service industry hurting consumers (food poisoning and allergic reactions to food are the most common examples).

Being able to walk into a restaurant and choose a meal from a menu of dishes is a luxury, regardless of the restaurant's quality. Because of this, they emphasize the differences in the lives and possessions of people everywhere: a fast food restaurant would seem like a paradise to the citizen of a poor nation; the fast food restaurant pales in comparison to a Michelin-starred restaurant. Given that the nature of a restaurant is that it is a luxury, but also operated by *professionals*, the waste in restaurants is qualitatively as well as quantitatively different than food waste at home. The chef has ample opportunity and training to avoid waste, but also throws away more food than the average individual.

Many positions in applied ethics begin with an intuition, and I will do the same here. The modern kitchen hierarchy, called a brigade, is the result of chefs working to avoid food waste, and increase efficiency. Very many popular dishes are the result of

the ingenuity of chefs looking to utilize scraps or leftovers.[4] Implicit in the way food is prepared in restaurants today, then, is a sense that wasting food ought to be avoided. This is for economic reasons at least, if not more, than ethical considerations of the chef. It is worthwhile, then, to consider briefly an argument from philosopher Henry David Thoreau.

A phenomenological argument against waste

Concerned with the negative impact that the superfluous or various luxuries were having on his life, Thoreau famously went to the woods. Living on Walden Pond, he thought often about the proper or right way to live, which he rightly notes is in an important way related to how one feeds oneself: his embrace of voluntary poverty meant Thoreau's diet consisted mainly of beans that he sowed and bread that he baked. In addition to this, he offered an argument against the eating of meat that appealed to one's feelings when handling raw meat. Based on the uncleanliness that Thoreau experienced when handling it, he almost entirely removed meat from his diet, calling this aversion the result of instinct rather than experience[5]. This argument is clearly not proof that eating meat is wrong, but it is a fascinating place to begin that discussion.

While enrolled in an American Philosophy course in which we read Walden, I was confronted with similar feelings while at work in the restaurant. Struck by the large quantities of resources that go into washing dishes, powering all of the cooking equipment, and the portioning and storing of food, I wondered if I had been doing

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[4] This is true of almost all popular foods. Croutons and French toast, for instance, were created to deal with stale bread; mushroom stock or broth is a tasty way to utilize mushroom stems, etc.
[5] Thoreau, 1997

something terribly *wrong* during my years as a dish-washer and cook. Thoreau was repulsed by the sight of raw flesh, and concluded that eating meat was immoral, and that he must stop--were my feelings about what we as cooks were doing an indication of some underlying ethical problem? The strength of Thoreau's argument comes from its simplicity (If it is icky, don't eat it!), and the fact that most of us do find raw meat icky. Similarly, most people are shocked and dismayed to hear food waste statistics like those cited above. My coworkers and I agreed on our intuition that waste in general, and food waste in particular, is wrong. In fact, the word *waste* entails the something was discarded carelessly or unnecessarily; so waste seems to entail a moral wrongdoing in our everyday attribution of the word to an action. With this intuition as a starting point, it will be possible to unpack the issue of food waste, and develop practical ethical guidance for the restaurant chef.

2. Why Chefs Deserve Ethical Scrutiny

The first part of my thesis, as mentioned, holds that the actions of chef warrant ethical consideration. This is an important point to make, because those working in food ethics largely overlook their actions. In the section on traceability I provide specific examples of literature that surprisingly overlook the issues that crop up in restaurants, but for now, two brief arguments suggest that the work of the chef may be more ethically difficult than it seems at first glance. First, it seems that some food waste is unavoidable, and second, no matter how small the individual act of food waste is, they add up to a considerable amount in a surprisingly short amount of time.

The Dilemma of Portion Control

Most restaurants utilize some type of portion control for consistency and to be able to calculate the cost of an individual dish. It also serves to keep the cost of an individual dish at a profitable level. The ways in which portion control is executed varies from kitchen to kitchen, and is based on the food being portioned. A popular choice in most kitchens is small plastic bags, which range in size to accommodate chicken wings, lunchmeats, shaved steak, calamari, etc. Because portion control requires labor and materials, it costs money. So chefs and restaurateurs are posed with the question of whether and what to focus their portion control effort and dollars on.

Within this seemingly mundane problem for the chef lays an ethical dilemma. Either the chef controls portions or not. If not, then the chef will ultimately waste food.[6] If so, then resources such as plastic (and everything that goes into its production) will be wasted. So, it seems, some type of waste, either food or some other resource, is inevitable. In a world where some go hungry, how we handle our food, especially in a context where food preparation is particularly resource intensive, is not something to gloss over.

"Everything costs money, beb."

One of the very first lessons I got as a new dishwasher and soon-to-be prep cook was from a strange chef that ran the line on the weekends. He called everyone "beb"

[6] This is an empirical observation based on my own experience. It is certainly *possible* that chefs could do away with resource demanding means of portion control without wasting food, but I would be surprised to see this happen in most restaurants.

(short for babe), so that's what we called him (when he wasn't around). The Beb said to me, as he would to everyone that was hired after me, "Everything costs money, beb. If each employee wastes one dollar per shift, that's six dollars a week, and about 300 dollars a year. . ." When we start adding up all of the employees in the restaurant, and consider that each one probably wastes more than a dollar, it isn't hard to see how that number adds up fast. The explanation usually trailed off here, and any time the Beb caught an employee doing something wasteful (like using too much dish soap, or not scraping the bottom of a dressing container with a rubber spatula), he would remind us "everything costs money, beb."

Some chefs have stories about other chefs throwing knives at them in anger, or lewd acts being performed in the walk-in. While mine may not be as entertaining, it serves to illustrate the point that restaurants become successful only when maintaining a relatively high volume of output, and because of this, small amounts of waste here and there add up. The Beb's focus was financial, but that line of reasoning can be extended to food and any other resource used in the kitchen. One plastic portion bag for an order of calamari may seem harmless, but when we consider that a typical meal for four at a restaurant could consume four or five plastic bags, it becomes clear how large that number can become in a short amount of time. The ethical point here is that considered in isolation, questions about how the food makes it to your table in a restaurant seem insignificant; considered on a larger scale, questions about how one chef, or one restaurant, serves it's guests are worthy of ethical consideration.

3. On Waste

Before entering the discussion about the two types of waste in restaurants, it will be helpful first to discuss waste more generally. As I mentioned above, using the term waste seems to entail a value judgment. In *An Ontology of Trash* Greg Kennedy makes a similar point: "So long as we continue to distinguish between positive and negative, we will always face waste. For all wastes result from the inveterate human habit of evaluation."[7] It is clear that considering something waste is the result of human judgment or evaluation, but what does this really mean? Is waste merely the result of certain values we hold, or is there something underlying our individual values that can make an action wasteful?

Kennedy takes the former position after a short explanation of the etymology of waste. As he explains it, waste comes from the Latin *vastus.* This means unoccupied or desolate, and is similar to the Latin word for empty or vain (*vanus*) and the Sanskrit word for wanting or deficient. The notions of unoccupied, desolate, empty, vain, wanting, and deficient mostly point to value judgments made by the beholder of waste. Following this, Kennedy concludes: "When our actions confirm the value we project, we do not waste."[8]

This definition of waste has the benefit of clearly explaining our relationship to ritualized feasting. In times of scarcity, people are finely attuned to the demands or necessities of everyday life. In response, people have developed various "ritualized

[7] Kennedy, 2007 (p.2)
[8] Ibid (p. 5)

attempts at surpassing necessity."[9] The occasional over-indulgent feast that comes with a harvest in poor farming communities, for instance, offers one an escape from the harsh realities of hardships like not having enough food. By conceiving of waste purely in terms of the values we hold, Kennedy is able to distinguish positive from negative instances of waste, the feast being positive. Despite this, I think Kennedy misses an aspect of waste that is independent of the particular or relative value judgments one might make.

If we take a second look at the notions in the etymology of waste, words like unoccupied, empty, or wanting, stand out as potentially independent of overt value judgments. Unoccupied, empty, and wanting can all be understood as empirical observations. If a chef determines that a meal about ready to leave the kitchen is not up to his or her strict standards, and discards it in favor of making a new one for the customer, there is an obvious way in which calling that waste is a value judgment. Yet, it is not obvious that this is *only* a value judgment. We can say empirically, without making the value judgment that discarding edible food is *wrong*, that where a foodstuff once had the potential to sustain someone, it no longer does. A room in a home can be wasted by being empty or unoccupied, and similarly a meal can be wasted by being thrown away instead of eaten. This is even clearer in cases where throwing a meal away leads directly to a 'wanting', but in restaurants fully stocked with food, wasting some never leads directly to wanting.

[9] Ibid (p. 11)

To further cast doubt on the idea that the notion of waste results purely from particular value judgments, consider the case when an individual has conflicting values. This happens quite frequently in the restaurant. In the above example of a chef throwing away a meal that, for whatever reason, isn't up to the standards of the restaurant, there is a conflict of values. The chef has obligations to the customer to fulfill his or her expectations, and an obligation to the owners of the restaurant to maximize profits. So the conflict of value comes down to profit versus reputation or integrity. To use a current example, the blog Gateway Gourmet, which writes about the culinary world, ran a blog-post titled "Ethics in the Kitchen". The post was mainly a list of imperatives, and the fourth was "Don't be afraid to waste (time, money, or food)." The reason is that serving poor quality food undermines the business in the long term. Despite the author advocating that the chef should throw away substandard food, he nonetheless considers it waste. This is an example of one valuing the reputation and success of one's business, and recognizing that an act in accordance with those values is still wasteful. The idea that waste comes only from actions failing to align with our values ultimately fails.

There are two distinct types of waste that occur in restaurants, Chef's waste, and Resource waste (hereafter CW and RW, respectively). As mentioned, CW happens when the chef fails to bring a dish or meal to its fullest potential. First, it should be noted that I do not mean by this that there is some preexisting standard of perfection for each thing that a chef makes. Even if there isn't an ultimate standard, everyone knows when a familiar dish comes out awful. There are endless examples of this, as there are endless

ways to mess up a meal. The chef might neglect to defrost a steak before grilling it, or over salt a soup, or use instant gravy instead of thickening the meat drippings in the pan. Whether a meal is bad because the chef made a mistake or cut corners, the result is CW.

The idea of CW is perhaps a little abstract, due to the waste not always being material. The non-material waste becomes clear, however, when we consider what consumers typically get out of the restaurant experience. For starters, it is obvious that eating in restaurants is about more than just sustenance. In fact, almost everyone's eating habits in the industrialized world are dictated overwhelmingly by considerations apart from sustenance. After all, how many of us are eating as Thoreau did?

Elizabeth Telfer takes this question up briefly in the introduction to her book *Food for Thought, Philosophy and Food*: "Why do people want to eat out? The short answer is 'for pleasure': the pleasure of the food, of the surroundings and of the company." She continues expanding on the various pleasures of food later in the book by way of arguing against "a long standing tradition in Western philosophy, dating back at least to Plato, which throws doubt on eating and drinking as sources of pleasure." Telfer considers two strands of this tradition, the quantitative, which holds that eating provides less pleasure than other pleasurable activities, and the qualitative, which holds that eating provides inferior pleasures to other activities.[10] After arguing against both strands of the tradition, Telfer discusses a number of ways in which meals can be more

[10] Telfer, 2002 (p. 24); There are a number of other discussions of traditions in western thought that downplay the good that can come from eating and other consumption. See also Schudson 1998, Campbell 1998, and Korthals 2004.

than just sustenance. They can be religious observances, a religious or moral statement, a celebration, an act of solidarity or bonding, a gift, an exercise of style or luxury, and a work of art.[11] While Telfer discusses the ways in which a meal transcends mere sustenance generally, each of the ways that she mentions are recognized by chefs and actualized in restaurants (though certainly not each way at the same time, or by every chef).

Celebrity chef Mario Batali discusses the extra-food considerations that go into the experience of a great restaurant in a cookbook named after one of his restaurants, *The Babbo Cookbook*. Batali says "The experience of dining, as opposed to simply eating, has as much to do with your surroundings, the company, and numerous other factors that you may or may not even register on a conscious level as with the food on your plate."[12] When all of the potential good that can come from one's relationship with food is considered, it becomes easier to see how there can be non-material waste when a chef serves bad food in his restaurant. The feeling of disappointment one has after a bad meal (especially at a gourmet or expensive restaurant) is testament to this.

The waste in CW is not limited to the non-material, and in fact the material waste is ultimately more important, ethically speaking. The non-material and material wastes in CW are distinct, but not entirely separable. For the chef, one of the main causes of CW is cutting corners by using prepared foods in this kitchen. This results in both material and non-material CW. Soups, stocks (typically 'bases' or pastes, to which the chef adds water), and croutons, for instance, are among the most common prepared

[11] Telfer, 2002 (p. 38)
[12] Batali, 2002

foods that one will find in the restaurant kitchen. These prepared foods are never as tasty as ones made from scratch, and so it is easy to see the source of non-material CW in these examples. Unless one has worked in a restaurant, it is a little bit more difficult to see how using prepared foods in the restaurant contributes significantly to material waste.

I could offer a long-winded explanation of how this is so, but fortunately, some famous food experts have already done a fine job. Alton Brown's explanation in one of his cookbooks of why home cooks tend to shy away from making sauces is as true for the home cook as it is for the typical chef in my experience, and the same kind of reasoning can be applied to other prepared foods that many chefs use. He says:

> "By and large, most home cooks don't do sauce…Traditional sauces are indeed scary—as all dinosaurs…are. They're scary because they are not of our time. They are of a time when toqued Frenchmen walked the earth, backed by armies of fourteen-year old apprentices who probably didn't live to see forty…The kitchens the culinary T-Rexes occupied bear no resemblance to the rooms we cook in, nor did the groceries that filled them. These guys worked with whole everything: they didn't buy a steak, they bought a side of beef. They didn't buy a fish filet, they bough the fish. They purchased cartloads of produce…This meant a lot of leftovers: meat scraps and bones and fish heads, carrot tops, mushroom stems…*Being clever and innovative, the ancient chefs didn't want to waste these items. They made sauces, and everyone was happy."*[13]

This passage begins a section of sauce recipes, and so it is easy to see why Brown picked sauces as the focus of this passage. But it could have just as easily been written about other things that chefs make: stale bread is perfect for croutons, French toast, bread budding, and breadcrumbs; organs become offal; shells from shellfish like lobster or

[13] Brown, 2006 (p. 213, emphasis added)

crab make strongly favored broths or stocks, and the list goes on. Batali makes a similar point in his cookbook: "In agricultural societies…nothing goes to waste. The ears, face, and nose become *testa*; the hooves become *zampone*; the intestines hold *salumi* made from all the loose scraps; the brains go into ravioli; the leather goes to a tannery, and the tail goes into soup. In this way, great recipes are born out of necessity."[14]

From what Brown and Batali say, it isn't difficult to see how bringing in prepared foods leads to RW, when many of the prepared foods would otherwise haven been made from scraps around the kitchen. What happens with these scraps, then, if the chef does use prepared foods like stocks from bases, frozen soups, or food service croutons? Most of the scraps go into the trash, but some of them are avoided from the beginning, because chefs now tend to buy individual steaks, fish filets, and even pre-sliced vegetables. Waste isn't decreased in this way, however; it only changes what is being wasted. This leads to an increase in grocery prices and RW, and a decrease in profits and quality.

Wastes that result from the food industry in general and restaurants in particular are not limited to non-material pleasures or foodstuffs only. This is why RW is resource waste, and not food waste. According to a study done at the request of the UN:

> "[R]oughly one-third of food produced for human consumption is lost or wasted globally, which amounts to about 1.3 billion tons per year. This inevitably also means that huge amounts of the resources used in food production are used in gets lost or wasted are also emissions in vain."

As mentioned above, the notion *vain* is similar to and involved in the etymology of

[14] Batali, 2002 (p. 210)

waste. Following the findings of the study mentioned above, and the etymology of *waste*, it is safe to conclude that where food is wasted, the resources that went into its production, transportation, and final preparation are wasted too. If we waste a third of our food annually, then we also waste a third of our food related resources annually. In a globalized food system where the groceries one buys are hardly affected by geography, climate, or recent weather, if we could put a single number to the resources wasted in the food system (due to food waste), it would likely be just as shocking as hearing that 1.3 billion tons of food go to waste each year.

Whereas CW is ultimately the violation of a certain professional ethic, RW constitutes the violation of a general ethic. What this means is that only the chef has an obligation to bring out various pleasures from the dining experience—this obligation does not extend to the home cook—but everyone has some obligation to not waste. In this way, the chef that violates aspects of the professional ethics, by acting in a way that leads to CW, also violates the general ethic.[15] Thus, while CW may seem at first to be an insignificant or trivial ethical violation, the relationship of CW to RW in the restaurant kitchen suggests otherwise.

For a final point of clarification on the types of waste, it is important to see how material CW is distinct from RW. In one sense, material chef's waste *is* resource waste. When the chef throws away the box and bag that the foodservice croutons came in, as well as the week's stale bread, resources are wasted. The fuel, for instance that made

[15] I avoid here the task of making the general argument that waste ought to be avoided because it seems uncontroversial, and to make this argument thoroughly would be beyond the scope of what I want to accomplish in this paper.

the plastic bag, powered the industrial kitchen equipment, shipped the product from the manufacturer, to distributor, and eventually chef, is wasted, as it all could have been avoided had the chef used some of the stale bread and other ingredients on hand. This type of waste, while it is in fact RW, is still distinct. It is distinct because the action that leads to the waste is done by a certain kind of agent: a professional chef with certain professional obligations. So while everyone can waste resources, only the chef can make CW. And again, CW is unethical, as it is a violation of the chef's professional ethic, and it leads to or is itself RW, which we all share an obligation to avoid.

4. On Traceability

Traceability has been implemented at an increasing rate throughout the food system. In a second book on the subject, Coff et al discusses thoroughly its application in the Danish bacon, UK wheat-bread, and Greek olive oil supply chains.[16] Most are familiar with food manufacturers utilizing traceability to attract customers, whether it is the place of origin and fair trade sticker advertised on coffee, or orange juice brands building ad campaigns around the location in which the oranges are farmed. This has become more of a legal obligation for companies as well, as it is instrumental in finding the source of problems like food contamination. There is no denying that the implementation of traceability in the food sector has been successful. However, this is true of only part of the food sector.

[16] Coff et al, 2008

Traceability for the Consumer

Christian Coff, in his book *The Taste for Ethics: an Ethic of Food Consumption*, offers a detailed analysis of food ethics as it relates to the production history of the foods that we consume. Coff distinguishes four kinds of knowledge (intellectual, sensuous, emotional, and narrative), and examines the how the different kinds of knowledge are utilized in our relationship with food. Criticizing how pervasive the use of 'intellectual knowledge' is in food matters, his position is ultimately that we ought to be using 'narrative knowledge' which allows particular foods to be evaluated according to their production history. As the name suggests, the consumer is supposed to evaluate a products story (or history), which contains the details necessary to make an ethical judgment.[17]

Unfortunately, there are limitations to this approach. Coff explains, "foodstuffs cannot function as signs but only as traces that let us know that there has been a production history in which there must be an ethical dimension."[18] This makes sense: we can't know by looking at a steak, whether on a plate in a restaurant or wrapped in Styrofoam and plastic at the grocery store, very much about it or it's production history. Beyond the shape, color of the flesh, and how delicately the fat is marbled throughout, there is not very much information to be had just by inspection. When the harvesting and the butchering are far removed from our eating, it is difficult to find the information necessary to make ethical choices. Thus, the separation of a food's production history from its preparation, service, and consumption, is an ethical problem.

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[17] Coff, 2006
[18] Ibid (p. 103)

Production of our foods, in case there was any doubt, is almost completely separated from its consumption. This is just as true in restaurants as it is in homes. I haven't worked in a restaurant that makes its own desserts. Many appetizers come bagged, boxed, and frozen. Frequently, restaurants order their meats by the cut, and they are shipped individually wrapped. Despite the fact that I live and work in Rhode Island, most of the fish that I have cooked has arrived at the restaurant fileted, skinned and frozen. Even during the summer, when I pick up fresh shellfish at a local distributor on my way into work, we still serve from Sole filets shipped from Alaska for our fish & chips. There certainly are restaurants for which some or all of these things aren't true, but these restaurants are likely in the minority.

To explain and deal with this issue, Coff borrows Peter Kemp's distinction between the *short-range* ethics that are possible without a separation of production and consumption, and the *long-range* ethics that are necessary with it. While Kemp holds that we ought to treat these long-range relationships as if they were face-to-face, Coff denies the plausibility of doing this, but takes a similar position: "If consumers are to put their ethics into practice, we must take the opposite direction. Instead of extending the short-range ethics to the absent, the absent must be made present in glimpses. This is the thesis on which the rest of this book is written."[19] His suggestion, then, is using traceability—the trace of a foodstuff's production history understood as a narrative—to make our food consumption choices. Because it is aimed at helping individuals make better choices, Coff's conception of traceability is really traceability for the consumer.

[19] Ibid (p. 100)

Robust Traceability

There are things that happen in the kitchen that consumers don't see that add to the ethical history of the food. By adding another step in the process from farm to plate, a foodstuff's history is further obscured. And as discussed above, there are many unethical things that chefs can do in the restaurant. Because it is focused only at the consumer, Coff's traceability is of limited use.[20] Coff, like many philosophers working in food ethics, seems to have a blind spot to restaurants. Neither of Coff's books that I cite discuss restaurants any length. Korthals and Telfer, both with books on food ethics, neglect to discuss restaurants at any length.[21] A Routledge anthology, *Food Ethics,* which is part of a series on Professional Ethics, neglects thorough discussion of restaurants as well, despite the amount of professionals in the food industry that work in restaurants.[22]

As Korthals says of the consumer, "I do not wish to absolve the consumer. Consumers too must liberate themselves from the bondage that holds them in relation to food production."[23] The chef, likewise, should not be absolved. Like the consumer, the chef is a small part of an incredibly complex food system. The global food system is obviously larger and more complex than a restaurant, but it makes sense to view the restaurant roughly as a microcosm of the global food system. Like the consumer, the

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[20] This isn't exactly a problem with Coff's notion of traceability, because it is useful to those that it was intended to be useful to, but it is a limit nonetheless.
[21] Korthals 2004, and Telfer 2002; to be fair, at least Telfer mentions restaurants enough for them to warrant a spot in the index.
[22] Mepham, 2002
[23] Korthals, 2004 (p.180)

chef can get lost in many of the same difficult questions: what food should I buy, and how much? where or from who should I buy it? how should I prepare this food and how much should I prepare? These types of questions are ethically important for the consumer and the chef alike. However, there are certain obligations that come with buying and preparing food professionally, so these questions might be even more important when considered from the point of view of the chef. Unfortunately, as I have argued, the chef doesn't get much attention from the ethicist.

The problem isn't exactly with the notion of traceability, but with its application thus far. A more robust notion of traceability that considers not only the issues of the consumer, but also of the chef, will be instrumental in bringing about the same changes in the restaurant on the same scale as other areas of the food production sector. Again, this isn't to say that Coff's practical suggestion to think about traceability in the food sector is wrong; but rather that his focus was not sufficiently wide in scope. The relationship of agri-business to supermarket to consumer encompasses the majority of the food industry, but to omit restaurants from consideration in food ethics is a mistake, and the result is a notion of traceability that is of seriously limited use for the chef. As mentioned, there is a qualitative as well as quantitative difference in the food wasted by chefs and consumers; these differences suggest that questions regarding the chef are more ethically significant.

Rather than only the consumer utilizing traceability to evaluate a foodstuff, the chef too can utilize it to evaluate various aspects of the restaurant that do not serve as *signs*, but as *traces*. The idea that the actions of a chef are better considered in total than

individually is important for and allows the application of traceability. Just like the consumer can't know everything necessary to make an informed, ethical choice, the chef can't make an appropriate ethical evaluation of his products just by looking at or considering one instance of it.

Robust traceability has the advantage over traceability for the consumer, then, because it is useful for the professional as well as the consumer. Additionally, it uses the examination of a trace (as opposed to a sign) to reach ethical conclusions without relying entirely on production history, so it doesn't require the underlying epistemological position that Coff maintains, which says that narrative knowledge is superior to intellectual knowledge with respect to food ethics. Coff was right to utilize a narrative approach to evaluating foods, but I think this part can be reserved without at the same time making those epistemological commitments.

In the rest of this section I will examine several key parts of any restaurant, and consider how traceability can be used as a tool for evaluation. Coff's traceability will be helpful up to a point, and what I call robust traceability will answer the remaining issues by considering the ethical aspects of dealing with food that crop up in the professional kitchen. The method of application is similar to Coff's, in that aspects of the restaurant will be evaluated as traces (rather than signs), but different in that there is less focus on the aspect of traceability that literally traces foodstuffs from plate to farm. Because the chef is a consumer as well as a producer of food, the considerations of traceability for the consumer are subsumed by robust traceability.

Food as trace

There are obviously a wide variety of different things that one can buy in restaurants, so in order to substantiate how the concept of robust traceability can be applied, and its strengths over simple traceability, the cases must be chosen carefully. I will look at something ubiquitous in restaurants: coffee. This example entails the ethical problems faced by consumers (which is Coff's focus) because chefs and restaurateurs are consumers in a way very similar to individuals; but it also entails ethical problems that consumers do not face. For instance, the individual consumer has very little ethical obligations regarding the food that they buy beyond choosing the *good* one, but the restaurant, employing *professionals* who are fulfilling obligations to customers, would seem to have ethical obligations (meeting sanitation requirements, and fulfilling their end of the transaction by serving a product as it was described on the menu, at the very least).[24]

The rules that chefs learn are designed to make the most of what is available to cook and eat; hence not following certain rules can make a meal objectively bad[25]. Due to these various rules of good cooking, we can say that there can be a "privation" of good in our consumption of foods. When a culinary professional breaks one of these rules and the result is a low quality product, he or she has committed a wrongdoing that is analogous to a mechanic installing used parts and charging for new.

To use one of our examples, the cheap coffee that many restaurants serve might

[24] In addition to Coff's work, see Schwarz 2010 for detailed discussions of the ethics of consumer choices.
[25] Trying to roast a turkey that hasn't yet been defrosted will never result in a good meal, regardless of one's particular taste.

be perfectly agreeable, even enjoyable, to the drinker. However, we can say that due to harvesting methods, perhaps a portion of the beans that were used to make that coffee were not ripe. Hand picking beans ensures that this doesn't happen, but this clearly would not be profitable for a bargain coffee company. While hand picking coffee beans guarantees that only ripe beans are used for brewing, it raises other, more serious ethical questions about working conditions. Exploitation is a problem in many areas of the food industry, particularly in cocoa farming.[26] At this point, traceability for consumers suffices in helping the chef choose a product to serve in the restaurant. This initial choice (which might include seeking products which are forthcoming about the area in which the product was grown and harvested, and avoid exploitation by paying farmers a fair wage) encompasses all of the same decisions made by the individual consumer. Beyond the choice of product, however, the similarities between individual consumer and chef stop.

How one stores, handles, and prepares the product—in this case coffee—is crucial for its ultimate quality, both ethical and gustatory. For individual consumers, these two qualities are largely separate, but this isn’t so for chefs. When I am at home and I brew a bad cup of coffee, I usually drink it anyway. When I am at work, on the other hand, and something I make tastes bad, the customer sends it back for another one, until I get it right. This wastes time, money, and whatever the product happens to be. In cases where restaurants have bad reputations, and customers have low expectations, the coffee likely will not be sent back, and so no waste results. The poor

[26] Schwarz, 2011

quality is still unethical in some sense if it is the work of a professional. To see why, we can consider Aristotle's function argument, which states that things have a virtue or function, and so are *good* to the extent that they meet or fulfill that function. A common example is a knife, whose function is to cut, and so whose virtue is sharpness. The culinary professional then, has many functions, but the most general might be said to be, *prepare food well*. So in the event that something horrible is served, but not wasted, we can still plausibly say that the act of the culinary professional knowingly serving something low quality is unethical, or *bad.*

Concerning the flavor of the coffee (and for the chef it's moral status), the very popular drop method for brewing coffee involves the coffee sitting, for an extended amount of time, on a hot plate. Reheating coffee after brewing it breaks down the flavor of the coffee, resulting in an overly bitter cup of coffee. This means that, regardless of how the coffee actually tastes to you, the chances are good that some fundamental mistakes were made in the processes that culminated in your drinking the coffee. Considerations apart from things like "I think lightly roasted coffee tastes the best", that deal with tangible aspects of the quality of a foodstuff, such as its harvesting, transportation, and preparation, suggest that more often than not, something that we eat or drink could have been better—more flavorful. To excel at one's craft, as a chef is to take something simple, like coffee, and elevate it by executing each step perfectly, thereby elevating its gustatory, and ethical quality. Even when thinking about one particular foodstuff, traceability for the consumer is only the beginning for the chef; considerations about how one ought to act beyond the choice of product are needed,

and provided by robust traceability.

Dish as trace

In addition to the food itself, the dish functions as a trace of its production history, and all of the decisions that went into it. “The dish” includes its description on the menu, the food that comprises it, and its presentation when it arrives at the table. Considerations regarding the food that comprises a dish are covered above, and so this part will focus on questions apart from a food’s production history. This isn’t to say that the focus isn’t on food, but rather that the focus is not on what the farmer does to the food, but what the chef and other employees do.

As well as determining, in large part, how an establishment will fare, the individual dishes are responsible for much of a restaurant’s moral status. Because the actions that make up the process by which a dish is recreated are repeated many times throughout a night, in proportion to the dish’s popularity, the actions cannot be evaluated in isolation. Thus, we ought to look at the dish as a trace that represents all of the particular recreations thereof during its time on a menu, as well as the choices that went into it. These choices include, among other things, the ingredients, the decision of when to serve it, how much to charge, which section of the menu it will be placed, and the portion size.

Of the choices that go into a dish, one of the most important is deciding the portion size. Too big and there is little room for profit, and more chance for waste; too small and the guests are unhappy. The chef has an obligation to make profitable dishes, to ensure

the restaurant's longevity, and he also has an obligation to please the guests by meeting expectations of quality and value. Most ethically relevant, the chef has an obligation to avoid food waste that is stronger than the one the individual cooking at home has. Despite some people feeling that we should finish what is on our plate before leaving the dinner table, there seems to be no relevant difference between throwing away what we haven't finished, and merely adding it to our waistlines. So, when the individual makes too much food at home, there is little in the way of wrongdoing when there is some left over food. The chef, on the other hand, serving the same set of dishes over and over, in an environment where portion control is necessary to good bookkeeping and making a profit, must be mindful of this, and adjust accordingly. Because there are many more meals produced in a given day by a restaurant kitchen, the chef has the opportunity to save very small amounts of food, and serve them to later guests. To be succinct: it doesn't matter if the individual puts four or five ounces of mashed potatoes on their plate for dinner, even if they can't finish the last ounce; the extra ounce in a restaurant, on the other hand, that serves 200-300 or more meals in a night, can mean the difference of fifty portions of mashed potato. We can substitute nearly anything a restaurant might serve for the mashed potatoes in this example, and it will still hold true.

In terms of the ingredients in a dish, beyond the issue discussed in the previous section, the chef has also to consider whether an ingredient or component of a dish should be house made, or bought prepared. Prepared foods, also known as "foodservice" in restaurants, are available in such variety that it would be possible for a

restaurant to buy everything prepared, and then simply warm, assemble, and serve. This does happen with dishes in many restaurants, but even when a chef is doing more than just heating and assembling, prepared foods can still play a large role in what chefs serve. Few restaurants make their own meatballs, hamburger patties, or French fries, for instance. This leads to both CW and RW, because handmade meatballs and hamburger patties are obviously higher quality and also because they can be made daily, meaning that they don't need plastic bags and cardboard boxes for storage, nor do they take up space in a freezer. Further, if *every* restaurant made their foods from scratch, an entire step in the process from farm to plate can be removed. This isn't an insignificant step either, as rather than hand power making the components of the dish, machines are. Refrigerated trucks then ship the products long distances, where they sit in large freezers at the restaurant. Removing the foodservice components from a dish helps to remove an entirely unnecessary, and relatively resource intensive, step in our food consumption.

Beyond the question of foodservice or house made, we have another about the ingredients that make up a dish to think about. There are important ethical decisions to be made regarding the components of a dish that go beyond each component's production history: the chef's professional duties require honesty when describing a dish on the menu, and a level of proficiency in cooking it. To speak concretely, consider bacon: there are important ethical considerations associated with the treatment of pigs in concentrated animal feeding operations, but there are also considerations associated with the reason *why* the chef chose to add bacon to this dish.

Bacon is a particularly strong example, I think, because chefs, line cooks, and home cooks alike misuse it on a daily basis. All of the kitchens that I have worked in cook and serve large quantities of bacon, and it is ubiquitous in the menus that I have served. Comedian Jim Gaffigan jokes that bacon bits are the magic pixie dust of food, and Iron Chef Michael Simon is outspoken about his belief that every dish is better with bacon, prominently displaying his affection via pork related tattoos. So bacon is popular, perhaps even overused, but does it follow that it is in fact, *mis*used?

To answer this question, some culinary history is helpful. Chef Auguste Escoffier was born in France in 1846, and would go on to revolutionize (or at the very least *codify)* French cuisine. Widely held as one of the most influential chefs, he was, in another chef's words, "the greatest and most radical chef of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries." The modern kitchen hierarchy comes from Escoffier's brigade system, and he popularized service a la Russe (serving meals in courses, rather than all at once). Without running the risk of an overstatement, Blumenthal says, "We eat as we eat because of Auguste."[27]

To add to these legacies, Escoffier's cookbook, *Le Guide Culinaire* has become one of the most common reference books for chefs. Escoffier begins *Le Guide* with a section on sauces, which are one of the defining characteristics of French cuisine. Some derivative of a French "mother sauce" can be found in very many French dishes, not unlike bacon and American menus. Escoffier, describing the dynamic role played by sauces and stocks

[27] Escoffier, 2011 (Foreword)

in French cookery, explained how one particular sauce, Espagnole, came to dominate the culinary landscape at one point:

> "It was gradually perfected but its use very quickly overtook the purpose for which it had been created and it is no exaggeration to say that during the latter part of the nineteenth century, the use of Espagnole became excessive. To this misuse can be attributed the appearance of an indifferent cookery, bereft of any well-defined flavor and where the entire range of tastes become lost in one single insipid level."

Escoffier seemed to hold that it was the chef's responsibility to please the guest *and* maintain self imposed standards one's cooking: although chefs might be happy enough ladling bland Espagnole over every meal, the professional chef can and should do better.

Similarly, no matter how delicious bacon might be, it simply should not be in some of the dishes it is. In fact, in my experience, a cook often wraps something in bacon to hide its inferior quality: you might find scallops or filet mignon wrapped in bacon at the Outback or Applebee's, but probably not at any of the Michelin starred restaurants (especially the ones serving Kobe beef, or freshly shucked scallops). When writing the menu, or coming up with specials, chefs and restaurateurs ought to ask themselves: does this sandwich (or whatever the dish is) need the extra fat and smokiness that the bacon provides, or is it just there because menu items *sound better* with bacon in the description, or because my meat or seafood is low quality? If an ingredient is there to *cover up*, then it is clearly unethical as it dishonest, and violates the responsibilities to the customer. Beyond a violation of a professional ethic, misusing ingredients, whether bacon or sauce Espagnole, is wrong because it is wasteful, insofar as it is superfluous to the dish.

Menu as trace

The food that restaurants buy, as well as the dishes they serve, can be evaluated with the notion of robust traceability. Like food and the dish, the restaurant's menu doesn't obviously display all of the ethically relevant information. The menu has the capability of conveying much more information to the consumer than foodstuffs alone, and the chef should take advantage of this. But beyond the information that the menu can give the consumer, the menu can also serve as a trace for the chef. The size, placement of certain foodstuffs on the menu, and whether or not it is dynamic and seasonal, all can affect the ethical status of a restaurant operation. The menu alone does not give this information; rather, it's implications, or some idea of how the menu influences the actions of a chef does. In this way, the menu qualifies as a trace.

The size of a menu is important not only for shaping the customer's feelings about the restaurant, but also shaping the workflow in the kitchen. Overly large menus often overwhelm customers and stifle conversation (it is hard to talk with your face hidden behind a menu), but they also often bog down the chefs in the kitchen. It is quicker and easier to cook many of the same items, but not surprisingly, it is difficult for any cook to juggle many different types of food at once. This is true not only of the line cook, but also of the prep cook. Huge menus frequently are the cause of chefs using pre made, low quality, and ultimately wasteful products.

If, for example, the only salad on the menu is the Caesar salad, it is very easy for the chef to make his or her own croutons and dressing. However, with each salad added

to the menu, the prep cook's list gets longer. Most chefs aren't willing to order each ingredient in each salad (including the ingredients in the dressing), and make them all from scratch. The result is that the chef buys prepared foods: the dressing is usually bottled (and mediocre tasting at best), the croutons bagged, the fruit peeled, sectioned, and in a plastic tub, and etc. Smaller menus allow chefs to focus, and cook more of their own food. It also makes service quicker and smoother. The result is almost invariably better food and higher profits, and ethically commendable work.

The issue of where something is placed on the menu is not about its physical placement on the menu, but it's placement in the service. Most New England chefs want to have lobster on their menu. Serving lobster can be ethically problematic, however. Potentially threatened populations make eating lobster an important issue in food ethics. A strange belief that lobsters do not feel pain is widespread among the people that I have cooked with, and most have scoffed at the notion of killing a lobster before cooking it.[28] Also, much of the lobster is wasted when steamed or boiled and served whole. Few people pick through the lobster for the leg and body meat, going only for the easy to access tail and claw meat. The shells and hard to dig out lobster meat are discarded, when they could have been utilized if the chef cooked and broke down the lobster in the kitchen. These issues make serving lobster ethically treacherous.

To put this point succinctly, consider two different ways of serving lobster, which would be served at different courses of the meal: steamed lobster and lobster

[28] I call this belief strange because there is certainly no *proof* that lobsters do not feel pain. Where there is some possibility that what we are cooking *does* feel pain, it seems uncontroversial to suggest that we shouldn't boil it alive.

cheesecake. Most people are familiar with steamed lobster; lobster cheesecake is a trendy dish often served as an appetizer, which consists of a creamy cheese mixture and chunks of lobster baked in filo dough. To really make the dish impressive, top it with lobster velouté and a piece of lobster meat. In the case of steamed lobster, one feeds one person, and as mentioned, a good bit is wasted. If a lobster costs the restaurant ten dollars, then they need to sell it for about thirty dollars to ensure a reasonable profit. In the case of the lobster cheesecake, all of the meat from the lobster can be picked and used; the shells can be used to make a lobster stock, which can be thickened into velouté, and one lobster can create two to four portions or more, depending on the lobster. That same ten-dollar lobster can go further, thus reducing food costs and increasing profits. More importantly, it significantly reduces the amount of lobster we are wasting, without forcing the chef or consumer to go without the lobster they love, all by serving lobster for an appetizer instead of an entrée.

As a final consideration of the menu as trace, it is important to ask whether the menu is dynamic and seasonal, or rigid and unresponsive? Continuing with lobster as an example, the season typically dictates how much a restaurant will sell. Restaurants in tourist destinations will always sell more during the busiest season for tourists. The ethical problem occurs during the slower months, when the menu doesn’t change to respond to the time. I have worked at a restaurant that serves lobster, and has a busy tourist season. During the winter, however, with no beach goers stopping in on their way by, lobster doesn’t sell as well. Rather than not ordering lobster and taking it off of the menu, the chef ordered less. The demand was so low that it was a nightly task

during the winter to check the lobsters, and if one looked like it might die before morning, we cooked it, tore off the claws and tail, and put it in a bucket with other claws and tails in the freezer. Every week or so, the bucket would be emptied and the meat would be incorporated into our lobster salad rolls. Unfortunately, much of the lobster is wasted in this way (as discussed above), and the chef occasionally forgot to check the lobsters, so it wasn't uncommon for one to die in the walk-in refrigerator. Because shellfish spoils quickly when it dies, these lobsters have to be thrown away entirely.

By changing the menu to be responsive to business and the season, problems like this can be avoided. If, for example, the lobster cheesecake wanes in popularity, the chef can switch to house made lobster bisque, or experiment with the many other shellfish available. A dynamic menu allows the chef to utilize food scraps, leftovers, and take advantage of deals or interesting new products from their purveyor or food supplier. The result is less waste and a superior menu, ethically *and* culinarily speaking.

5. Objections

To conclude, and further substantiate my position, I will field some potential objections: some might be uncomfortable with a paper purporting to deal with waste, but that does not mention sustainability; chefs and restaurateurs with large menus and pantries filled with foodservice items are likely to be averse to my suggestions, and some that are particularly troubled with the level of inequality in the world may reject outright the possibility of an ethically good restaurant.

But what about sustainability?

Generally, the first thoughts when confronted with waste of any kind are questions of sustainability. We often use the idea of sustainability in our ethical positions, even when we are not explicitly aware that we are making ethical claims. Take, for instance, something many probably heard from their parents while young children: "You better finish that—there are starving kids in Africa!" Implicit in that admonition is the idea that people are starving in the world because there isn't enough food to go around. Part of my thesis is that food waste is morally wrong, and unacceptable in a business whose sole service is to cook and serve food; however, this is due to reasons mostly not having to do directly with sustainability.

I avoid grounding my case in notions of sustainability for two reasons. The first is that when one holds waste to be wrong because what is being wasted is not plentiful, as soon as it becomes plentiful, wasting it is no longer wrong. Calling waste wrong in this way is narrow and rather unsubstantial. The second is that the issue of sustainability is perhaps being overstated: there is still non-farmed arable land in parts of the world (particularly where hunger problems are the most serious[29]), and furthermore, average farming yields are a function of technology.

Chef's waste, which leads to more general resource waste, as such violates of both a professional and a general ethic. The fact that there are ways in which waste is unethical, without making recourse to sustainability, suggests that although an important issue, it is not the most appealing foundation for an ethic of food. If there are

[29] UNECA, 2009

reasons against being gluttonous, excessive, and wasteful that does not have to do with running out of something, these are clearly the more ethically relevant reasons.

As for the second reason, the debate over the status of modern consumption with regard to sustainability can be witnessed in two philosophical articles, Garret Hardin's *The Tragedy of the Commons* and Mark Sagoff's *Do We Consume Too Much?* Hardin claims that the world and its resources are finite, and concludes that growing consumption must lead inevitably to coercion, while Sagoff claims that our ability to substitute one resource for another, as well as growing technology and efficiency, undermines concerns that the world's finitude will lead to coercion. Sagoff notes that we can currently feed a population of 10 billion people, and claims that "resource reserves are a function of technology."[30] This piece was published fifteen years ago, and in that time there has been no shortage in advances in food technology. Meat can now be grown in the lab; 3D printing is currently being used to print human organs (if you can print a heart, you can print a sandwich!); and GMOs as well as research in indoor farming suggest that there are plenty of technologies that can increase levels of food production. These types of technologies will help increase yields in developed, industrialized nations, but they aren't at all necessary for increasing yields where food is needed the most. According to a 2009 report from the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa,

> "Comparing the yields of common cereal crops with the world averages shows the huge potential gains that Africa can reap by introducing measures to reach

[30] Sagoff, 1997

> the world average (figure 4.1). Africa's yield is 55 per cent of the world average in the case of rice, 34 per cent in the case of maize, and 69 per cent in the case of sorghum."[31]

It is clear from this that significant gains can be made in parts of the world merely by introducing technology that is currently available. Finally, consider again that about 1.3 billion tons of food is lost or wasted annually. Better technology and food handling techniques can ensure that more food from the farm actually makes it to the plate. Sustainability very well may be an issue we should be worried about, but it doesn't seem like a problem that can't be avoided, nor does it seem like the issue ethicists should be most concerned with in food or consumption ethics.

The myth of the "regular"

The thesis that I defend suggests that many restaurants should make significant changes. A common reason given by restaurant owners for their unwillingness to change is that it will upset the customers and drive away business. Whether it is a recipe for a dressing, a portion size or specific menu item, an entire menu, or the décor, owners, chefs, and managers are often not willing to change. This isn't a problem at successful restaurants; but even those that haven't been employed at restaurants that are barely in business (I have worked at two) can see how widespread this problem is. In fact, judging by the success of certain television programs, watching incompetent restaurateurs battle celebrity chefs over making changings to their failing restaurant is

[31] UNECA, 2009

very popular. This reason for the general aversion to change can be called “the myth of the regular”. While there are exceptions, the kind of aversion to change that I am talking about, in my experience, comes after a period of success for a restaurant, and after an unwillingness to update the products and services. Regardless of what prompts this aversion to change, it is not a good one, and is bad for business. I will offer two considerations to support this.

The first point against the myth of the regular is a point about the nature of restaurant customers, so to speak. Simply put, they often get bored, move away, or die. Restaurants cannot possibly be successful in the long term without a relatively constant stream of new customers. Consider your own restaurant choices: how many of them do you frequent on a regular basis? And for how long have you been a ‘regular’ there? Most people like variety, and regularly go to new restaurants. Consider also that, for one reason or another, most people move throughout their life, and do not stay a ‘regular’ at any one restaurant forever. Few restaurants develop large groups of regular customers that can sustain a business.

The last possibility that I mention, that of customers dying, might seem unnecessary. I include it, however, for good reason. In the case that a (non-branded) restaurant does succeed for longer than five to ten years, the possibility of developing a strong group of regulars is a real one, although it still will not carry a business alone. In the case of the first restaurant that I worked at, the group of regulars was so committed that they were the source of the vast majority of our business. The waitresses knew most of the customers by name, and the cooks knew most of the customers by their

ordering quirks (well-done-baked-stuffed-scrod lady, for instance, came alone every Tuesday, and sent her meal back every single time, without fail, for over a year straight). The owner, wanting to pass the business to his son, was faced with the problem that can be best described with a brief story.

Like many of our regulars, one couple had been frequenting the restaurant for well over a decade, and during my time there, they came in nearly every Sunday evening for dinner and a drink. They both ordered the small portion of broiled scrod, he had a pint of Bass, and she had water. After cooking their meals every Sunday for quite some time, it became a part of the Sunday shift that I expected. One day, however, they didn't show up. After about a month, the husband came in one Sunday afternoon alone. Cooking only one broiled scrod was strangely sad for me, even though I didn't even have any idea what the couple looked like, let alone any personal connection to them. In this way the group of regulars slowly diminished in size during my time cooking there; the owner is currently trying to sell his restaurant. This story is even more noteworthy due to the restaurant's particular situation: it had been open for so long that the mortgage had been paid off. Despite not having one of a restaurant's biggest expenses, the group of regulars was still unable to support the business.

Ultimately, the important point is that for a number of reasons, restaurants cannot rely on a group of regulars to keep them profitable. Because of this, chefs must be aware that while consistency is a virtue and characteristic of successful restaurants, a willingness to change is also a key to success for those that aren't wildly successful from day one.

For the second consideration, there is evidence to show that even if one could count on regulars to support a business, customers are receptive to the influence of the restaurants they eat at. In *Shaping Culinary Taste: the Influence of Commercial Operators*, Maureen Brookes explains the extent to which professionals in the industry influence consumers' decisions. While customers are the ones that make the choices and lead restaurant production, there are important ways in which the restaurant industry shapes the demand as well. In Brookes' words: "there may be a continuum of possibilities on the demand led vs. supply driven argument."[32]In other words, it isn't clear that the restaurant industry is entirely demand led or supply driven, and it is likely some middle ground in between. By examining the marketing literature, Brookes offers two general examples of how strongly influenced customers can be by the food service industry: branded restaurant concepts, and celebrity chefs' restaurants.

Branded restaurant concepts are incredibly popular today, and part of this success is due to the fact that there is less purchase risk for the consumer. For instance, even if one isn't thrilled about eating fast food for dinner while on a road trip, a mediocre meal is still better than winding up at a run down restaurant/bar where even the waitress advises against ordering the meatloaf. Brookes also points out that branded restaurants, like cars or clothing, promote brand loyalty; in order to maintain this loyalty, the brand needs to evolve, however, to keep up with the consumers desire for consistency and something new.[33]

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[32] Brookes, 2004 (111)
[33] Ibid (p. 123)

Celebrity chefs influence eating habits through televisions shows, and also in the same way that branded restaurants do when they open restaurants of their own. According to Brookes, “within the marketing literature, celebrity chefs are often considered product rather than consumer oriented.”[34] A particularly good example of a product-oriented restaurant that does not cater exclusively to its customers is Thomas Keller's Ad Hoc in Yountville, California. It is close to his first three Michelin-starred restaurant, The French Laundry. In a passage called "The Accidental Restaurant", Keller explains Ad Hoc’s genesis. Originally envisioned as a burger restaurant, his restaurant group didn't have the time to create the perfect burger joint. Because they were paying for the space, it needed to be bringing in business. So Keller "thought of the simplest restaurant possible, one founded on a style of cooking we do for ourselves everyday, if not twice a day, at all our restaurants: preparing the family (staff) meal." The decor was quickly put together, and the kitchen serves one family style item which changes daily (no choices!), "and we called it what is was: Ad Hoc," The restaurant became so popular that Keller decided to keep it open, making it a permanent part of his restaurant group.[35]

Ad Hoc is a contemporary example of a restaurant that grants total control to the culinary authority of the chefs. The ability to cook large batches of one meal ensures efficiency of time and resources, and especially profit. This model, for reasons ethical and financial, should be emulated widely. It might be objected that Keller's status as America's most celebrated chef is the driving force of Ad Hoc's success, and thus those

[34] Ibid (p. 113)
[35] Keller, 2009 (p. 102)

chefs that do not have six Michelin stars can't expect to follow its example. This objection might hold if Keller was the actual chef in the kitchen there at any time, which he was not. A further reason to doubt this objection is provided by a different celebrity chef, Gordon Ramsay. Despite his *thirteen* Michelin stars, he was unable to succeed with his restaurant Amaryllis in Glasgow. So while being a celebrity chef gives one some unique advantages, it doesn't ensure the fate of a restaurant in either direction. Keller's Ad Hoc offers support for the claim that restaurants and chefs are not entirely at the mercy of the taste or preferences of its customers; rather, they can cook *very* efficiently without fear of upsetting the regulars, or offering too narrow a selection.

Restaurants are for hedonists!

Some philosophers, Henry David Thoreau and Peter Singer for example, have held that we ought to avoid luxuries for one reason or another[36]. Many other philosophers, and some religions, have looked down upon food, as a source of vice, rather than something to be enjoyed. A number of different views, then, might suggest that the good life does not include eating in restaurants. So in a world with such serious inequalities, can we ethically justify restaurants?

Thoreau, as mentioned, advocated for a kind of voluntary poverty, and drank only water, among other dietary restrictions. A position so strongly against luxuries of any kind would hardly allow for one to eat in restaurants. His philosophy of food is also

[36] I mention these two philosophers not because either of them explicitly holds that owning or spending money at a restaurant is wrong, but because they offer the clearest examples of ethical positions that entail that one should avoid luxury or the superfluous.

decidedly against operating a restaurant as a *good* way to earn a living and spend a life. Thoreau remarks of the farmer: "The farmer is endeavoring to solve the problem of a livelihood by a formula more complicated than the problem itself...This is the reason he is poor; and for a similar reason we are all poor in respect to a thousand savage comforts, though surrounded by luxuries."[37] A farmer is not the same as a restaurateur, but restaurants are undeniably complex, and in many respects the process of cooking a meal becomes much more complex, whether the restaurant is serving a menu or a banquet.

Michael Schudson, in an essay titled *Delectable Materialism: Second Thoughts on Consumer Culture*, identifies five separate strands of thought, which contribute to contemporary criticisms. "Most criticism of consumer culture shares a few basic assumptions," he says.[38] Among them is a belief that we can separate necessary from artificial needs, and thus live the simple life. An aversion of the superfluous allows plenty of time for contemplating and seeking worthy things like justice, or beauty, claims those that hold that the simple life is a prerequisite for the good life.

This assumption, that we can separate necessary from artificial needs, is swiftly undermined by Schudson, and illuminating for the question of the moral status of restaurants.[39] Biology alone cannot solve the task of separating the necessary from artificial needs: "Human biological functions, like eating, are culturally coded and

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[37] Thoreau, 1997 (p. 67)
[38] Schudson, 1998 (p. 251)
[39] For another argument against the notion that consuming is bad or immoral, see Campbell 1998

socially organized…one must retain a certain reserve about eating so as to acknowledge that the activity is one of eating a meal, not one of simply consuming food."[40]

The view of the good diet as the simple diet, then, rests on a problematic view of the good life as achieved only by ascetic simplicity. Taking this point forward, it can be stated more broadly: the point of eating is never merely sustenance. The activity is very often one of eating a meal, but the morally salient aspects of our relationship with food go far beyond its consumption. Even in Thoreau, for example, we can find evidence that his relationship with food was not purely a utilitarian one.[41]

Dining out is much more than mere gustatory pleasure. This point, of course, is largely a rehashing of points made earlier. Telfer offers an extensive list of the value of eating food beyond sustenance, while Mario Batali and Alton Brown explain how great recipes and good food are born out of necessity and thrift. Pierre Bordeaux famously argues that food consumption is an expression of social class, and this work has received a good bit of scholarly attention and reinterpretation.[42] The point is there are myriad ways to argue against the objection that restaurants are too luxurious in the face of so many going hungry.

It is also the case that some people eat at restaurants to save the time or the hassle of making their own food, and if the chef is mindful of his waste, a meal made in a restaurant can ultimately be more efficient than one made at home, and certainly not all restaurants serve luxurious or superfluous foods (nor must the ones that do). Bell

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[40] Ibid (p. 251)
[41] See his chapter "The bean-field" in *Walden*.
[42] See Bordeaux (1984), Sloan (2004), and Seymour (2004)

discusses something similar, distinguishing between “dining out” and “eating out” where customers have different expectations depending on whether they are after a meal or a dining experience.[43] Restaurants are an integral part of the food sector in industrialized societies, and with a little attention, can operate without posing significant ethical problems.

I have argued that chefs and restaurants deserve more ethical scrutiny than the field currently affords them; that chef’s waste is distinct from and leads to resource waste; and that robust traceability is capable of illuminating food related ethical problems faced by chefs and consumers. Restaurants waste a considerable amount of food (about 50 tons a year each[44]), and the chef as a food professional or producer, rather than only a consumer, faces a strong obligation to avoid wasting food. This obligation is strengthened by the extent to which ethically superior cooking is inline with cooking that yields higher profits. The extent to which food is wasted, and the complexities of determining culpability for food waste suggest that questions in professional food ethics are quite important, but also quite interesting, for the chef and ethicist alike.

[43] Bell, 2004
[44] Bureau of Sanitation, LA

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