

MORE PLEASE: FOOD AND THE INFINITY OF DESIRES

A Dissertation

by

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation might best be described as a discussion and analysis of the tendency towards excess at the heart of modern American culture. In studying excess, the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer—whose writings on the limitless desire of the will had such a profound influence on the writers and thinkers at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—is linked to Emile Durkheim’s theory, which informs much of this study. Durkheim’s conception of anomie is examined using a combination of etymology and hermeneutics culminating in the understanding of anomie as derangement, or, as rules that are lack of rules.

To illustrate this tendency in a concrete way, food is employed as a vehicle for discussion. I outline and critique the various definitions of food, and offer my own definition of food as something that sustains life, but does so through the utilization of the collective constituent elements (vitamins, minerals, calories) that naturally occur within a material substance. Defining food holistically and in terms of nature allows me to also identify unnatural foods by employing Durkheim’s concept of derangement.

I trace the origins of excessive willing in modern American culture back to the Protestant religious doctrines of predestination and the calling, arguing that tendency towards worldly asceticism has been removed—replaced by an insatiable desire to consume more—and resulting in the formation of what I am calling the consumption industry. Recontextualizing Mestrovic’s postemotional theory, I contend that the food

industry in particular, and the consumption industry in general, rely on prepacked ideas as well as prepacked emotions to sell their foods in modern American society. This includes the consumption industry's research on human biology and neurology—which has led to the production of deranged foods that actually induce hunger in consumers. Finally, the rise of monopoly capitalism is examined in light of Eros' unitive power—highlighted through a comparison of Plato, Freud, and Durkheim—leading to the conclusion that the modern spirit of capitalism is postemotional Eros – a drive towards greater unity, divided against itself, fueled by recycled emotions and inflamed desires.

## DEDICATION

The following project is dedicated to my wife, Katie Kainer, who believed in me when I didn't believe in myself, who listened to me when I felt ignored, and who brought me back when I lost my way.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In pushing sociology of food in a new direction, I rely heavily on the work of five social theorists: Arthur Schopenhauer, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, David Riesman, and Stjepan Mestrovic. Prior to recontextualizing their ideas, it would be helpful to understand the ideas in the context in which they arose. To this end, it is useful to offer some context about their lives and the particular contributions each thinker made to social theory. Since each theorist builds on the one before him, I will proceed in chronological order beginning with Schopenhauer and ending with Mestrovic.

The German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) sought to fashion his own philosophical system using a combination of Plato's philosophy, Kant's philosophy, and the writings of the Buddhist, Christian, and Hindu religions. His most famous work, *The World as Will and Representation* (1818), was published after nearly a decade of work and argued that there was a division between everyday consciousness and a higher state that transcended the world of appearance and glimpsed a "more real" world<sup>1</sup>. In discerning between the world of appearance the world of something more real, Schopenhauer echoed Plato's writing of the "Forms" or "Ideas." Schopenhauer's insistence that there was a more real world was also indebted to Kant's distinction between phenomenon and noumenon, that is, between representations and things in themselves. However, unlike Kant, Schopenhauer believed that it was possible to attain

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<sup>1</sup> See Janaway's *A Very Short Introduction to Schopenhauer* (2002)

knowledge of the thing in itself—Schopenhauer called this thing-in-itself “will,” and described it as an endless striving—through our perceptions of our own bodily processes and desires. This is a difficult thing to explain philosophically, but Schopenhauer, who originally wanted to be a doctor, makes extended use of his considerable knowledge of biology and physiology in offering examples that illustrate the blind striving of the will as a deeper knowledge. All in all, Schopenhauer’s philosophy devoted tremendous attention to the distinction between will and representations, that is, between the forms of things as they appear to the senses and things as they are beyond the reach of the senses. Schopenhauer became extremely famous in the 1880s up to the fin de siècle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, shortly before his death, but the height of his fame happened to overlap with the birth of sociology. Schopenhauer’s ideas would influence thinkers even after his death including important thinkers like Wilhelm Wundt, Sigmund Freud, Georg Simmel, Friedrich Nietzsche, Ferdinand Tönnies and the next social theorist on my list—Emile Durkheim.

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) was another of these important social thinkers who was tremendously influenced by Schopenhauer’s philosophy. Born in Epinal, Alsace-Lorraine, a contested region on the border of Germany and France, Durkheim—whose given name was actually David—was the descendent of seven generation of Rabbis. Contrary to many accounts that portray Durkheim as an atheist, Durkheim was a practicing Jew throughout his life and even took the train out to Epinal on Friday

afternoons so he could attend synagogue with his mother.<sup>2</sup> In light of these facts, Durkheim's concern with establishing a science of morality—and his concern with morality in general—seems intimately bound up with his Rabbinical heritage since his moral concerns were sublimated through a scientific rather than a rabbinical outlook. It is worth pointing out that at the time of his birth, Epinal was under Prussian control, meaning Durkheim essentially grew up as a German Jew. In fact, his parents fled from Germany to Alsace-Lorraine to escape anti-Semitism. This makes his decision to study in Germany with Wilhelm Wundt after completing his Doctorate in Philosophy (not sociology) in France a little less confusing—since he was fluent in German. It also provides a link between Schopenhauer's philosophy, which was an all-pervading cultural force in Germany towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and Durkheim's unique brand of sociology as the science of morality.

Despite his German/Jewish origins and his background in philosophy, Durkheim is usually portrayed as the quintessential French positivist and a disciple of Auguste Comte. This is surprising since Durkheim criticized Comte throughout his work, and anointed Henri Saint-Simon as the founder of sociology, a distinction usually given to Comte. Durkheim's philosophical training is on full display in his *Rules of the Sociological Method* (1895) as he describes both a new metaphysical system where social facts are real and independent of social actors, and a new epistemology for the study of these social facts. The new methodology for studying food advanced in this

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<sup>2</sup> See Mestrovic's *Emile Durkheim and the Reformation of Sociology* (1988)

dissertation reaches back to Durkheim for both inspiration and direction so that in recontextualizing his work, I remain faithful to his ideas even as I use them in different ways.

Finally, it must be noted that Durkheim is not just some “old dead white man,” as a senior colleague suggested to me recently. As I noted earlier, Durkheim’s given name was David, yet he changed it to Emile to avoid the anti-Semitism that was common in France during his life time. Thus any conception of white-privilege that modern scholars might attribute to Durkheim—as my colleague wished to do—is a misconception and is misplaced, since his Jewishness afforded him no privilege. Despite his brilliant academic gifts, Durkheim struggled to establish sociology as a serious academic discipline after Auguste Comte failed to do so. One need only look at the prefaces to his major works—especially the second preface in *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893)—for evidence of a scholar tired of being misunderstood. One must keep Durkheim’s Jewish identity and his philosophical training in mind when addressing his thought: to ignore either is to misunderstand the life and work of one of sociology’s most brilliant thinkers.

The German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920) is also a key component of this dissertation project. Weber’s magnum opus, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904), outlined the Protestant doctrines of the calling and of predestination as social forces that influenced the development of Capitalism in America. This is the exact opposite of arguments made by Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848)—Marx and Engels argued that class struggle had been the driving force of history and was responsible for the formation of the various modes of production

(primitive communism, feudalism, capitalism, socialism, and communism) as well as social institutions (religion, the family, government)—since Weber sees economic activity as driven by the religious beliefs of the Protestant congregation. Weber also described what he called the “routinization” of charisma, by which he meant that persons, things, and ideas regarded as charismatic were endowed with authority that people respected. When such charismatic persons, things, and ideas begin to fade, their charisma is routinized in an effort to keep their teachings and saying alive. However, in attempting to keep this charisma alive outside of what William James called first-hand experience, the intuitive and perceptive elements of the original charisma become rigid and are interpreted in a rigid way. What is left is an iron cage of dogmatism, devoid of the relational and emotional elements that once moved people in a profound way.

The American lawyer and sociologist David Riesman (1909-2002) plays both a direct and indirect role in the formation of this dissertation’s argument. Born the son of wealthy German Jews in Philadelphia, Riesman graduated from Harvard with his Bachelor’s in biochemistry before returning to Harvard’s law school to complete his law degree. Riesman was an amateur sociologist in the traditional sense, since he did not possess a Doctoral degree in sociology—indeed, he held no PhD in any field. In 1950, Riesman published what would become one of the best-selling sociology books of all-time, *The Lonely Crowd*. His analysis of 1950’s American society shifting from a culture driven by production to one driven by consumption was revolutionary and landed him a job in Harvard’s sociology department, albeit, against the wishes of the department and at the behest of the university President. Combining the insights gleaned from his

readings of classical social theorists like Marx, Durkheim, and Weber with more fringe social thinkers like Erich Fromm (who was Riesman's therapist) and Thorstein Veblen resulted in a novel perspective of American society that simultaneously took account of individual will and social forces. Riesman was the first social theorist to note that in modern society, children were socialized less by their parents and more by the media, a trend that has continued into our present times. Riesman also noted that cookbooks, which historically have been about teaching people (usually women) how to cook nutritious meals for their families, took a decidedly new turn in 1950s America. Riesman noted that cooking, which was usually viewed as a serious and necessary task, was recast as a fun and inclusive activity in these new cookbooks. Classics like Fannie Farmer's *Boston Cooking-School Cook Book* (1896) were replaced by cookbooks like Irma Rombauer's *The Joy of Cooking* (1931), which included sections on throwing parties and entertaining guests. Riesman's insight that media was socializing people more than their parents is perfectly illustrated by his example of fun and social cookbooks which are supposed to bring people together but more realistically only offer an opportunity for curdled indignation and fake sincerity, as anyone who has ever thrown a dinner party and been left to clean up by themselves after feeding everyone surely understands.

Stjepan Mestrovic (1955-) was Riesman's student at Harvard and has become a well-regarded social theorist in his own right. Born the grandson of the famous Croatian sculptor Ivan Mestrovic, he immigrated to America when he was 6 years old. Mestrovic would go on to Harvard for college where he would obtain his Bachelor's in Psychology and Social Relations, a Masters of Theological Studies, and a Masters of Education in



Clinical Psychology before going on to Syracuse to complete his PhD in Sociology. As one of Riesman's students, Mestrovic read widely and drew inspiration from a wide variety of sources, but none more than Emile Durkheim. His *Postemotional Society* (1997) builds on Durkheim's analysis of social life when the collective consciousness is wearing away and Riesman's analysis of the other-directed society as driven by representations advanced through the media. Considering that he grew up in a family of artists, and that art is certainly an emotional medium, it makes sense that Mestrovic noticed and then drew attention to the fact that emotions are rarely considered as part of social theory. In fact, his *Postemotional Society* (1997) is an attempt to rectify this glaring gap in the literature by showing how modern society relies on prepackaged emotions as much, if not more than, it relies on the prepacked ideas best illustrated in the writings of George Orwell. In this way, Mestrovic's work carries forward Weber's concept of the routinization of charisma, only on a much larger scale since the routinization of charisma is now the dominant cultural practice exemplified by the fake sincerity and curdled indignation outlined in Riesman's treatment of other-directed society in *The Lonely Crowd* (1950).

Having placed my theoretical influences in their proper cultural context, the table has been set for my discussion of food and social theory. As one reads through the chapters it is the wish of this author that one might bear in mind the lives and times of the theorist employed. In recontextualizing their work, I sought to be as faithful to their original ideas as I possibly could, even as I pushed their ideas into new academic realms.

Broadly speaking, this dissertation is concerned with the tendency towards excess that is a cornerstone of modern American society. In choosing to investigate this tendency towards excess, I was surprised to discover that the tendency towards excess involved both excessive freedom—perhaps better described as the removal of restraints and regulations—and excessive restriction. Yet excessive freedom and excessive restriction are abstract theoretical constructs and offer little help in explaining the modern situation. In a time period marked by the loosening of traditional restrictions—both social restrictions and biological restrictions—it is interesting to note that the restrictions on what we can and should eat continue to go up. To avoid the pitfall presented by abstraction, and in keeping with the explosion of literature on the food system, food is employed as a vehicle for discussing the modern obsession with excess since the consumption of food is fundamental to the existence of human life. Consequently, the various circumstances that food is consumed in offer sociologists a chance to study the different representations that may encompass the “Idea” of eating<sup>3</sup>.

One such circumstance is the tendency towards over-consumption that is at the heart of the explosion of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease in countries all over the world. The other circumstance is the tendency towards under consumption, which is most easily observed in the behavior of the anorexic, for whom food is viewed as an obstacle to be avoided, rather than an essential nutrient to sustain life. A less extreme example would be the explosion of fad diets including Paleo, Atkins, The South Beach

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<sup>3</sup> See Simmel’s essay *The Sociology of the Meal* for a fantastic discussion of this idea

Diet, and Whole 30. In each of these diets, a particular food group is isolated as “the problem” and is subsequently excised from the diet of its adherents. In the case of Atkins and Paleo, the problem food group is carbohydrates, leading to diets that are heavy in protein, fruits, and vegetables. Proponents of the Paleo diet argue that this is precisely the diet of our Paleolithic ancestors who were supposedly much healthier than moderns with their “diseases of civilization,” which include heart disease, diabetes, and stroke.

Aside from the obvious fact that the average lifespan of Paleolithic man was a fraction of the average lifespan of modern people, the Paleo dieters also ignore that the food consumed today, even if from the same food groups, are qualitatively different than the ones eaten by our ancestors. For example, the wild game that was part of the hunter gather diet was much leaner than the meats widely available today and was especially leaner than modern beef. Regardless, the modern scholar must face the fact that for much of human history it was carbohydrates that formed the bulk of the diet for the bulk of the population, the peasants, and that the word bread was used interchangeably as a synonym for the word “food<sup>4</sup>.”

Studies have shown that humanity can subsist on diets high in fat, carbs, protein, vegetables, and fruits but it can’t subsist on a diet high in all of the above, or low in all of the above. As with Aristotle, the golden mean of eating between two extremes poses the best solution to these problems. Fad diets, for all their popularity, represent one extreme while anorexia and bulimia constitute the other. Fad diets distort the division of

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<sup>4</sup> For example, the *Our Father* says “give us this day our daily bread”

labor by increasing the emphasis upon certain food groups and removing the emphasis on other. Yet health is about more than what you consume, it involves stress levels, exercise levels, sleep levels, and one's sense of purpose. Health is therefore systemic and relational, and therefore irreducible if one hopes to account for the factors influencing health.

To account for this dynamic view of health and food, I draw explicitly from Schopenhauer's philosophy to argue that food is will and possesses a will to life. An apple tree wants to live just as much as a butterfly, an ox as much as a wolf, and ancient people as much as modern people. To this end, the problem of modern dietetics is rooted in more than individual experience and will power, but in the social arrangements people and institutions are in.

In discussing the relations between people and institutions, my discussion of food includes an etymological study of Durkheim's concept of anomie with additional emphasis placed on the division of labor's role in his conceptualization of anomie as "derangement" –not normlessness.

One may ask what anomie has to do with the food system? Derangement entails not just the disarrangement of the division of labor, but the exploitation by some of the parts at the expense of the other parts and the whole. The immorality implied in Durkheim's concept of anomie is made explicit as the secular equivalent of sin. I expand this idea with special reference to St. Augustine's theological anthropology—Augustine says that human beings are eccentric creatures who long for God— which I compare

with the metaphysics of Schopenhauer and Durkheim to illuminate their common conception of limitlessness and ceaseless desire which are the hallmarks of anomie.

My discussion of deranged and immoral food is problematic given the ubiquity of the term “food.” To resolve this, I critique the various definitions of food, and subsequently advance my own working definition of food. Food refers to something that sustains life, but does so through the utilization of the collective constituent elements (vitamins, minerals, calories) that naturally occur within a material substance. In other words, food is the product of ecosystem which arose from the formation of moral constraints between organisms dependent upon one another. My insistence on the collectiveness of these elements is important, since it implies that the whole of any food is greater than the sum of its collective parts.

To arrive at such a definition, Durkheim’s conception of the division of labor as a spontaneous and moral force is employed to aid in defining the difference between food and deranged food, thus creating a new means of talking about moral food that doesn’t rely on abstract models – economic or philosophical. The concreteness of my definition takes inspiration from Charles Darwin’s work on cooperation—as opposed to survival of the fittest—between organisms. The primacy of cooperation in social theory is outlined with special reference to the theories of Darwin, Durkheim, and Herbert Spencer.

The influence of Mestrovic’s theory of emotion finds expression in my discussion of the role of emotions in Weber’s study of the Protestant ethic. The power of emotions in motivating the Protestant ethic is illustrated with quotes from the original study and a corresponding discussion of the downstream societal effects as primarily

driven by emotion. The most important of these emotions was anxiety, particularly as it presents as anxiety about one's fate as either saved (good list) or damned (bad list).

Weber's work is recontextualized to discuss the practices of large food companies in modern capitalism, specifically, their efforts to appear on the "good list." For example, publicly traded companies tend to disparage emotions and emphasize rational choice when making decisions. Nonetheless, the stock market seems to fluctuate based on emotional responses, including the public perception of a company as weak, exploitative, or otherwise engaged in morally dubious practices. Consequently, modern companies appear to be concerned with being on the "good list" —which includes high profit margins, positive public image, and high sales volume—and the company must engage in business practices that give the impression that this is the case, even if the company is struggling.

Building on Weber's routinization of charisma and Mestrovic's postemotional theory—with its emphasis on emotions and relations—I advance a new term into the sociological lexicon, "postemotional Eros," to describe the driving force of modern society as one of superficial unity. Raw emotion, with its overwhelming highs and lows, is traded for the more stable prepackaged emotions which inform the economic, political, cultural, spiritual, and relational lives of modern people. Using Mestrovic's postemotional theory and my concept of postemotional Eros, I reexamine the marketing practices of large food companies based on emotions and recontextualize them within the broader framework of a society that feeds on prepackaged emotions.

Lastly, I discuss the food industry's manipulation of natural cognitive, somatic, and emotional responses of its customers, arguing that doing so constitutes the derangement. This final contribution is perhaps the most significant since it acts as a midpoint between placing all the blame on the company or on the individual consumer since the manipulation of these natural responses is widespread throughout "the consumption industry" and, moreover, throughout modern consumer society.

## CHAPTER II

### SCHOPENHAUER AND FOOD STUDIES

“There is no sincerer love than the love of food” –George Bernard Shaw

The above quote from George Bernard Shaw serves as the perfect primer for this dissertation’s principle argument which might be summed up as too much of a good thing is not good for you. Few people would argue that food is a bad thing, fewer people would argue that love is a bad thing, but many people recognize that love and food can become warped into something far different than their typical forms. When love lapses into obsession it ceases to be love because the lover has made the beloved into little more than an object— into something to be worshipped rather than in relation with. Why begin a dissertation by talking about love? What does this have to do with food? There is nothing wrong with loving food, or loving to eat for that matter. However, when one lives to eat rather than eats to live, the individual is likely to find themselves engaged in any number of dietary practices that are harmful to the human body. This obsession with eating has an opposite that is equally deranged, namely, an obsession with not eating. As Shaw’s quote illuminates the love of food is, to be sure, a sincere love. There is a certain level of respect that we have for people whose dietary practices require discipline such as strict locavores, vegetarians, fasters, or people who only eat organic food. Yet, just as the love of eating can become a deranged obsession, so these disciplined dietary practices are equally capable of derangement culminating in eating disorders like bulimia and anorexia. This dissertation then, is concerned with the derangement of our



relationship with food in the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> century where it manifests simultaneously as an obsession with consuming and with abstaining from consumption.

### **The Current State of Food Studies**

Food research gained popularity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and continues to gain momentum into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Once almost the exclusive domain of historians and anthropologists, we now see philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, nutritionists, medical doctors, and evolutionary biologists weighing in on the food debate. The diverse disciplines engaged in this discussion have, for the most part, ignored the work of those researchers in fields different from their own. This tendency is beginning to falter with the introduction of food studies programs at several universities across the United States. These interdisciplinary programs introduce students to historical, anthropological, literary, sociological, and statistical methods of studying food. While the integration of all these positions is beyond the scope of this project, the fact remains that the diverse methodologies and disciplines that study food only add to the richness of the topic.

Adding to this diverse field of study is an important goal of this project; the means to achieve this goal begins with the introduction of Arthur Schopenhauer's philosophy of the "will" to the sociology of food. The introduction of "will" to the study of food is not merely the addition of a concept, albeit an interesting one, to the study of food. It is an attempt to bridge the gap between materialist and symbolic studies of food. This project is therefore as concerned with removing epistemological boundaries in the study of food as it is with defining concepts like anomie. I am not proposing a philosophical proof, nor am I arguing that Schopenhauer's philosophy is without issue,

but I am endeavoring to show the genealogy of ideas that Schopenhauer bequeathed to Durkheim and which Durkheim bequeathed to sociologists in general. The principle means of doing so will be the introduction of Durkheim's sociology to the study of food. Mestrovic (1988) and Gunderson (2016) have already documented Schopenhauer's influence on Durkheim specifically and I wish to point out several more examples of influence for the skeptical reader. In this way, the project can remain focused on the sociology of food without degenerating into a philosophical debate.

Magee (1983) noted Schopenhauer's tremendous influence on the *fin de siècle* at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This influence included the sociology of Durkheim and Simmel, the psychoanalysis of Freud and Jung, the literature of Melville and Proust as well as a host of other thinkers and artists. While the influences are certainly impressive, we still must ask why should we introduce "the will" as a metaphysical concept to the study of food in sociology? On the one hand, using Durkheim's theory— with its documented Schopenhauerian influences— implies that we are accounting for the presence of "will" already. However, to leave this assumption hidden is to ignore one of the poles of *homo duplex*, or the dualism of human nature. Why is this problematic? The reply comes from an unexpected source, Talcott Parsons, who wrote:

The sociologist must face the problems of human motivation whether he wants to or not. If he does not acquire a genuinely competent theory, he will implicitly adopt a series of ad hoc ideas which are no less crucial because they are exempted from critical analysis. Perhaps the situation is not altogether incomparable in reverse (Parsons, 1962, p. 61).

In other words, one cannot begin and end with rational choice—as the economists often do— as the starting and ending points of our investigation into why we eat what we do. The idea that every person weighs the pros and cons associated with everything that they put into their bodies is obviously false<sup>5</sup>. This is not to say that people can't make rational decisions about what to eat, nor does it mean that they don't make such decisions, but it does open the door to the possibility that people could overeat or under eat without rationalizing their decision. The exemplification of “will” in this project helps to account for the seemingly incompatible culinary dualism that has vexed modern researchers: the high rates of obesity and starvation in the same country.

The discussion of this dualism has involved economics, race, ethnicity, culture, and gender but has neglected to account for the most striking feature of this dualism, the fact that it has two sides. Therefore, if we focus too much on obesity, we ignore the fact that there are people who are starving to death in the developed world in 2017. If we focus too much on food security and access to food, we ignore the fact that food security has improved to the point that obesity rates are at an all-time high and continue to grow.

To approach this problem as an “if only” problem is to approach the problem with a deterministic mindset and ignore the non-rational and metaphysical dimensions of the problem. One such narrative goes that if only we had greater food security then people would be more likely to eat nutritious food and the obesity rate would go down.

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<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the reader thinks that this is too strong a statement, but I feel confident making it nonetheless. In his *Confessions*, St. Augustine describes an incident in his youth where he stole pears, not because he didn't have them, nor because they were better than the ones he had, but only because they were “seasoned with sin.”

The assumption is that obesity rates are locked up with issues related to social class, and by extension, with race and gender. The assumption that access to healthier food automatically corresponds to greater consumption of such food is a slippery slope. Clearly, if one doesn't have access to healthy foods then they cannot eat them. However, it does not follow that limitless access to healthy food leads to their exclusive consumption. Indeed, the difference in obesity rates by social class indicate that every class is getting more obese and that lower class men are not much more obese than men in higher social classes. There is a sharp distinction in the obesity rates of women in lower classes and women in higher classes, suggesting that women are more likely to consume healthy foods if given access to them. The sharp contrast between gender and obesity leads us back to Parsons' comment about sociology accounting for motivation. I contend that Schopenhauer—via Durkheim—offers us a means of addressing this problem.

### **Schopenhauer's Influence on Durkheim**

I have already cited Magee's (1983) study that emphasized the tremendous prestige and influence that Schopenhauer's philosophy had on the thinkers and artists at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I have also stated that Mestrovic (1988) and Gunderson (2016) have shown that Durkheim's writings bear a strong affinity to Schopenhauer's and that this affinity is more than the result of chance. This is especially true concerning two concepts that are common to both thinkers: representations and will.

If one is to study food using the method proposed by Durkheim, one must clarify several assumptions that he took from Schopenhauer and which need to be stated as contextual statements given that our academic milieu in 2017 is quite different from the milieu Durkheim was writing in. With that in mind, I move to discuss the first common concept: representation.

According to Andre Lalande ([1926] 1980) representation refers to “something actually present and able to be sensed versus its “replacement” as an image in the mind of the observer” (Mestrovic 1988: p. 47). Schopenhauer’s magnum opus, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (1818), was translated into English as *The World as Will and Idea* or *The World as Will and Representation*. The translation helps us to clarify that Schopenhauer’s use of the German *vorstellung* approximates the English words *idea* and *representation* and the French word *représentation* that Durkheim was so fond of. While Durkheim’s use of the word *representation* may appear complicated at first glance, Janik and Toulmin (1973) argue that the word had been used in the drawing rooms of Vienna and Paris for at least a century before Durkheim used it. To this end, Schopenhauer begins *The World as Will and Representation* (1818/1959) with a discussion of representation:

The world is my representation: this is a truth valid with reference to every living and knowing being, although man alone can bring it into reflective, abstract consciousness ... It then becomes clear to him that he does not know a sun and an earth, but only an eye that sees a sun and a hand that feels an earth; that the world around him is only as representation, in other words, on in reference to another thing, namely that which represents, and this is himself...everything that exists for knowledge, and hence the whole of this world, is only object in relation to subject, perception of the perceiver, in a word, representation (Schopenhauer, 1818/1959, p.195).

These sentences appear in the opening paragraphs of chapter one in *The World as Will and Representation* and are significant for two reasons. First, Schopenhauer's demand that we accept his claim that everything in the world is known to us as a representation indicates that Schopenhauer was following in the footsteps of Kant's critique of pure empiricism (1788/ 1956). In doing so, Schopenhauer refuses to start with the object of our knowledge, nor the subject that brings the knowledge into abstract consciousness. Rather, he wants us to start with the representation (the idea) as independent of subject and object, and therefore, as something that might be studied. Second, Schopenhauer's insistence is paralleled by Durkheim's insistence that all of social life is composed of representations. The significance of this is great as Mestrovic (1988) notes "[t]his move barred any retreat to crude empiricism and realism" (p. 46).

If Schopenhauer and Durkheim agreed— along with Kant—that one should start their investigation with representations, they also agreed that Kant's argument that reason is an a priori faculty of the human mind was flawed. Schopenhauer argued that reason was the tool and servant of the "will" while Durkheim argued that reason was "a collective and impersonal product of historical development...a social faculty; it varies in relation to social structure" (Mestrovic, 1988, p. 50). Ellenberger (1970) summarizes Kant and Schopenhauer's positions as follows:

Kant distinguished the world of phenomena and the world of the thing in itself, which is inaccessible to our knowledge. Schopenhauer called the phenomena representations, and the thing in itself will, equating the will with the unconscious as conceived by some of the Romantics; Schopenhauer's will had the dynamic character of blind, driving forces, which not only reigned over the universe, but also conducted man. Thus, man is an irrational being guided by internal forces, which are unknown to him and of which he is scarcely aware (Ellenberger, 1970, p. 208).

The second important concept, common to both Schopenhauer and Durkheim, and mentioned in the quote above is “will.” While Schopenhauer and Kant agree that the will (Kant’s thing in itself) are beyond the scope of conceptual knowledge, Schopenhauer believes that we may reach the will via intuition of our immediate perceptions. Intuition serves us well in this regard but its findings are troubling as immediate perception reveals we are always in a state of desire and never in a state of rest. As Schopenhauer (1818) describes it:

In fact, absence of all aim, of all limits, belongs to the essential nature of the will in itself, which is an endless striving... Therefore the striving of matter can always be impeded only, never fulfilled or satisfied. But this is precisely the case with the striving of all the will’s phenomena. Every attained end is at the same time the beginning of a new course, and so on *ad infinitum* (Schopenhauer, 1818/1969, p. 164).

Schopenhauer argues that the “essential nature” of the will is the absence of all aims and all limits and that this nature could only be impeded, never satiated. This idea was tremendously influential in Durkheim’s sociology as he frequently mentions constraint— earning him the nickname the “sociologist of constraint”— and his concern that modern life has ceased to provide moral constraints on the egoistic will. In *Moral Education* (1925) Durkheim writes:

The totality of moral regulations really forms about each person an imaginary wall, at the foot of which a multitude of human passions simply die without being able to go further. For the same reason – that they are contained – it becomes possible to satisfy them. But if at any point this barrier weakens, human forces – until now restrained – pour tumultuously through the open breach; once loosed, they find no limits where they can or must stop (Durkheim, 1925/1961, p.42).

Durkheim's concern with moral regulation is a defining feature of all of his work. One might even make the argument that Durkheim's metaphysical system directly parallels Schopenhauer's from the start of his career. In *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, published 28 years prior to *Moral Education*, Durkheim also took up this problem of unlimited individual desires and the forces that constrain them, writing:

It has been claimed, indeed, that human activity naturally aspires beyond assignable limits and sets itself unattainable goals...However, one does not advance when one walks toward no goal, or—which is the same thing—when his goal is infinity...To pursue a goal which is by definition unattainable is to condemn oneself to a state of perpetual unhappiness...[T]he more one has, the more one wants, since satisfactions received only stimulate instead of filling needs (Durkheim, 1897/1951, p. 247–8).

This closely parallels Schopenhauer's position regarding the will as endless striving incapable of final satisfaction, only hindrance, and finally destined to result in suffering.

[The will] always strives, because striving is its sole nature, to which no attained goal can put an end. Such striving is therefore incapable of final satisfaction; it can be checked only by hindrance, but in itself it goes on forever...[A]ll striving springs from want or deficiency, from dissatisfaction with one's own state or condition, and is therefore suffering so long as it is not satisfied. No satisfaction, however, is lasting; on the contrary, it is always merely the starting point of a fresh striving. (Schopenhauer, 1818/1969, p. 308-309).

Both Durkheim and Schopenhauer paint a pessimistic portrait of life as destined to result in suffering, a representation shared by a host of others including Plato in *The Republic*, Freud in *Civilization and its Discontents*, and the Second Noble Truth of Buddha. Plato concludes *The Republic* with the Myth of Er and its disturbing message that, given the choice, all souls choose a different life than the one they lived before. Thus, those who suffered greatly in the afterlife choose to be good in their next



reincarnation and those who were rewarded in the afterlife chose to be tyrants. This is not insignificant as Plato tells us that tyrants do not get a chance to pick a new life when they die, but their souls are forever confined to the underworld. Since all souls eventually pick lives different than the ones they lived previously, all souls eventually choose to be tyrants with philosophers being the one exception.

This parallels the Christian parable— found in the Gospels of Mathew, Mark, and Luke of it being easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. The implication is that those blessed with wealth, freed from the constraints of poverty, aspire to acquire more earthly possessions. These in turn become a barrier between the rich person and the eternal satisfaction available in the afterlife as described by Jesus and Plato alike.

Freud spends vast portions of *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930) writing about how people struggle to reduce their suffering, even going so far as to outline the three primary sources of suffering:

We are threatened with suffering from three directions: from our own body, which is doomed to decay and dissolution and which cannot even do without pain and anxiety as warning signals; from the external world, which may rage against us with overwhelming and merciless forces of destruction; and finally from our relations to other men. The suffering which comes to us from this last source is perhaps more painful to us than any other (Freud, 1930/1961, p.26).

The Second Noble Truth of the Buddha more clearly expresses a metaphysical truth – the metaphor of unquenchable thirst to describe the will’s nature – found in the pessimism expressed by Plato, the Gospels, and Freud. This Second Noble Truth is summarized by Gethin as:

The suggestion is that deep in the minds of beings there is a greed or desire that manifests as an unquenchable thirst which is the principal condition for the arising of suffering...It is the cause of suffering because it can never be finally satisfied (1998: p. 70).

It should be unsurprising then that, influenced as he was by Buddhist philosophy,

Schopenhauer offers a near perfect copy of this metaphor as he writes:

We call [striving's] hindrance through an obstacle placed between it and its temporary goal, suffering...Willing and striving...can be fully compared to an unquenchable thirst. The basis of all willing, however, is need, lack, and hence pain, and by its very nature and origin it is therefore destined to pain. (Schopenhauer, 1818/1969, p. 309, 312)

Finally, Durkheim too, offers us the same metaphor using nearly the same

language in *Suicide* when he writes:

Unlimited desires are insatiable by definition and insatiability is rightly considered a sign of morbidity. Being unlimited, they constantly and infinitely surpass the means at their command; they cannot be quenched. Inextinguishable thirst is constantly renewed torture (Durkheim, 1897/1951, p. 247).

My purpose in taking such great pains to establish the linkages of this thought—that all of life naturally aspires beyond set limits and is therefore doomed to frustration and suffering—are three-fold. First, it serves as a perfect example of Durkheim and Schopenhauer's assertion that representations have an existence outside of, and only partially dependent on, social actors' conscious wills. Second, it helps to clarify both the definition and use of the term "representation," which is essential to this project since Plato, Buddha, the Gospel Authors, Schopenhauer, and Durkheim all encounter and approach the world of representations, what Plato would have called the world of Forms or Ideas. Third, the temptation to think in deterministic "if only we do this, then everything will be fixed" terms is very strong when addressing social problems and

issues related to food like obesity and starvation certainly fall under this umbrella. I have thus taken great pains to establish that such thinking will not be used over the course of this work, as well as to establish all such thinking as overly simplistic and naïve.

### **Food, Will, and Representation**

Durkheim does not make food a primary topic of his investigations but his methodology is such that it can be applied to the investigation of a whole host of collective representations. Durkheim's disciples employed his sociological method to a wide variety of interesting studies including memory (Maurice Halbwachs), linguistics (Louis Gernet), gifts (Marcel Mauss), even saints and heroes (Robert Hertz). The ability to study such a wide range of phenomena is possible because Durkheimian sociology starts with the representation (the idea), what might be described as the midpoint between object and subject. This dissertation seeks to study representations of food in the United States of America as they appear in the present and in recent history.

While Durkheim does not devote much attention to investigating food, Schopenhauer offers a plethora of food-related examples in his discussion of the will. For example, Schopenhauer offers the following discussion of the will, need, and hunger:

Man needs the animals for his support, the animals in their grades need one another, and also the plants, which again need soil, water, chemical elements and their combinations, the planet, the sun... At bottom, this springs from the fact that the will must live on itself, since nothing exists besides it, and it is a hungry will. Hence arise pursuit, hunting, anxiety, and suffering (Schopenhauer [1818] 1969: p.154).

There are two important points made here that require clarification. The first is that despite the will striving blindly, its many gradations are all dependent upon one

another and constitute a massive system of checks and balances. These checks and balances are both material— as in the chemical, environmental, and nutritional requirements required to sustain life—as well as immaterial such as the mutual dependence created by the spontaneous division of labor. The second is that the will subsists on itself, meaning that all that consumes and is consumed is will. Yet Schopenhauer's book is called *The World as Will and Representation*, so one must pause to ask: where is the representation, if nothing exists beside the will? Schopenhauer offers us a clue when describing the aesthetic contemplation of plant life writing:

They (plants) therefore need the foreign intelligent individual in order to come from the world of blind willing into the world of representation. Thus they yearn for this entrance, so to speak, in order to attain at any rate indirectly what directly is denied to them (Ibid p. 201).

Schopenhauer adds as a footnote that he advanced this idea with great trepidation but was delighted and surprised to find that St. Augustine had already made it in *The City of God*.

The trees offer to the senses for perception the many different forms by which the structure of this visible world is adorned, so that, because they are unable to know, they may appear, as it were, to want to be known (Schopenhauer, 1818/1969, p. 201).

This is to say that trees offer much data to our sense perceptions about the structure of the visible world because they cannot know (i.e. are incapable of conceptual thought) and so appear to desire to be known. Here, again, we are met with the import of representation since the plants for Schopenhauer, and the trees for Augustine, are pure will and as pure will, strive and desire to be more. Therefore, one is left with this surprising revelation, namely, that all food is will but desires to be more, the attainment

of which is only possible indirectly by being drawn into the world of representation by a conscious being capable of abstract knowledge. Thus, attempts to describe food only as a collection of vitamins and chemical compounds or only at the symbolic level do violence to food as both representation and as will.

Bearing all this in mind, this dissertation starts with two important assumptions that must be outlined in the interest of transparency and to avoid confusion:

- 1) At the metaphysical level, food is will, therefore, what is consumed is will even as the desire to eat and the act of eating are both also acts of will (desire).
- 2) Representations of food are always at risk of being destroyed by the will, which breaks through the representation, but are nonetheless vital to constrain:
  - 2a) individual will – what Durkheim and Schopenhauer call egoism
  - 2b) deranged social will – consumerism for example

Durkheim's method, which he refers to as renovated rationalism, gives us the tools to deal with this the complicated landscape that is the sociology of food. I want to be as clear as possible that I wish to highlight Schopenhauer's thought not as the basis of a philosophical argument, for this is not an investigation into the philosophy of food, but as the starting point for understanding Durkheim's perspective that is neither psychological nor focused purely on rational-choice. I wish to avoid any reductionist thinking on matters of food and social problems related to food. Henceforth, food will always be considered two: it lives and is lived, it is will and representation.

## CHAPTER III

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, my goal is to lay out Durkheim's understanding of anomie as derangement, rather than the incomprehensible "normlessness," and then to critique previous studies of food in light of the insights provided by Durkheim's definition. Anomie is perhaps one of the most controversial terms in sociology, as its definition has been the topic of numerous papers and presentations, but has only recently re-entered the realm of sociological discussion in the work of Mueller and Abrutyn (2016) in their studies of suicide. The historical usages of anomie, which Durkheim was sensitive to, will be the starting place for my inquiry.

#### **Anomie: The Roots and Meanings of Derangement**

In this section, I begin by tracing the roots of the term "anomie" back to Ancient Greece and again in the works of Christian writers to clarify the term that Durkheim inherited. Second, I compare Durkheim's own writings to those of his interpreters to illustrate that Durkheim's sociology is built, not on preventing "normlessness," but on preventing "derangement" in the division of labor. The alleged presence or absence of norms is trivial compared to the haunting picture that Durkheim paints of anomic society as "deranged" and full of suffering, torment, and unlimited desires. To understand Durkheim's conception of anomie, and those that followed, we must understand the term that he inherited from his intellectual precursors as well as how his interpretation of anomie was elaborated by those who followed the misrepresentation of anomie as "normlessness" by Parsons and Merton. Durkheim noted the importance of such an

exercise when he wrote “a concept is not my concept; I hold it in common with other men...it is the work of a community (1912/1965, p. 481).

It would seem that anomie was derived from the Greek a-nomos, which translates as “lawless or impious,” but this is not completely correct as the Ancient Greek understanding of law was different from that of modern people (Liddell and Scott, 1966, p. 147). The word Nomos originates from the word Moira, which means destiny, fate, and “that which is right” (Liddell and Scott, 1966, p. 1140-42). Cornford (1957) noted that Nomos and Moira were linked together by “the notion of dispensation” (p. 29). Originally, nomos referred to Zeus’ dispensation of land; next it referred to the dispensation of edicts by Pericles, lastly, it referred to reason— the ordering principle of philosophy (Cornford, 1957, p. 20-39; Hastings, 1961, p. 545-55; White and Riddle, 1869, p. 526). Reason then, as it is understood and employed by philosophers, stems from Moira, just as Nomos does (Cornford, 1957, p. 35). The linguist Louis Gernet, a disciple of Durkheim, specialized in the language of ancient Greece and wrote that in addition to the Greeks’ scorn for hubris (pride) they believed that “nomos is [the] imperative rule derived from a collectivity that represents [etymologically] the principle of distribution” (Gernet, 1981, p. 329). Taken collectively, scholars paint a picture of nomos where the “dispensation of land, law, and reason are all conceived as sacred tasks; thus, the ‘mismanagement’ of any of these is understood as a form of sacrilege” (Mestrovic and Brown, 1985, p. 83). I am left to conclude that nomos in Ancient Greece implied that dispensation was a sacred task, and, as such, a-nomos would refer to the opposite, namely, the profaning of the dispensation of land, law and reason. Put

differently, a-nomos does not refer to profane lands, laws, and reasoning, instead, it implies that dispensation itself that has become profane. As an illustration of this point, in *The Republic*, Socrates insists that the ruler of his most just city would be a philosopher king or philosopher queen precisely because the sacredness of the task of dispensation is best allocated to those who desire it least.

The next time that anomie figured heavily in the treatment of social life occurred when the Bible was translated from Hebrew to Latin by St. Jerome, among others, and 24 different Hebrew words for sin found in the Old and New Testaments were all translated as “anomia” (Lyonnet and Sabourin, 1970; Mestrovic, 1985). Anomia as sin does not simply refer to the conscious transgression of divine law, the breaking of the commandments, but that “God in some way, at least in the intention of the sinner, is hit, grieved, and, as it were, hurt” (Lyonnet and Sabourin, 1970, p. 14). Lyonnet and Sabourin go on to explain that sin was viewed as a debt, or a disease to be healed (p. 26), “not as a specified sinful deed, but as a power which governs men and inspires their conduct” (p. 27). In summary, anomia in the Biblical context is “the secret quality, the spirit, the tendency, which inspires the sinful actions and provokes them... a general state of hostility against God” (p. 30-33). What is this secret quality, the spirit that inspires the sinner to injure God himself?

According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere flea bites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind... (Lewis, 1936/1996, p. 109).



One such teacher, St. Augustine, characterized the sin of Adam and Eve as the result of their pride, for they desired to be more than God, and only then did they act. Consequently, their sin was not simply a transgression of God's law, but derived from their libido dominandi, their lust to dominate God and usurp him as the Alpha and Omega. Augustine links the shame that envelops Adam and Eve after eating the apple to their revised understanding of what they are, beings that desire to usurp God, not just beings that disobey his orders. It is the why behind their what that makes the distinction.

One may dig into the Christian Scriptures for more examples of this. For example, the Book of Genesis begins as a story of how God—who is the embodiment of the principle of dispensation—makes everything in relation to himself and for relation with himself, or, as Martin Buber would have put it, as a thou to his eternal I. The principle of dispensation is fundamentally the opposite of pride or egoism for dispensation implies solidarity, and so further implies moral constraint. Pride warps the principle of dispensation into the principle of accumulation, whereby the sinner seeks to accumulate land, law, and reason, not for the purpose of dispensation, but in an effort to transcend all moral principles, and at the expense of others. As Lyonnet and Sabourin (1970) put it “to sin is to follow one's fancy, unrestrained by the law of God” (p. 43). The sin of Adam and Even then is first committed in their hearts, throwing off the yoke of God's law and seeking to usurp him, and their subsequent consumption of the apple is only a dull echo of the primary sin. In his course on St. Augustine's masterpiece, *The City of God*, the Religious Studies Scholar, Charles Mathewes described St. Augustine's anthropology of humanity as essentially theological, saying:

[For Augustine] The human is a creature who longs for God and, as such, the human is a creature of excess, of gratuity. We are eccentric, that is, having our centers outside of ourselves...wherever we are, we over spill our bounds, overrun our ends...Once we are untethered from God after the fall, our affections keep flowing from within us, snaking crazily across the surface of this world like a firehose out of control, shooting water this way and that. This is clearly manifest in our political lives, but it is also manifest elsewhere in our earthly lives (Mathewes 2017).

This depiction of humanity as essentially limitless after the fall of Adam and Eve is a pessimistic one to be sure. Indeed, Augustine argued that the best happiness we could hope to attain on earth was mere “happiness in hope.” Such is the malady of the eccentric creature whose center is outside of itself. One may be confused how this theological anthropology influenced Durkheim, indeed, one may flatly deny that it could have. Yet in *Suicide* (1897/1951), Durkheim echoes Augustine’s charge that humanity is fundamentally eccentric:

But how determine the quantity of well-being, comfort or luxury legitimately to be craved by a human being? Nothing appears in man’s organic nor in his psychological constitution which sets a limit to such tendencies...It is not human nature which can assign the variable limits necessary to our needs. They are thus unlimited so far as they depend on the individual alone. Irrespective of any external regulatory force, our capacity for feeling is in itself an insatiable and bottomless abyss (Durkheim, 1897/1951, p. 249).

The importance of Durkheim’s depiction of humanity as fundamentally limitless is an important one, and consequently, the literature that treats humanity in a similar vein is an important part of the puzzle. This includes the literature on sin, as I have already shown how one of Augustine’s foundational charges was refracted through Durkheim. Thus, anomia as sin “is the inner dynamism of evil leading to, and manifesting itself in sinful actions” meaning “man cannot be liberated from the tyranny of sin except by

receiving a new dynamism, the life-giving Spirit, who works in man his reunion with God (Lyonnet, 1970, p. 291). For Durkheim, this dynamism comes from society—conceived as a system of representations (ideas)—but it can become deranged, sickly, in a word – anomic.

The origins of anomie in Ancient Greece and in the Christian writings on sin were synthesized in the work of Samuel Johnson (1709-1784). Johnson, a British writer and poet, defined anomie as “breach of law” in his Dictionary of the English Language (1785). However, Johnson defined law as a “rule of action” which included such “laws” as decrees, edicts, statutes, customs, as well as those “rules or axioms of science: as, the laws of mechanicks,” jurisprudence, and the Bible. Johnson gave only one example of “anomy’s” usage, “If sin be good, and just, and lawful, it is no more evil, it is no sin, no anomy.” It is noteworthy that Johnson connects anomie, sin, and rule, thus synthesizing the Christian writings on sin with the Ancient Greek writings on the dispensation of law and reason. This is the anomie that Durkheim and his contemporaries inherited from the Ancient and not-so-ancient world. If they inherited its meaning, so too did they inherit the concerns which were the traditional context for its usage, including morality, suffering, and life in communion with others under a common rule of law. Insofar as Durkheim inherited anomie’s meaning and concerns, he passed on a new way to characterize these concerns, but he used an old vocabulary to do so. Having outlined anomie in the context of Greek philosophy and Christianity, I move to discuss anomie as it directly preceded Durkheim’s usage of the term in the work of the French poet and philosopher, Jean Marie Guyau (1854-1888).

### **Durkheim's Critique of Guyau's Moral Anomie, and Subsequent Use of Anomie**

In 1885, Guyau published *Sketch of a Morality Without Obligation or Sanction* in which he argued that “anomie” was, “c'est l'absence de foi fixe, qu'on peut designer sous le terme d'anomie, pour l'opposer a l'autonomie des Kantiens” (Guyau, 1885/1907, p. 165).<sup>1</sup> Lalande (1926/1976, p. 61) believed that Guyau used the term anomie to oppose Kant's conception of autonomy with its repressive sense of duty. In 1887, Guyau published his *Irreligion of the Future* where he offered moral anomie as a rational alternative to religious dogmatism. Guyau, like Durkheim, understood anomie (a-nomos) not as lack of law, but lack of rule. Indeed, Guyau (1887/1962) writes, “we have proposed as the moral ideal what we have called moral anomie - the absence of any fixed moral rule” (p. 375). It is noteworthy that Guyau's understanding of anomie as lack of rule bears some similarities to the definition put forth by Samuel Johnson, “the breach of law” [rule of action] and is given in a religious context, thus confirming my earlier argument about the nature and meaning of anomie that Durkheim's milieu inherited.

Durkheim's first use of the term anomie can be found, not in his *Division of Labor in Society* (1893), but in his review of Guyau's *Irreligion of the Future* (1887). In this review, Durkheim says little about “moral anomie,” but he is critical of Guyau's system of morality, which seems to focus on the individual being freed of obligation writing, “only the second ones [feelings of belonging to the social organism in its entirety] can generate the idea of obligation” (Durkheim, 1887, p. 309). Orru (1983) argues that this was Durkheim's first exposure to the concept of anomie, one which left

an impression on him, and that his interest in the concept would continue to grow until he published *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893) and wrote:

The sentiment of obligation, that is, the existence of duty, is in danger of being weakened in admitting there is a morality, and perhaps a higher, which rests on the independent creations of the individual, which no rule determines, which is essentially anomic. We believe, on the contrary, that anomie is the contradiction of all morality (Durkheim, 1893/1933, p. 431).

We see at once that Durkheim's first reference to anomie was focused on the philosophical movement towards "moral anomie," which he explains as the weakening of the sentiment of obligation. Between the weakening of obligations and the lack of rule, which he also points out explicitly, Durkheim argues that anomie cannot be moral and the whole system of moral anomie rests upon a shaky foundation. If a new system of morality is to transcend an old, it may only gain adherents through the sentiment of obligation, that is, if people are bound by duty to accept it. Durkheim (1893/1984) wrote, "He who speaks of obligation speaks at the same time of constraint" (p. 13). For Durkheim, morality was bound to obligation, and so to constraint, thus he argued that the destruction of the sentiment of obligation and the prescription that morality should be determined by individuals, without any guiding rules, was the antithesis of morality.

In Book Three (The Abnormal Forms) of *The Division of Labor in Society*, Durkheim writes, "we may say *a priori* that a state of anomie is impossible wherever organs solidly linked to one another are in sufficient contact, and in sufficiently lengthy contact" (Durkheim, 1893/1984, p. 304). The prevention of anomie then, lies in strong linkages between social organs, which remain in sufficiently lengthy contact with one another. Durkheim explains that this prevents anomie because, "indeed, being adjacent

to one another, they are easily alerted in every situation to the need for one another and consequently they experience a keen, continuous feeling of their mutual dependence,” in other words, they experience constraint (Durkheim, 1893/1984, p. 304). Durkheim continues:

For the same reason, exchanges between them occur easily; being regular, they occur frequently; they regulate themselves and time gradually effects the task of consolidation. Finally, because the slightest reaction can be felt throughout, the rules formed this way bear the mark of it, that is, they foresee and fix in detail the conditions of equilibrium (1893/1984, p. 304).

Durkheim posits that exchanges between the social organs naturally occur frequently, regularly, and easily because they are mutually dependent upon one another. But what is this force that draws the social organs into mutual dependence, into regulation, into constraint, into obligation, and so into morality? Durkheim’s reply is that it is the spontaneous--not forced--division of labor. Durkheim understood the division of labor as an external force, which naturally draws the social organs into communion with one another. In this way, Durkheim’s conception of the division of labor is quite similar to the Ancient Greek principle of dispensation discussed earlier in this work. Recall that Louis Gernet, a linguist and a disciple of Durkheim’s, specialized in the language of ancient Greece and wrote that the Greeks found hubris (pride) to be contemptible and believed that “nomos is the imperative rule derived from a collectivity that represents [etymologically] the principle of distribution (Gernet, 1981, p. 329). Durkheim carries this idea forward arguing that it is egoism (pride) that destroys solidarity, that insults the collective, that defies the principle of distribution (i.e. dispensation), and creates the anomic forms of the division of labor.

Durkheim notes that the exchanges affect “the task of consolidation,” which we take to mean the consolidation of the social organs into an organism. After all, Durkheim wrote that society was an organism.<sup>2</sup> The careful reader might be tempted to point out that the “task of consolidation” and the division of labor would seem to be opposing forces and, thus, Durkheim’s understanding of anomie and social solidarity rests on a contradiction. Durkheim offered the various academic disciplines as an example of this seemingly contradictory part of his theory:

But the jurist, the psychologist, the anthropologist, the economist, the statistician, the linguist, the historian – all these go about their investigations as if the various orders of facts they are studying formed so many independent worlds. Yet in reality these facts interlock with one another at every point... Indeed they afford the spectacle of an aggregate of disconnected parts that fail to co-operate with one another. If they therefore form a whole lacking in unity, it is not because there is no adequate view of their similarities, it is because they are not organized... If the division of labor does not produce solidarity it is because the relationships between organs are not regulated; it is because they are in a state of anomie (Durkheim, 1893/1984, p. 304).

The division of labor, the Ancient Greek principle of dispensation, naturally produces solidarity between the disciplines by allowing each to focus their studies on a particular part of the common world, or as Durkheim put it:

This solidarity resembles that observed in the higher animals. In fact each organ has its own special characteristics and autonomy, yet the greater the unity of the organism, the more marked the individualization of the parts... we propose to call organic the solidarity that is due to the division of labor (1893/1984, p. 85).

Thus, in the absence of pride—which he later referred to as egoism—the division of labor, which I have now solidly linked to the principle of dispensation, leads to increasing specialization and so increasing interdependence, constraint, and solidarity. We might then invert Durkheim’s previous statement about organic solidarity and say

“the more marked the individualization of the parts,” “the greater the unity of the organism” (inverted for emphasis). Having discussed anomie’s origins as the obverse of the principle of dispensation, we might add that “the nouns *nómos* and *nomós* both derive from the verb νέμω, *némō*, to dispense or to allot, with *nomós* being the *result* of allotment and *nómos* being the *manner* of allotment or dispensing (justice)” (“Nomos,” wikipedia). Truly, consolidation does not oppose the division of labor (*nómos*, the manner of allotment) but is the product of the division of labor (*nomós*, the result of allotment). It appears that the ideas of justice, dispensation, and consolidation were all part of the Greek conception of “nomos,” and Durkheim’s conception of anomie was a refraction of a-nomos, that is, a deranged dispensation of justice or a forced consolidation.

Therefore, in the absence of organic solidarity, this consolidated whole, does not fall on the shoulders of the division of labor, for it is the product of this division. Durkheim points out that if the disciplines do not appear as a unified (i.e. organic or consolidated) whole, it is not because the similarities between them are not observed, but because they are “deranged.” This derangement prevents the division of labor from regulating the relationships between organs, from producing solidarity, and so perpetuates a state of anomie.

One of Durkheim’s most famous passages about anomie is found in the second preface of the *Division of Labor in Society (1893/1984)* where Durkheim writes:

It is the state of anomie that, as we shall show, must be attributed the continually recurring conflicts and disorders of every kind which the economic world affords so sorry a spectacle. For, since nothing restrains the forces present from reacting together, or prescribes limits for them that they



are obliged to respect, they tend to grow beyond all bounds, each clashing with the other, each warding off and weakening the other...Men's passions are only stayed by a moral presence they respect. If all authority of this kind is lacking, it is the law of the strongest that rules" (xxxii-iii).

Durkheim's discussion of economic anomie is much more nuanced than the vulgar translation of "normlessness." He describes economic anomie as a collective state of limitless desire, where the absence of a moral authority that commands respect reinstates that most primitive system of morality – the law of the strongest. On the relationship between society and individual desires Durkheim wrote, "society is not only something attracting the sentiments and activities of individuals...it is also a power controlling them" (Durkheim, 1897/1951, p. 241). Put differently, society is responsible for constraining the individual will, but it is the relaxing of these restraints on individual egoistic desires that characterizes anomie.

Four years after the publication of the *Division of Labor in Society* (1893), Durkheim again took up the topic of anomie in his book *Suicide* (1897). As noted previously, Andre Lalande observes that it was in *Suicide* that Durkheim offered his only synonym for anomie, "L'etat de dereglement ou d'anomie" *Le Suicide*, p. 281 (Lalande, 1926/1980: p. 61).<sup>3</sup> Having discussed the etymology of anomie, and, having pointed out that Durkheim was sensitive to the collective definitions of words, we move to discuss Durkheim's understanding of anomie as dérèglement. Dérèglement does not have an equivalent synonym in English, mainly because it implies "immorality and suffering, but it is perhaps best translated as derangement" (Mestrovic, 1988, p. 62)<sup>4</sup>. The translations of anomie as normlessness or deregulation are overly secular, and are otherwise at odds with the etymology of both anomie and dérèglement, which I have illustrated. Mestrovic

noted the importance of the influence from theology when he wrote, “the French poet Rimbaud used dérèglement to refer to a general kind of disordering. Anomie as dérèglement implies a condition of madness or a state akin to sin” (Mestrovic, 1988, p. 62). The Littré Dictionnaire de la langue française – the French equivalent of the Oxford English Dictionary- cited derangement as the primary meaning of dérèglement:

Dérèglement, dérangement are words expressing two nuances of moral disorder: What is dérangé is disarranged [hors de son rang] or is without place. What is déréglé is out of rule [hors de la règle]. The state of dérèglement is more serious than that of derangement (1863/1963, vol. 2, p. 1672).

Circling back to our earlier discussion about *The Division of Labor in Society* where Durkheim quipped, “If they (the various academic disciplines) therefore form a whole lacking in unity, it is not because there is no adequate view of their similarities, it is because they are not organized,” in other words, they are dérangé or disarranged (1893/1984, p. 304). A few sentences later, Durkheim captures the other half of his definition of anomie, “If the division of labor does not produce solidarity it is because the relationships between organs are not regulated [déréglé]; it is because they are in a state of anomie, that is, is déréglé or out of rule (1893/1984, p. 304). Note that Durkheim’s use of déréglé was mistranslated as “not regulated.” Accordingly, we see that Durkheim’s conception of anomie did not change between his publication of *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893) and *Suicide* (1897).

Up until this point I have linked the Christian writings about sin to the Ancient Greek writings on the grounds that the principle of dispensation, law, and hubris can be correlated with the division of labor, rule, and egoism, respectively. The Greek and

Christian writings on anomie do not give preference to a particular social class, a move that we see echoed in Durkheim. In *Socialism and Saint Simon* (1897) Durkheim criticized Marx for giving preference to the suffering of the proletariat:

The malaise from which we are suffering is not rooted in any particular class; it is general over the whole of society. It attacks employers as well as workers, although it manifests itself in different forms in both: as a disturbing, painful agitation for the capitalist, as discontent and irritation for the proletariat. Thus, the problem reaches infinitely beyond the material interests of the two classes concerned...[one should] address, not those feelings of anger that the less-favored class harbors against the other, but feelings of pity for society, which is suffering in all classes and in all its organs (Durkheim, 1897/1986, p. 143).

Durkheim's focus on suffering that is caused by anomie closely mirrors the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. According to André Lalande (1960, p. 23) Durkheim's students nicknamed him "Schopen" because he was so enamored with Schopenhauer's philosophy. Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) was a German philosopher and an influential figure in the fin de siècle of which Durkheim was a part. Schopenhauer's philosophy centered around "the will" and its relation to suffering which he described as:

[T]his striving that constitutes kernel and in-itself of everything, as the same thing that in us, where it manifest itself most distinctly in the light of the fullest consciousness is called will...It always strives because striving is its sole nature, to which no attained goal can put an end. Such striving is therefore incapable of final satisfaction; it can be checked only by hindrance, but in itself it goes on for ever (Schopenhauer, 1818, p. 308-309).

In his description of the relationship between desire, willing, striving, constraint and suffering Schopenhauer was especially concerned with the suffering brought on by the will's nature writing:

We call its [the will's] hindrance through an obstacle placed between it and its temporary goal, suffering...For all striving spring from want or deficiency,

from dissatisfaction with one's own state or condition...No satisfaction, however, is lasting; on the contrary, it is always merely the starting-point of a fresh striving (Schopenhauer, 1818, p. 308-309)

Schopenhauer's depiction of the relationship between limits and suffering closely mirrors a passage from *Suicide*, where Durkheim discusses how unlimited desires cannot be satisfied and only produce new desires:

It has been claimed, indeed, that human activity naturally aspires beyond assignable limits and sets itself unattainable goals...However, one does not advance when one walks toward no goal, or-which is the same thing- when his goal is infinity....To pursue a goal which is by definition unattainable is to condemn oneself to a state of perpetual unhappiness...[T]he more one has, the more one wants, since satisfactions received only stimulate instead of filling needs (Durkheim, 1897/1951, p. 247-248).

This idea of insatiable desire, which has been linked back to Schopenhauer's philosophy, was essential to Durkheim's conception of anomie. As we have already stated, Durkheim's only synonym for anomie was *déréglément*, and, following the etymology of the word, that which is *déréglé* is without rule. In his neglected *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals* (1950), Durkheim argues, "To the extent that the individual is left to his own devices and freed from all social constraint, he is unfettered too by all moral constraint" (p. 7). In the absence of external moral constraints, the insatiable will is unleashed prompting Durkheim's observation:

When there is no other aim but to outstrip constantly the point arrived at, how painful to be thrown back!...Since imagination is hungry for novelty, and ungoverned, it gropes at random...At least the horizon of the lower classes is limited by those above them, and for this same reason their desires are more modest. Those who have only empty space above them are almost inevitably lost in it, if no force restrains them" (1897/1951, p. 257).

It is interesting to note that Durkheim talks about how the insatiable will of the lower class is constrained by their economic circumstances even if they are not under the

sway of moral constraints. In contrast, the upper classes have “only empty space above” and so their desires “outstrip constantly the point arrived at,” that is, they are doomed to suffer. One cannot help but notice this passage’s affinity with the beatitudes as they appear in the Gospel of Luke:

Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh. Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep. Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets (Luke 6: 20-26, King James Version).

Luke’s four beatitudes are immediately followed by his four woes. The poor, the hungry, the sad, and those who are persecuted for God’s sake will all receive their *just* reward in heaven while the rich, the full, the happy, and those who are well spoken of have already received their just reward, meaning they are destined to suffer. Indeed, the society subjected to the deranged principle of dispensation-to the anomic division of labor-has severed social constraints and so is severed from morality, ignorant of justice, and suffering in all of its organs. It is on this ground that Durkheim stakes his claim that anomie takes many forms among them moral, economic, conjugal, intellectual, religious, and political.

If the reader is still skeptical of Durkheim’s ties to the Christian philosophy of the Middle Ages and the Philosophy of Ancient Greece, we might remind them that the Middle Ages were regarded with horror by the Humanists of the Renaissance, while

Durkheim regarded the Renaissance as an extended period of anomie (Mestrovic, 1989, p. 79). In *The Evolution of Education Thought* (1938/1977), Durkheim notes that the Protestant Reformation was the catalyst for the reestablishment of equilibrium between the poles of homo duplex which the Renaissance had so skewed. Durkheim viewed the Jesuit Counter-Reformation in this context as well, despite the fact that the reformations seem to be pulling in differing directions. Mestrovic (1988) notes, “If early Catholicism resulted in anomie of the Renaissance because it took man too seriously, Protestantism leads to the modern anomie of pragmatism because it takes the world too seriously” (p. 80). Thus, anomie is not conceived as excessive willing in a particular direction, either towards empiricism or sophism, but rather a general state of excessive willing brought about by the derangement of the division of labor. With that in mind, I move to contemporary interpretations of anomie.

### **Contemporary Depictions of Anomie**

The earliest modern interpretations of anomie are to be found in the works of Talcott Parsons who wrote, “[a]nomie is precisely this state of disorganization where the hold of norms over individual conduct has broken down” (1937, p. 377) and “the breakdown of this [normative] control is anomie or war of all against all” (Parsons, 1937, p. 407). Parsons’ student, Robert Merton, sticks fairly closely to the definition put forth by his teacher when he defines anomie as “a condition of relative normlessness in a society or group (Merton, 1957, p. 161). LaCapra (1972, p. 159) defines anomie as “a state of complete normlessness and meaninglessness of experience attendant upon institutional and moral breakdown.” Dohrenwend (1959, p. 472) took a slightly different

stance arguing that anomie was the “absence of norms altogether.” Some of the more logical theorists argued that there could never be a *total* lack of norms, but that anomie was characterized by “contradictory normative standards with which the actor must contend” (Dudley, 1978, p. 107; see also Marks, 1979; Willis, 1982). None of the above theorists quote Durkheim to support their interpretation of anomie (Mestrovic, 1985, p. 120). The empty and confused conceptualization of anomie by these theorists has nothing in common with the “deranged” state of anomie with which Durkheim was so concerned. These representations of anomie as absence and meaninglessness imply emptiness or nothingness, while Durkheim’s anomic society is drowning in desire, overflowing with agitation, and steeped in suffering. We continue our journey having trampled the overly secular and shallow understandings of anomie as “normlessness” which have no parallels in Durkheim’s writings, and so have been found wanting.

Another modern approach to anomie asserts that people are “not uni-dimensional at the mercy of collective control but that they are dualistic” (Mestrovic, 1985, p. 121). Durkheim’s biographer, Steven Lukes, believes this to be “the keystone of Durkheim’s entire system of thought” (1972, p. 22). From this perspective, anomie appears as a struggle between society’s obligations, frameworks, and goals and the individual’s autonomy (p. 23-24). Both Lukes (1972) and Giddens (1976) fail to follow this path because they believe that Durkheim contradicted himself by simultaneously advocating individualism, understood here as the cult of the individual, while also comparing individualism to egoism. (Mestrovic, p. 121). For Durkheim, the cult of the individual was a “collective representation—a social force that compels us to respect individual

rights and dignity- and an individual phenomenon, egoism, will, something like Freud's narcissism" (Mestrovic, 1988, p. 55). Durkheim's criticism of Guyau, discussed earlier in this work, stemmed from Guyau elevating the individual's will, their egoism, to the place of moral authority. Individualism, the cult of the individual, restrains the egoistic will and constrains all person to "respect individual rights and dignity." One can now see that there is no contradiction in Durkheim's thought, as his understanding of anomie rested on the collective representation of individualism opposing the egoism, the will, of the individual.

### **Social Integration, Solidarity, and Durkheim's Conception of Suicide**

The final piece of the puzzle that is anomie is its relationship to suicide. Durkheim claimed that "suicide varies inversely with the degree of integration of the social groups of which the individual forms a part" (Durkheim, 1897/1951, p. 209) as well as "insufficient individuation has the same effects [people commit suicide] when social integration is too strong" (Durkheim, 1897/1951, 217). It may seem a bit curious that suicide might vary inversely and proportionally to social integration, as Maris writes:

The suicide rate cannot vary indirectly and directly with social integration at the same time. Being a great man, Durkheim realized this and put his comments on fatalism in a footnote, apparently hoping that his rather obvious contradiction would be overlooked (1969, p. 12-13).

However, the contradiction is only obvious if integration is taken to be inherently good, an assumption that has plagued sociology for quite some time (Mestrovic, 1989, p.117) However, if one casts off this assumption, and think about our daily lives, one may think of many examples where too much of something that is usually good becomes



very bad – long phone calls from loved ones when we are trying to meet a deadline at work for example. Indeed, the issue at hand does not stem from Durkheim himself, but from the interpretations and assumptions of his work. It is not just the assumption, which Durkheim did not share, that integration is always an unqualified good, but the use of the phrase “social integration” in general. Indeed it may have been less confusing to his readers had Durkheim substituted solidarity, one of the central themes of the *Division of Labor*, for “social integration.” The suicide which Durkheim argued varies inversely to social solidarity is egoistic suicide.

Durkheim was very critical of egoism, which I have already compared to Freud’s narcissism, and believed it to be a force in need of social constraint. Recall the theoretical genealogy of egoism that we sketched earlier in this paper – Greek hubris becomes the Christian pride, which gives way to egoism – and how egoism elevates the individual, isolating them in the process, and severing them from the solidarity of the group. As Durkheim put it:

Through the very fact that these superior forms of human activity have a collective origin, they have a collective purpose. As they derive from society they have reference to it; rather they are society itself reincarnated and individualized in each one of us. But for them to have a *raison d’être* in our eyes, the purpose they envisage must be one not indifferent to us. We can cling to these forms of human activity only to the degree that we cling to society itself (Durkheim, 1897/1951, p. 212).

Recall too, the division of labor is the source of solidarity because it produces interdependent organs that compose an organism: society. In this way, the suicide rate increases as solidarity weakens, as the individual feels himself to be outside of the solidarity, he loses his ability to feel his need for others and for others to feel their need

for him. Bearing this in mind, it seems quite logical that suicide would vary inversely with the degree of integration (solidarity).

How then does it follow that the suicide rate should also vary proportionally to social solidarity? Durkheim calls “altruistic” those suicides that are the result of duty saying:

Now when a person kills himself, in all these cases, it is not because he assumes the right to do so but, on the contrary, because it is his duty...the weight of society is brought to bear on him to lead him to destroy himself...it [society] compels and is the author of conditions and circumstances making this obligation coercive. This sacrifice then is imposed by society for social ends...this is because so strict an interdependence between followers and chiefs, officers and kings, is involved in the constitution of society that any thought of separation is out of the question” (Durkheim, 1897/1951, p. 219-220).

Altruistic suicide then, is a sacrifice to society by society. The willingness to sacrifice one’s life for another is not an individual motivation, but a social one. If this were not the case, soldiers would not be apt to throw themselves on top of grenades, march into oncoming gunfire, or otherwise put themselves in danger for the good of another. With this example in mind, one cannot be so quick to throw out mechanical solidarity as a thing of the past, for it continues to survive in modern times, but only those who have eyes to see with notice it. The demarcation of the individuals cannot be but very minor if society possesses such coercive power over them that it might demand they impale themselves on the spear of duty. It might be argued that altruistic suicide is the result of centripetal forces overpowering centrifugal forces, while egoistic suicide indicates that the centrifugal forces have overpowered their centripetal counterparts.

Either way, one can be certain that anomic suicide is different from the egoistic and altruistic types of suicide discussed here.

Barclay Johnson (1967) argued that “altruism and fatalism really do not belong in Durkheim’s scheme, and that egoism and anomie are identical” (p.875). Johnson apparently misunderstands Durkheim’s conception of egoism and anomie. Durkheim understood egoistic suicide as resulting from an absence of solidarity, not from the derangement of moral rules. In contrast, anomic suicide is the preeminent form of suicide in anomic societies where the “rules themselves are the cause of the evil” (Durkheim, 1893/1933, p. 374). Yet, how can rules be the cause of the problem? For that answer I return to Durkheim:

The passion for infinity is commonly presented as a mark of moral distinction, even though it cannot appear except in deranged consciences which establish as a rule the derangement from which they suffer...since this disorder is at its apex in the economic world, it has the most victims there” (Durkheim, 1897/1983, p. 283).

Durkheim singles out the economic sector, with its endless pursuit of profit, as establishing derangement as a rule. However, derangement cannot be established as a rule unless there is solidarity within the group. This is yet another instance where Durkheim refuted the optimistic assumption that solidarity is an unqualified good. Perhaps an equally clear example of derangement as a rule would be the endless drive to be successful. If success is money, there is always more money to be had; if it is a great education, there is always someone who has a better education; if it is athletic achievements, there are always those who are more athletic and who win more awards. Without clearly defined limits, the limitlessness of success becomes a horizon that

stretches on forever. What's more, unlike the pursuit of profit, the pursuit of success can be undertaken from a very early age.

To illustrate the complexity and scope of Durkheim's argument, I wish to consider the case study on adolescent suicide that was performed by Mueller and Abrutyn (2016) and published in *American Sociological Review*. It may seem strange to have an extended case study about adolescent suicide in a work about food, but its inclusion is essential for its missteps allow me to highlight covert assumptions of the authors that have come before me and the readers who come after.

First, one must recall Durkheim's reasoning for why suicide is essentially a male phenomenon: "If women kill themselves much less than men, it is because they are much less involved than men in collective existence; thus they feel its influence – good or evil – less strongly" (1897/1951, p. 299). If one extends this idea further, it might be said that higher suicide rates reflect a greater role in collective existence, that is, greater exposure to the forces that animate the collective. In Mueller and Abrutyn's case study, adolescents from a small tight-knit community are the ones committing suicide. Following Durkheim's logic, one may conclude that the adolescents are the ones who are most involved in collective existence. This idea becomes more complex when one considers that the parents in this town are trying to live vicariously through their children. As Mueller and Abrutyn noted: "Many youths and parents reported, whether objectively true or not, that parents live through their children; thus a child's failure or success is experienced as reflecting strongly on the parents." (2016, p. 10). Yet if

the child's failure reflected so strongly on the parent, why is the parent not the one to commit suicide out of a sense of shame or a sense of duty?

Mestrovic (1989) provided us with a clue when he wrote, "Urban life is characterized, in general, by a quantitatively high degree of social contacts but a qualitatively low degree of social bonds... Social contacts are generally a source of stress because they multiply the chances for hurt, disappointment, humiliation and the like" (p. 120-121). In my case study, the children have many social contacts but few social bonds. Perhaps more problematic, the formation of additional social contacts is championed over the formation of social bonds. This quote from a female young adult in Poplar Grove describes the deranged obsession with success that adolescents grow up embedded in:

The more [advanced placement (AP)] courses you take the better, the more sports you're involved with the better; the more trophies in your bedroom, the better; Oh it's classroom registration time. How many APs are you taking next semester? Oh, it's sports transition time, what team are you joining next semester? Oh your team went to the championships, did you place first? What position did you play?" (Mueller & Abrutyn, 2016, p.11)

This obsession with the limitless, the infinite pursuit of success, is an indicator of the deranged nature of the Poplar Grove community. Furthermore, the desire of parents to live vicariously through their children deranges the bond between child and parent, and makes it more of a social contact. Thus, the child's failure is refracted through the parent, through the community, and back into the child who is left to deal with this failure by themselves. Normally, social bonds will help insulate the potential suicide from this suffering, but the issue of derangement is magnified

since forming social bonds is not highly valued, nor is seeking help in the Poplar Grove community (Mueller & Abrutyn, p.13-14). How might one describe the state of the adolescents in our case study? To quote Durkheim's student Maurice Halbwachs, "All of the collective sadness and melancholy becomes embodied in him and rises through him to a higher awareness of itself" (1930/1978, p. 302). This is not excessive regulation or excessive integration, but a derangement of the division of labor between children and parents. The children likely do not want their parents to live vicariously through them, but that is the deranged rule, and the suffering that results is felt most keenly by the adolescent who is the most involved participant in the social life of the community.

The relationship between suicide and the potency of the collective sadness and melancholy was illustrated by Halbwachs as follows, "We can assume that the number of suicides is a rather exact indicator of the amount of suffering, malaise, disequilibrium, and sadness which exists or is produced in a group" (Ibid p. 314). One might then argue that these high suicide rates, which I have labeled as deranged or anomic, indicate an immense collective suffering, which takes up residence in the most active member of social life in Poplar Grove, the adolescents. The topic of suffering and its expression in group settings is a major topic of concern for this study, one which will receive a greater treatment in successive chapters. For now, I will content myself to say that while group can help insulate individuals from sufferings, they can also be the source of said suffering.

By now it has become obvious that anomie is a complicated concept, wrought with misunderstandings, which I have taken great pains to clarify. Nonetheless, it is a concept that is of fundamental importance to this work and, consequently, must be specified as much as possible. For the purpose of clarity, I will use the term derangement and its derivatives to express what Durkheim meant by anomie in subsequent sections of this work. I make this designation out of necessity, since any modern day use of the term is met with the biases stemming from Parsons and Merton and spread far and wide by that most insidious of vested interests – the textbook press. I have endeavored to elucidate that anomie is not normlessness, nor a confusion of norms, but a state of derangement which afflicts our rules and relations. The equation of anomie and egoism, which Johnson seeks to make, falls far short on the grounds that egoism is the individual transcending moral rules while anomie is the implementation of immoral rules. These rules need not be prescriptive, for their immorality is tied to their destruction of moral constraints and so to the result they have on individuals and society at large. The problems raised by rules “that are a lack of rule,” as described by Durkheim, have not been the topic of much investigation, most likely owing to the misconceptions of Durkheim that are, and have been, fashionable. This study seeks to address these questions using food as a vehicle for analysis and reflection. The value of this investigation lies in its ability to navigate social theory and food studies simultaneously, drawing attention to issues in one by highlights answers posed by the other. With this in mind, I move to discuss some of the prevailing approaches to the study of food.

## **Food for Thought: Food and Social Theory**

This work is driven by social theory, but the vehicle for this discussion is food. The previous section on derangement and its many misunderstandings was of supreme importance to this project, and what's more, necessary to foreshadow this section on the primary approaches to studying food.

Prior to sociologists entering the realm of food studies, most studies of food were either anthropological or economic. Mennell et al. (1992), Murcott (1988), and Whit (1995) all critiqued and reviewed the various anthropological approaches to studying food and, as such, I do not feel the need to critique them all here. That being said, I do feel that I must at least comment on the work of Claude Fischler because of his use of the term “gastro-anomie” which must be discussed in light of my previous comments on anomie.

It was Fischler who offered us the “omnivore’s paradox” and its derivative, the “omnivore’s anxiety.” According to Fischler, “unlike specialized eaters, an omnivore has the invaluable ability to thrive on a multitude of foodstuffs and diets and so adapts to changes in its environment” (Fischler, 1988, p.277). Fischler develops the idea of the omnivore’s anxiety from its need for a diverse diet, writing, “the omnivore is inclined towards diversification...which can be vital to its survival; but, on the other hand, it has to be careful...any new unknown food is a potential danger” (Ibid, p. 278). Fischler is correct to highlight the adaptiveness of omnivoreness, but his limited conception of food restricts his theory and ultimately leads it astray. The starving herbivore can only hope to survive if it finds plant life to sustain itself, but the omnivore is always starving in some



way, always hungry, for its nutritional needs are only met by a diverse diet—and one can never have enough diversity. Fischler also coined the term “gastro-anomie” to designate the deconstruction of the codes and structures that have governed eating habits. Here, too, Fischler falls into the trap set by Parsons and Merton for his main point is that there are no more food norms, which is to say, that we are normless. While I agree with Fischler that the change in eating habits has been rapid, I do not believe that we are normless. In fact, this entire project hinges on the idea that the norms that govern the present food system are “deranged” as they promote what I am calling, “disorders of excessive willing.” I will address the differences between the absence of norms and the presence of deranged norms—rules that are lack of rules— in subsequent chapters.

While I make frequent use of Durkheim’s theory and his terminology, neither he, nor the other classical theorists had much to say about food. Mennell et al (1992) point out that Marx’s use of the term diet was in reference to political assembly. Marx’s benefactor and partner, Friedrich Engels, recorded information about the atrocious food quality consumed by the working class in England in his *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845). Yet, as Mennell et al. note, Engels’ observations are more secondary, and so set the standard for later researchers who talk about food to do so as part of a discussion of something like social inequality or racism, not as something to be studied on its own.

Durkheim’s inquiry into food was almost purely confined to its significance in totemic religion and, more broadly, with respect to the sacred and profane as he addressed them in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912). Herbert Spencer, of

whom Durkheim was largely critical, also made references to the religious functions of food, including the offering of food to the dead and the abstaining of food as part of the process of divination. Interestingly, Spencer observed that corpulence served as a marker of social status in China and in African women since it implied that a person was free from the obligation to work.

Echoing Spencer's studies of corpulence, the American sociologist Thorstein Veblen (1857-19) offered some insights into the nature of class distinctions in America in his *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899). According to Veblen, "the custom of festive gatherings probably originated in motives of conviviality and religion but now also serve an invidious purpose (1899/1965, p. 65). The vocabulary Veblen designates for this invidious purpose includes conspicuous consumption, conspicuous waste, and conspicuous leisure. Veblen develops this conspicuous trinity in the context of food most fully in his example of intoxicants and narcotics, writing:

From archaic times down through all the length of the patriarchal regime it has been the office of women to prepare and administer these luxuries, and it has been the prerequisite of the men of gentle birth and breeding to consume them. Drunkenness and other pathological consequences of the free use of stimulants therefore tend in their turn to become honorific (Ibid, p. 62).

Of the theorists widely considered to be "classical," Simmel deals most directly with food in his essay *The Sociology of the Meal* (1910). Simmel, like Durkheim, begins with food's utility for religious rights, but moves into a discussion of the significance of commensality, including who is included at the table and who is excluded. Simmel describes the importance of coordination in eating together, writing:

We know that very primitive people did not eat at definite hours but anachronistically simply when someone was hungry. However, having meals

together leads at once to temporal regularity, for a given circle can only gather at a previously fixed hour—the first conquest of the naturalness of eating (1910: p. 245).

For Simmel, the meal is a form super-imposed onto our natural appetites, which are always stirring with us, and it is the business of meals to oppose these spontaneous appetites, for their satiation can only be had within its confines.

Norbert Elias' *The Civilizing Process* (1939) explains the development of manners among the secular upper classes dating back to the Middle Ages. As far as his interest in food, Elias is perhaps most famous for his discussion of table manners (1939/1978, p.70-108). Aside from his discussion of table manners as markers of social status, Elias offers us comparatively little in the way of food studied as food.

In *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), David Riesman offers some particularly fruitful insights about American's changing relationship with food. Riesman's analysis is interesting because it draws attention to a shift in the symbolic meaning of food in the transition from inner-directed to other-directed society. Riesman describes the symbolic meaning of food to the inner-directed person as:

[the inner-directed type] might use food for display with relatively standardized menus for company and for dining out; what was put on display was a choice cut of meat, an elegant table, and good solid cooking...Having the proper food was something one owed to one's status, one's claim to respectability (1950, p. 142)

Riesman contrasts this with the symbolic meaning of food in the life of the other-directed character type, who puts on display

His taste and not directly his wealth, respectability, cubic capacity, or caloric soundness...the other-directed person is...prepared for the search for marginal differentiation not only in what he sets before his guests but in how it is talked about with them (Ibid)

Riesman's characterization of the symbolic meaning of food in other-directed society foreshadows Bourdieu's (1984) work on food in *Distinction*, and even anticipates Naccarato & Lebesco's (2012) work on culinary capital as a specific type of capital that Americans use to signal their social status. Bourdieu's theory, built upon Marx's work on economic capital, investigates how "multiple forms of capital—economic, cultural, social, and symbolic—circulate across the social field" (Naccarato & Lebesco, 2012, p. 2). Bourdieu contends that this process of capital circulation occurs in practice, since he argues that it is in practice that we "knit together structure and action, meaning and material conditions" (Calhoun & Sennett, 2007, p. 7). Naccarato & Lebesco, following Bourdieu's lead, investigate individual food practices with a lens towards understanding how culinary capital is circulate through these food practices (Naccarato & Lebesco, 2012, p.2).

Social theory helps to inform what we see when we look at food, but food also helps us understand and critique social theory. Perhaps the most surprising omission from the literature is the absence of definitions about the most basic concept in the study of food, food itself. Some of this is by design as Fischler wrote, "while the functionalists looked at food, the structuralists examined cuisine" (1990, p.17). Still, it is surprising that highly regarded books like Tannahill's *Food in History* (1973/1988), Johnston & Baumann's *Foodies* (2010), Naccarato & Lebesco's *Culinary Capital* (2012), DeSolier's *Food and the Self* (2013), Julier's *Eating Together* (2013), and Biltekoff's *Eating Right in America* (2013) all abstain from offering a definition of food even though food occurs or is implied in all of the above titles. My insistence at the outset that food is

primarily will and only secondarily representation stands in stark relief of these studies that use the term food loosely – without ever considering the consequences of such a choice.

Having reviewed the many collective representations concerning food, I have arrived at the inescapable fact that food is will and, as such, the will subsists wholly on itself. One may be tempted to pass over this statement and its attendant significance as mere reductionism, but this would be an error with three significant consequences. First, to ignore that all we eat is will is to forestall all discussions about our moral and immoral relationships to and with food on the grounds that food is something less than us. Second, it is to ignore the obvious examples of animals that attack and eat people especially predatory animals like crocodiles, lions, and tigers. Lastly, it would be to ignore the simultaneous adaptability of environments and the organisms that reside within them and the fragile nature of existence for all organism ranging from humans to blades of grass.

CHAPTER IV  
SETTING THE TABLE

**Methods**

In my introduction, I addressed the importance of Schopenhauer's influence on the fin de siècle at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and his influence on Durkheim and Freud in particular. Yet Schopenhauer's philosophy relies heavily on Plato, and as Mestrovic (1985) argued in his doctoral dissertation, Durkheim and Freud could be read as responding to Plato. This is to say, the use of Durkheim and Freud's work necessarily engages the work of Schopenhauer and Plato, and consequently, the ideas found in each thinker's writings bear the hallmarks of inheritance including similar conceptualizations and vocabularies.

Many of the thinkers and ideas discussed herein have rarely been put into dialogue with one another, as such, this work seeks to place these thinkers in a dialogue with the main interlocutors being myself and Durkheim—although Plato, Freud, Weber, Riesman, and Mestrovic also participate as interlocutors. If multiple parties are to have a discussion they must have a topic to discuss. It follows that food will serve as my vehicle for discussion.

In placing these thinkers in dialogue with one another in a common context, I seek to illuminate important parts of their thought that I believe have been neglected and misinterpreted. This requires more than comparison and contrast, it requires the use of

hermeneutics<sup>6</sup>—the theory and method of understanding— applied not to religious texts<sup>7</sup>, but to the texts of several social theorists—Plato, Durkheim, Freud, Weber, Riesman, and Mestrovic—as well as to the writings of several food studies scholars and investigative journalists. In other words, my method is the hermeneutics of food and the hermeneutics of social theory. If I am to situate my study with the greater schemes of social theory and food studies, my understanding and use of hermeneutics requires further explanation. For this explanation, I turn to Friedrich Schleiermacher, who developed hermeneutics for the purpose of understanding texts, principally, the Bible.

The German theologian, philosopher, and biblical scholar Friedrich Schleiermacher described hermeneutics as “the art of understanding.” I accept Schleiermacher’s premise, and in doing so, make understanding Durkheim and the other social theorists the first part of my study. To say my goal is to understand these authors is not the same as explicating, translating, or applying them. Rather, it entails an understanding of the historical period that the author wrote in as well as knowledge of the primary currents of thought during a given time period. In his *The Hermeneutics: Outline of the 1819 Lectures*, Schleiermacher wrote:

one must first equate oneself with the author by objective and subjective reconstruction before applying the art. With objective reconstruction one proceeds through a knowledge of the language as the author used it.... With subjective reconstruction one proceeds through the knowledge of the author’s inner and outer life (Schleiermacher, 1819/1978, p. 10).

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<sup>6</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher is seen as the father of hermeneutics

<sup>7</sup> The field of hermeneutics is typically described as the method for understanding religious texts

Following Schleirmacher, I acquainted myself with Durkheim’s writings through enrollment in a course dedicated to reading his primary source works— as opposed to interpretations of this work—followed by a careful re-reading of his works with special attention paid to his use of anomie. These re-readings were an essential part of my method, as Schleirmacher wrote, “only from a reading of all of an author’s works can one become familiar with his vocabulary, his character, and his circumstances” (Ibid). The previous chapter on the origins of anomie was only possible after years of reading, since it was only after this period that I become capable of understanding Durkheim’s unique voice in Sociology.

Schleirmacher wrote that the practitioner of hermeneutics must be sensitive to the linguistic content (manifest) as well as the psychological content (latent) in a text. Put differently, the linguistic content of a text refers to what is common and shared in language, while the psychological content refers to the distinguishing features of a particular author’s work (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). Durkheim is a particularly interesting author for hermeneutical analysis because he was keenly aware of the collective nature of language, writing, “a concept is not my concept; I hold it in common with other men...it is the work of a community (Durkheim, 1912/1965, p. 481).

The art of understanding consists primarily in this sensitivity to the linguistic and the psychological content of the text. Nevertheless, this sensitivity cannot be cultivated except through exposure to the historical period—particularly its influences and problems—that a given author is working in. In describing this relationship, Schleirmacher wrote, “the vocabulary and the history of the period in which an author



works constitute the whole within which his texts must be understood with all their peculiarities” (Schleirmacher, 1819/1978, p.10).

In my introduction, I noted Schopenhauer’s influence on the fin de siècle that Durkheim worked in and suggested that understanding Durkheim began with understanding the intellectual forces that were most potent in his milieu. Since Schopenhauer was an all-pervading influence, prior to beginning this project I read both volumes of Schopenhauer’s *World as Will and Representation* (1818). This reading helped me understand why Durkheim was so concerned with limitless desire, he was responding to Schopenhauer’s influence on his milieu. The similarities in vocabulary and content indicate similarities in the linguistic content of Durkheim and Schopenhauer, which I illustrated through a comparison of quotations drawn from both authors on topics that they both addressed—desire, suicide, and the will to life to name a few. The psychological content of Schopenhauer’s work was his creative alliance of Plato and Buddhism to push the bounds of Kant’s philosophy into the realm of “the thing in itself.” The psychological content of Durkheim’s work cannot be divorced from his origins as the descendent of seven generations of rabbis. As discussed in the previous chapter, Durkheim used anomie to refer to the secular equivalent of sin, which he used to describe a wide variety of immoral social phenomenon. Durkheim’s depiction of anomie as a state of immorality was derived from his usage of the term throughout his works, beginning with his critique of Jean Marie Guyau in which he wrote that the absence of all fixed moral rules could never be construed as a system of morality. The latent

meaning in all of his works, then, was a concern with immorality and sin in the context of social life.

The texts that I employ are translations of the originals, which means they have already been interpreted in a sense because the translator had to decide what words to use when an English equivalent did not exist. While my work is indeed interpretive, I draw directly from the primary sources and utilize a large number of quotations to illustrate the consistent use of wording and ideas in each author's works.

There is one important exception, and that is the case of "anomie" in Durkheim's work. Following Mestrovic and Brown (1985), my investigation of the anomie began with etymological research into the origin of the word in Ancient Greece. Then I combined this approach with hermeneutics to understand how it was used and in what contexts. As a result, I was able to distinguish anomie as "lack of rule" rather than the more literal translation of "lack of law." More specifically, Durkheim's use of anomie referred to rules that are lack of rules, that is, to rules that do not provide moral constraint and so are themselves the problem. The only synonym that Durkheim used for anomie is *déreglement*, which translates as "derangement." Durkheim employed his concept of anomie to discuss economics as well as marriage, which is to say, he employed it to study tremendously different phenomenon. This makes it all the more puzzling that Parsons' vulgar translation of anomie as normlessness could have caught on since marriage, of all things, is very much bound up with cultural norms and could never be described as "normless." Thus, I contend that my hermeneutics of primary

source classical social theory, limited as it is by my use of translations, nonetheless improves on the understanding of all the theorists invoked.

Bearing all this in mind, my project began by employing hermeneutics to understand Durkheim and Schopenhauer. Only after understanding them—the previous chapter was constructed with such care to illustrate this understanding— did I begin to discuss the other social theorists who form the corpus of this work. Only after shifting the contexts that these theorists are read in from Parsons/Hobbes to Plato/Schopenhauer, could I begin the second part of my project, the recontextualization and application of classical social theorists to the study of food.

Having outlined my methods, I wish to outline the rest of this project for sake of clarity and consistency. This chapter continues with the origins and meanings of anomie—these were discussed in the previous chapter— as derangement is recontextualized with the goal of (1) extending Durkheim’s theory of derangement to modern society, (2) linking derangement to the practices of the food industry and the consumption industry in general. The next chapter, chapter 4, will apply (1) and (2) above to the problems introduced in chapter 1, including defining food and deranged food. Finally, chapter five will discuss the role of emotions in the modern food system. The sixth chapter will expand the ideas discussed in the previous chapters beyond the food system and will serve as my conclusion.

### **Derangement in Modern Society**

In the previous chapter, I took great pains to establish a genealogy of the term anomie from the Ancient Greeks all the way to Emile Durkheim. Nonetheless, it is still

fashionable in sociology to describe the term anomie as “normlessness,” so I continue my discussion using the only explicit synonym that Durkheim offered for anomie—*déreglement*, which is translated into English as derangement. Derangement in English captures the disturbance in the normal functioning of an item or being, but it fails to capture the sense of immorality that accompanies the French *déreglement*. The deranged society has a forced division of labor governed by rules—used here to refer to norms, laws, customs, and habits—that are actually the absence of rules. Yet the absence of rules is not terribly worrisome unless one subscribes to the view that rules are necessary and, in their absence, life in common is either impossible or highly exploitative. The view that society is natural is an important attribute of this study. What I mean by “natural” is closer to what Darwin, Durkheim, Simmel, Tönnies and other thinkers from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century *fin de siècle* regarded as spontaneous versus the “state of nature” position taken by Hobbes and his followers—including Talcott Parsons.

Consider what social life would look like if there was no strongest, no sense of obligation between members, and no common sentiments to bind them together. In other words, what is human nature? The answer given by Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) in his writings on the state of nature<sup>8</sup>, was that it would result in a “war of all against all.” Parsons followed Hobbes’ depiction of the problem of social order and argued that social integration was the “consensus in society and the conflict between the individual and the larger consensus is understood as deviance” (Mestrovic 1985, p. 354).

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<sup>8</sup> See in particular Hobbes’ *Leviathan* (1651/1982)

Against Hobbes and Parsons, and following Durkheim, I contend society is something natural, the spontaneous cooperation of a cosmic division of labor.

Durkheim's view of society as natural stands in contrast to three famed Western philosophers: Hobbes, Rousseau, and Montesquieu all of whom believed that "society is something that is added to nature" (Durkheim, (1892/1965), p.135-136). Mestrovic (1985) describes Durkheim's position, writing:

Durkheim specifically and explicitly rejected the assumptions of Hobbes on the same grounds that he criticized Rousseau, Montesquieu, Comte and a host of other thinkers, namely, that both the individual and collective levels of existence are equally natural (Mestrovic, 1985, p. 354).

Durkheim argued that society was natural and its residence within the individual was similarly natural, culminating in what he called the collective consciousness, or "the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average member of society (Durkheim, 1893/1984, p. 38-39). In referencing beliefs and sentiments Durkheim was referring to both ideas and emotions, since sentiments are to be understood as social bonds that are felt by the individual.

It is worth pointing out Durkheim does not argue all such beliefs and sentiments are moral, hence, Durkheim leaves open the possibility that social bonds and the feelings they engender can be harmful to the individual. To this end, Durkheim prescribes the distinction of the normal from the pathological as a critical part of the sociological method<sup>9</sup>. The distinction between the normal and pathological are keystones throughout

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<sup>9</sup> Durkheim devotes an entire chapter in his *Rules of the Sociological Method* (1895) to the distinction of the normal from the pathological—from the deranged.

Durkheim's works, many of which, are actually included in this dissertation – the natural division of labor versus the forced division of labor being the most important in this project. Amazingly, one of the examples that Durkheim offers appears in *Moral Education* (19), as Durkheim writes, “With a certain amount of nourishment a normal man is no longer hungry: it is the bulimiac who cannot be satisfied” (p. 39). Durkheim distinguishes between the normal person's hunger with its fixed limit of nourishment and the pathological bulimic who gorges himself (excess will) and then quickly purges all of their acquired nourishment (excessive denial of the will). In contrast to the bulimic, the anorexic person does not consume enough nourishment, preferring to abstain from consumption as much as possible. Excessive willing, unconstrained by society, drives both the bulimic and the anorexic to deny the will to life, although the bulimic first overindulges the will to life by overeating and then forces themselves to throw up. In both cases, the individual is driven by a pathological will to life.

In the following chapter (Chapter 4), I critique both definitions of food and their general absence from academic sources on the grounds that one must distinguish between the normal and pathological forms of food and consumption if one is truly to undertake a Durkheimian sociology of food.

Modern sociology often regards all social bonds as good and helpful—the temptation to see all foods as nothing more than sources of energy is the same reductive thinking carried out in a different discipline— but Durkheim was more cautious noting that integration into a system with permissive rules was extremely painful for individuals, writing:

When there is no other aim but to outstrip constantly the point arrived at, how painful to be thrown back!...Since imagination is hungry for novelty, and ungoverned, it gropes at random (1897/1951, p. 257).

The pain generated by ceaseless desire is a fixture of Durkheim's thought stemming from the tremendous influence Schopenhauer had on Durkheim specifically, and the fin de siècle at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in general (Magee 1983; Mestrovic 1988). Schopenhauer describes the relationship between the will's striving and pain, writing:

[The will] always strives, because striving is its sole nature, to which no attained goal can put an end. Such striving is therefore incapable of final satisfaction....[A]ll striving springs from want or deficiency, from dissatisfaction with one's own state or condition, and is therefore suffering so long as it is not satisfied. No satisfaction, however, is lasting; on the contrary, it is always merely the starting point of a fresh striving. (Schopenhauer, [1818/1859] 1969, p. 308-309).

Schopenhauer's claim that ceaseless desire and striving towards infinity is the essential character of the will—which animates all phenomena—is recast by Durkheim in light of society's moral prescriptions directed towards the infinite. Durkheim writes:

The passion for infinity is commonly presented as a mark of moral distinction, even though it cannot appear except in deranged consciences which establish as a rule the derangement from which they suffer...since this disorder is at its apex in the economic world, it has the most victims there" (Durkheim, 1897/1983, p. 283).

The passion for infinity is never moral, as the rules that do not have natural limits become a lack of rule. For Durkheim, morality consists precisely in the constraint of individual egoism, which is why he singles out the economic sector as a symptom, arguing that its ceaseless pursuit of more had come to be characteristic of social life at large, not simply the economic sector. Thus, Durkheim distinguishes between the

pathological desire for more profit, and the normal desire for profit that sets limits to itself. This dissertation purports to study “rules that are lack of rules” in the context of culture, economics, and politics. To this end, I advance the phrase “consumption industry” to refer to businesses engaged in the practice of getting people to ceaselessly consume<sup>10</sup>.

### **The Consumption Industry and the Manipulation of Constraint**

The ceaseless striving of the will and its manifestation in social life leads one to the ceaseless pursuit of knowledge. The American Political Philosopher Allan Bloom offers food for thought on this topic, writing:

The soul’s longing, its intolerable irritation under the constraints of the conditional and limited, may very well require encouragement at the outset. At all events, whatever the cause, our students have lost the practice of and the taste for reading. (Bloom, 1987, p. 62).

Bloom asserts that the soul’s longing must be cultivated, implying that its longing is natural but in danger of being extinguished if not nurtured—in Bloom’s case by an education in the “great books”—by society. One must ask if Bloom is correct in asserting that the infinite longings must be stoked, after all, if the longings are truly infinite how can they diminish within the temporal limits of time and space? Durkheim also discusses the infinite longing to know that stirs the human soul, writing:

But one might object that if one satisfies his hunger with a limited quantity of food, it does not follow that one can satiate his intellect with a determinate quantity of knowledge. This is a mistake....we cannot lead a more vigorous intellectual life than that which is compatible with the condition and over-all development of our central nervous system at that point in time. If we try to go

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<sup>10</sup> Consume is used here in the broadest sense referring not just to literal consumption of food and drink but also to consumption of ideas and feelings.



beyond this limit, the foundation of our mental life will be disrupted, and, as a result, the mental life itself (Durkheim, p. 39).

Durkheim contends that there are limits to our appetites for food and knowledge, these constraints are the natural extension of society within us. It seems more likely, then, to assert that the absence of infinite longings is bound up in students' inability and distaste for reading. Drawing on Durkheim and Schopenhauer, Bloom's depiction is particularly interesting since it implies a retreat from, or perhaps a denial of, the fervor that characterizes the will to life.

However, these limits are viewed as obstacles to be overcome by the consumption industry. Indeed, ceaseless consumption requires that the limits on consumption be removed including financial, biological, and cultural constraints. Credit cards are perhaps the most obvious attempt to unleash egoism since they allow individuals to purchase things that they cannot actually afford. Credit, in general, deranges the traditional constraint played by financial means making it possible for almost every individual to gratify their desires even when they lack the financial capacity to do so. This is an essential feature of the consumption industry.

Another traditional constraint that the consumption industry has worked to remove is the biological constraints on literal consumption, which is to say, the consumption of food. The food industry's heavy investment in neurological research related to salt, sugar, and fat turned up several findings that the industry has employed to increase consumption of its products. In the 1970s a Boston Mathematician named Joseph Balintfy identified "the bliss point" in sugary foods, that is, the "precise amount of sweetness—no more, no less—that makes food and drinks most enjoyable" (Moss,

2013, p. 10). Using this information, the food technicians who worked for these large food companies were able to engineer processed foods that produced the most pleasant somatic symptoms in consumers.

The discovery of the bliss point resulted in the consumption industry's heavy reliance on sugar to exploit the body's natural division of labor. However, sugar is not the only ingredient employed to derange biology, the food industry also makes extensive use of salt in its product formulations. The Monell Research Center published a paper in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* (2012) that showed babies are born liking sweet tastes, but they naturally dislike salt. Babies that were fed baby food with low sodium or no sodium did not like the taste of the salty solutions created by the researchers. The babies who ate diets high in salt however, preferred the salty solution. The finding was startling, the deep love of salty food is the result of nurture, not nature. Moss (2013) argues that this finding points to a deeply troubling idea, namely, that the natural constraint against a diet high in sodium has been removed by the food industry, and the modern obsession with salty food is an artificially induced desire. More troubling still is the link between high sodium diets and high blood pressure, also known as hypertension. The increase in blood pressure has been correlated with increased rates of cardiovascular disease, which includes stroke, coronary heart disease, and heart failure.

In light of these companies' efforts to trigger powerful somatic responses with their food products, it should come as little surprise that the large food companies refer to their best customers—the people who purchase and consume the highest volume of

their products—as “heavy users.” The tendency to describe consumers of processed foods using the same language as the consumers of drugs is another interesting finding of Moss’ excellent book on the food industry (Moss, 2013, p.282). While the language of addiction conjures up images of junkies robbing convenience stores to score enough money to buy some more drugs, it does not conjure images of people eating an entire package of Oreos. In spite of this difference, Moss describes a study—nicknamed “Crave It”—by neuropsychologist and mathematician Howard Moskowitz which found:

people are drawn to foods that are heavily salty, sweet, or fatty for reasons other than hunger. They are drawn to these foods by emotional cues and the wish to avoid the lousy feelings the body generates as a way to defend against starvation (Moss, 2013, p. 278).

The fear of hunger is deeply rooted in biology, including the biology of humans, which is why fasting is considered a pious act, since it is essentially the denial of the will to life. The food companies are aware of both the fear of hunger, and the linkage between piety and fasting, thus they produce many products designed to keep consumers full longer. Yet this is a direct contraction of the consumption industry, which thrives on continuous consumption and would be in danger if its products satiated consumers— as opposed to igniting their hungers and desires. Therefore, such labels should be viewed with suspicion since the ingredients are typically portrayed as healthy—whole grains are reported to keep consumers full longer—although the addition of high levels of salt, sugar, and fat to such products counteract the body’s natural response to such products. Indeed, the production and distribution of foods that actually made consumers full and limited their consumption are directly opposed to the aims of the consumption industry. If there was ever a conflict of interest in business, this is most assuredly it.

Having discussed the derangement of financial and biological constraints, I move to discuss the derangement of cultural constraints. The derangement of cultural constraints on consumption is a particularly difficult task in a country with deep Protestant roots. For now, I will only say that the consumption industry thrives on the exploitation of pre-packaged emotions. The work of the Frankfurt school—especially that of Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse— noted the culture industry’s reliance on pre-packaged ideas. However, Mestrovic (1997) notes that the Frankfurt school missed the role of prepackaged emotions. Prepackaged emotions, it might be theorized, produce prepackaged relationships between people, yet the emotions that are packaged are not virtuous emotions like the sense of duty, but more narcissistic emotions like apathy and jealousy. The constant emotional bombardment of the consumer, carried out by the consumption industry, blunts their emotion excitation, leaving a mass society that longs for nothing higher than immediate gratification.

With the rise of the consumption industry, and its prerogative for constant consumption, modern people in the United States have lost the practice of cooking and their taste for engaging with their food. As one student told me bluntly, “I don’t want to wait for water to boil, I could spend that time doing something else.” To account for these changes I place the hermeneutics of food and the art of food in a dialogue with one another. This approach allows me to capture the ideas about food in modern America as well as the emotions attached to food.

If one fails to take account of the ideas and the emotions attached to food, one cannot account for the emotionally laden practices of binge eating, bulimia, anorexia,

and gluttony all of which are better understood in the context of sublimating Eros. Ignoring Eros' capacity for unity is a symptom of the Spencerian "survival of the fittest" perspective, which views social life as a zero sum game. However, if one accounts for Eros' drive towards unity one arrives at the Darwinian perspective of cooperation between organisms, which reveals the additional benefits organisms accrue through cooperation including greater flourishing through specialization, increased interdependence, and a decrease in the intensity of the struggle for existence.

To illustrate the difference between the Spencerian and Darwinian studies of food and culture consider the social phenomenon of "the second shift." Food studies scholars have been especially critical of women's "second shift," returning from work only to enter the kitchen and prepare a meal for their families (Hochschild & Machung, 1989). Such studies tell us women are exploited by their husbands as well as patriarchal society at large, which they should resist by either forcing their husbands to cook or using their extra income to purchase meals out. Yet such studies ignore the very obvious fact that food has to get on the table somehow, and cooperation between family members would ease the difficulty of placing it there. If one family member is left to cook the meal on their own, it should be equally lucid that the other family members depend on said cook, and that the cook deserves their respect and gratitude. All members should, in a natural division of labor, feel their need for one another. The absence of these sentiments does not stem from a derangement of the relations between the sexes, but from the derangement of the relations throughout society. It follows, simply removing women from the kitchen is not a real solution, nor is replacing them with men, or

children for that matter. The real problem is the absence of the powerful sentiments and obligations which naturally form between individuals who cooperate with one another. To that end, the importance of emotional infrastructure in the food system will be expanded on in Chapter 5 as well as in the conclusion.

## CHAPTER V

### FOOD: THE NORMAL & ABNORMAL FORMS

#### **The Problem with Indefinable Food**

From the outset this project hinges on advancing a different understanding of food than is common in mainstream American culture and mainstream academia alike. Searching through vast volumes on food— from historical texts to careful analyses of the nutritional components of food— turned up much less than I expected in terms of a working definition. The *Routledge International Handbook of Food Studies* (2013), *Food: A Culinary History* (1996), *Food: The History of Taste* (2007), *Good to Eat* (1985) as well as Reay Tannahill’s famous *Food in History* (1973) all spend hundreds of pages talking about the nuances of food and cuisine without ever pausing to define what food is. Books ranging from *The Penguin Atlas of Food* (2003) to *What is America Eating?* (1986)—a compilation of speeches from a symposium sponsored by the Food and Nutrition Board (FNB)— brought to the foreground a major problem, namely, definitions of food are actually quite difficult to find. For example, take this excerpt from a speech made by well-known dietician, Joan Gussow:

In the thirty-four years I’ve been in the field of nutrition...I have watched real food disappear from large areas of the supermarket and from much of the rest of the eating world...[they are replaced by] products constructed largely around commerce and hope, supported by frighteningly little actual knowledge

Gussow criticizes the retreat of real food from large portions of the grocery store while simultaneously avoiding defining food and its opposite. One is left to ponder what these real foods are that disappeared and what exactly is left in the grocery store?

Despite the gray area, strong claims like the one made above are the rule, rather than the

exception, when it comes to food criticism - regardless of discipline. The journalist Michael Pollan has written several books about food and the food industry, but despite the massive attention his books have garnered, neither *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (2006) nor *In Defense of Food* (2008) offer their readers a straightforward definition of food. This is all the more troubling since Pollan offers advice as to what people should eat with the very first line of *In Defense of Food* writing, "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly Plants" (p. 1). Pollan's *In Defense of Food* (2008) includes a chapter titled Eat Food: Food Defined, but it does not include an actual definition of food but a set of rules designed to help one eat food. The rules include:

1. Don't eat anything your great grandmother wouldn't recognize as food
2. Avoid food products containing ingredients that are
  - a. Unfamiliar
  - b. Unpronounceable
  - c. More than five in number, or that include
  - d. High-fructose corn syrup
3. Avoid food products that make health claims
4. Shop the peripheries of the supermarket and stay out of the middle
5. Get out of the supermarket whenever possible

Pollan's rules are an admittedly good starting place but they fall short for several reasons. First, as one of my Professors pointed out, if your great grandmother was not knowledgeable about food, she would not be the right person to consult. Second, the natural food system is vast and avoiding ingredients that are unfamiliar reduces the diversity in the diet, and redirects the consumer to focus on pantry staples, which are perhaps even more likely to be deranged – a topic I will discuss in short order. Third, in advising consumers to "eat mostly plants" Pollan, perhaps inadvertently, levels all plants. From a nutrition perspective this is problematic since plants have wildly different



nutritional characteristics with plants like potatoes and sweet corn accounting for more calories, 110 and 90 calories respectively, than bell peppers and carrots, 25 and 30 calories respectively. Moreover, potatoes are an excellent source of potassium (620 mg in a medium potato or 18% of the daily value), carbohydrates (26 g, 9% of the daily value), and even contain 45% of the recommended daily allowance of Vitamin C. One bell pepper contains 190% of the recommended daily allowance of Vitamin C, while one carrot contains 110% of the recommended daily allowance of Vitamin A. In other words, it is not sufficient to tell people they need to eat plants because the category -which includes fruits, vegetables, grains and legumes- is vast and eating a balance of these plants is key to obtaining essential proteins. But even this critique is marred by a serious problem, people don't eat big sticks of vitamins and nutrients, they consume these in the form of food which makes stances like Pollan's, and prescriptive rules in general, all the more problematic in light of the glaring absence of a definition of food from the discussion. Nonetheless, if I am to discuss deranged food in a meaningful way, I must advance some ideas about food that is not deranged.

### **Food Defined**

In her book *Accounting for Taste* (2004), Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson defines food as “the material substance we humans consume to meet the physiological requirements for sustenance; food is what we eat to live” (p. 3). Ferguson's definition is grounded in biological need, but lacks clarity and utility since it only recognizes food as a material substance and biological necessity. As a result, Ferguson's definition prevents her from distinguishing foods produced by nature and those produced at the expense of

nature, a dichotomy that I will take up in successive sections. The *Merriam Webster*

*Dictionary* builds on this definition in a number of ways:

1. material consisting essentially of protein, carbohydrate, and fat used in the body of an organism to sustain growth, repair, and vital processes and to furnish energy; *also*: such food together with supplementary substances (as minerals, vitamins, and condiments)
2. inorganic substances absorbed by plants in gaseous form or in water solution
3. nutrient in solid form
4. something that nourishes, sustains, or supplies

The dictionary definition of food refracts some of the distinctions made by Ferguson, notably, the material state of food and its nourishing properties. The addition of protein, carbohydrates, and fat to the definition is a definite shift away from Ferguson's definition, but further problematizes the already murky concept of food products. The problems beg two interrelated questions: Is the amalgamation of vitamins and minerals into a material form – powder, pill, bar—sufficient to sustain organic life? Is this amalgamation sufficient to sustain societies—understood in the context of plants, animals, and humans—or is there more to sustenance than biology? The answers to these questions require considerable clarification and cannot be answered apart from moral, cultural, and economic issues, which will be covered in the following sections. For now, I return to defining food and the main categories that authors have divided food into.

The main identifiers that appear when defining food can be grouped together in their emphasis on physiology/sustenance and nutritional components (protein, carbs, fat and vitamins). The first definition contends that food only has sustaining properties and consequently either ignores or eliminates anything that people consume that makes them sick, or otherwise brings them infirmity rather than health. According to this definition,

anything that we consume that helps to prolong our life is food while anything that shortens our life must be its inverse – poison as it were. This definition has a strict utilitarian slant to it, and as a result, misses the obvious fact that food is also a great source of pleasure. Cultural food choices are rooted in both necessity and pleasure, as aversions to food differ from culture to culture, and reflect a culture’s aesthetics as well as its interdependence on nature.

The second definition views food as a composition of vitamin and mineral “organs” that produce energy in the form of calories for their consumer. The nutrients are the essential components of food, greater individually than as the sum of their collective parts. One problem with this definition is that it encourages people to view food as nothing more than calories and/or nutrient components. This problem is further exacerbated by fad diets that encourage people to consume a lot of a particular nutrient such as Atkin’s diet. The Paleo diet is especially problematic because it encourages people to eat like their Paleolithic ancestors, which sounds like good advice, but is next to impossible in light of USDA research that has demonstrated most meat, fruits, and vegetables sold in American supermarkets today possess considerably less nutrients than those produced before World War II<sup>11</sup>. Lastly, all these types of definitions ignore the

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<sup>11</sup> The demands of industrial food distributors include long shelf life and durability in transport, two things which vary inversely with nutrient content. The vitamins and minerals that naturally occur in food are volatile compounds that lead to spoilage and rot, which lower profit margins for industrial producers and distributors. To offset this, much of modern food has been modified to increase its durability and shelf life and, subsequently, reducing the importance of the distance from farm to table. The cost of this shift is borne by consumers who now must eat more fruits and vegetables –which they do not want to do—and consequently more calories if they are to obtain the same amount of vitamins and minerals as consumers did prior to WWII.

vehicle for delivering these calories and vitamins, what is being consumed, for a more literal understanding of food that is more easily operationalized.

Building on these definitions, I wish to advance a definition of food as something that sustains life, but does so through the utilization of the collective constituent elements (vitamins, minerals, calories) that naturally occur within a material substance. My insistence on the collectiveness of these elements is important, leading to the conclusion that the whole of any food is greater than the sum of its collective parts. To this end, vitamin supplements and isolated compounds are not food in the sense of the word as I will use it, but are better considered deranged food since they extract the vitamins and minerals that naturally occur in food with the aim of delivering an “unadulterated” supply to their consumer.

Here one uncovers the first problem, the view of natural production of food as slow, encumbered, and adulterating the nutrients therein. In seeking to improve on this natural and spontaneous division of labor between all organic life, particular nutrients are elevated above others to the detriment of food and the food system – this is the essence of derangement. I take Durkheim’s insistence that the division of labor’s outcomes are very different when it is healthy versus when it was sick to be tremendously insightful and, consequently, draw a fine distinction between foods produced by and possessing a healthy division of labor and those that were not and do not. Describing the effects of the healthy division of labor, Durkheim writes:

The most notable effect of the division of labour is not that it increases the productivity of the functions that are divided in this way, but that it links them very closely together. In all these cases its role is not simply to embellish or

improve existing societies, but to make possible societies which, without these functions, would not exist (1893/1984, p. 21).

In Durkheim's example the division of labor links functions more closely together making new societies possible, not just improving the efficiency or grandeur of the old ones. Similarly, the division of labor links nutrients together, infuses them with a will to life, and produces new foods – foods *not possible prior* to the increased linkages between functions. The division of labor links all organisms together, humans included, in a phenomenon immortalized by *The Lion King* as “the circle of life.” These linkages engender mutual dependence among organisms—themselves all manifestations of Schopenhauer's will to life—producing an ecosystem that begins as a moral community that encapsulates all organisms and, in turn, mutually modifies organisms into an ecosystem that eases the struggle for existence.

One may object to this definition and criticize it as cumbersome, but I wish to illustrate how my definition contains the seeds of other definitions of food and plants them in more fertile soil. In *The Real Food Revival* (2005), Vinton and Espuelas describe ‘Real Food’ as “delicious, produced as locally as possible, sustainable, affordable, and accessible” (p. xiii). One is tempted to immediately criticize the definition as largely subjective since what is delicious, affordable, and accessible is linked to the individual's resources and personal preferences. However, in objecting to the specifics, one may miss the obvious whole – Real Food is a division of labor that includes all five attributes but is not reducible to any of these five. Vinton & Espuelas define real food by its essence, that is, by addressing those qualities that are irreducible. However, they stop short of explaining what that essence is and why the destruction of

that essence is morally dubious. In short, they see two mutually exclusive forms of the division of labor, one in the Real Food that makes it delicious, and the other in the realm of political economy that makes it difficult to obtain and distribute without harming the environment. The problem with this approach is it treats these divisions of labor as separate—one spontaneous and natural, the other forced and deranged—rather than bound up with one another. The result of a spontaneous division of labor that engenders mutual dependence is nutritional diversity (diverse nutrients), culinary diversity (diverse foods), and moral cohesion.

There is perhaps no better exemplification of this idea than that of terroir. Justin Hughes, associate professor and director of the Intellectual Property Law Program at the Cardozo School of Law describes terroir in his article *Champagne, Feta, and Bourbon: The Spirited Debate about Geographical Indications* (2006) writing:

Terroir has no direct English translation, but the notion behind the Latinate word is simple: the product's qualities 'come with the territory.' To put it less poetically, terroir is the idea of an 'essential land/qualities nexus.' This is the idea of terroir: that the particular geography produces particular characteristics that cannot be imitated in other regions (Hughes, 2006, p. 299).

This bond between environment and food is captured beautifully by Larry Olmsted in his book *Real Food Fake Food* (2016) as he writes:

The rare Royal Red shrimp, arguably the best-tasting shrimp in existence, has been found in only two locations worldwide, both deep water pockets off the eastern coast of the United State...Such plants and animals are Mother Nature's way of reminding us that the world is varied and that not all places are the same. Ecosystems are amazingly complex, from climate, geography, and geology down to the insect and microbial level. This makes particular places better or worse than others at growing particular things (Olmstead, 2016, p.114).

In other words, terroir stems from ecosystems—themselves natural manifestations of the division of labor—which are formed spontaneously through the natural division of labor. Durkheim specifically outlines two conditions brought about by this natural division of labor that prevent derangement writing, “a state of anomie is impossible wherever organs solidly linked together are in sufficient contact and sufficiently lengthy contact (Durkheim, 1893/1984, p. 304). The sufficient contact and sufficiently lengthy contact are powerful forces since they link the organisms in an ecosystem more tightly together, resulting in food with distinct properties that also bear the mark of a moral community. In this sense, terroir connotes an understanding of food that is more than the sum of its parts. It’s “realness” is the product of a moral community formed among organisms that have come to be interdependent on one another.

In his summary of John Dewey’s famous essay *The Reflect Arc Concept in Psychology*, David Hildebrand describes Dewey’s criticism of the relationship between organisms and their environment writing, “the nature of organisms is to interact continuously with their environment in a manner that is cumulative and mutually modifying (Hildebrand, 2008, p.15). Dewey helps to illustrate that terroir is not something to aspire to, it is a happening that is always in process, the result of an infinite number of mutual modifications brought about by the division of labor. The idea of mutual modification is of extreme importance to this project and will appear in every chapter hereafter. The natural division of labor exerts influence that is mutually modifying, rather than unilaterally modifying, a distinction that helps to illuminate how both the food and the food system have become deranged.

One may argue that ecosystems are the products of this mutual modification, rather than their starting point, and contend the division of labor makes ecosystems possible. The mutual modification at the heart of the division of labor creates strong bonds between organisms. The strength of these bonds varies inversely with the diversity of the ecosystem so more diverse ecosystems are much more interdependent than ecosystems that possess a monoculture of a particular staple like wheat. Durkheim discusses the relationship between similarity and constraint in the conclusion of *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893/1984) writing:

Thus if only those ties were forged that were based on similarities, the disappearance of the segmentary type of society would be accompanied by a steady decline in morality. Man would no longer be held adequately under control. He would no longer feel around him and above him that salutary pressure of society that moderates his egoism, making him a moral creature. This it is that constitutes the moral value of the division of labor. Through it the individual is once more made aware of his dependent state vis-à-vis society. It is from society that proceed those forces that hold him in check and keep him within bounds. In short, since the division of labor becomes the predominant source of social solidarity, at the same time it becomes the foundation of the moral order (Durkheim, 1893/1984, p. 333).

Durkheim's comments on morality based on sameness corresponds to an ecosystem with a forced division of labor. He cites Darwin's writings on sameness and paraphrases them writing, "two organisms vie with each other more keenly the more alike they are. Having the same needs and pursuing the same purposes, they are everywhere to be found in a state of rivalry" (Durkheim, 1893/1984, p. 208). Such ecosystems result in poorer health for the organisms that inhabit them and the subsequent introduction of vast quantities of pesticides and antibiotics to prevent sickness. To this end, food produced in a forced division of labor is always of an inferior



quality in terms of its nutrients, its impact on the environment, and its relations with other organisms—including humans. Under such circumstances neither humanity nor plant life feels ‘salutary pressure’ and, consequently, both lapse into states of egoism at the expense of one another. The plant requires help if it is to spread its seed, a task performed by rain, wind, water, birds, insects and humanity. The human requires help from the food in the form of nourishment— food that is heavily medicated does not provide such nourishment—a task performed by the interdependence of the other organisms that live in proximity to the plant. Through their interdependence they work to keep one another in a state of health.

One may question if my discussion of the division of labor, food, and morality is stretching Durkheim’s theory beyond its limits, nevertheless, there is a precedent in the literature for my approach. Durkheim’s teacher Alfred Espinas wrote a book on animal societies. Durkheim uses the works of Darwin to illustrate his idea of organic solidarity in *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893). It should be noted that Darwin never used the phrase “survival of the fittest,” for which he is so often given credit. Herbert Spencer, whom Durkheim despised and criticized voraciously throughout his works<sup>12</sup>, actually coined the phrase “survival of the fittest.” Darwin described biological organisms as engaged in a “struggle for existence,” that is to say, in a collective and open-ended struggle. Cooperation and interdependence among organisms engender mutually assured destruction, a key point that “survival of the fittest” not only fails to convey, but outright

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<sup>12</sup> See especially *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893)

denies. Consider the following passage about Darwin's theory in Park & Burgess' famous book *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (1921)

The formula "struggle for existence," familiar in human affairs, was used by Darwin in his interpretation of organic life, and he [Pg 514] showed that we gain clearness in our outlook on animate nature if we recognize there, in continual process, a struggle for existence not merely analogous to, but fundamentally the same as, that which goes on in human life...the phrase "struggle for existence" was meant to be a shorthand formula, summing up a vast variety of strife and endeavor, of thrust and parry, of action and reaction (Park & Burgess, 1921, p. 514).

This important passage is expanded upon with a short, but extremely profound passage, just a few pages later:

The term "struggle for existence" is used in a large and metaphorical sense, including dependence of one being on another, and including (which is more important) not only the life of the individual but success in leaving progeny" (Park & Burgess, 1921, p. 516).

Having already noted the impact Darwin's thought had on Durkheim, one can move to discuss how the unpacked definition of the struggle for existence is made manifest in Durkheim. Mestrovic describes the shift from Darwin to Durkheim, writing:

It was a short step for Durkheim to draw upon Darwin's insights and to conclude, in his classic book, *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893), that the struggle for existence within and among societies is ameliorated by the "cooperation" and the division of labor. Durkheim added that this cooperation or division of labor must be "spontaneous," and he warned against the "forced division of labor"— which is dysfunctional (Mestrovic, 2012, p. 138).

Schopenhauer, whose influence on Durkheim was also noted by Mestrovic (1988a, 1988b, 1989), devotes considerable time to discussing morality in nature in his works *The Will in Nature* (1836) and *The World as Will and Representation* (1818). In fact, Schopenhauer's discussion of will in plants and animals adds another dimension to this discussion since he claims that plants and animals do not possess the ability for

reflective consciousness and are instead composed entirely of will, and consequently pure egoism. One may ask if morality is possible between plants and animals given Schopenhauer's conception? Schopenhauer's believed it was and gave the example of the life cycle of a particular flower for illustration, writing:

In the flowering season, the female flower of the *dioecious Vallisneria* unwinds the spiral thread of the stem that had been holding it at the bottom of the water, and uses it to rise to the surface. At just the same time, the male flower tears itself away from the short stem on which it had been growing at the bottom of the water, and so by sacrificing its life it reaches the surface and swims around looking for the female flower. Then, after pollination, the female contracts its spirals and withdraws back to the bottom where the fruit develops (Schopenhauer, 1818, p. 185).

As I noted above, Durkheim described the relationship between social will and egoism writing, "He would no longer feel around him and above him that salutary pressure of society that moderates his egoism, making him a moral creature" (Durkheim, 1893/1984, p.333). If the division of labor produces social pressure and, consequently, morally constrains individuals, then one might also say that the division of labor produces moral constraint among plants and animals through its pressures exerted in the form of a diverse ecosystem. Durkheim fully conceived this idea and described it in vivid detail, writing:

Moreover, everyone has noticed that in the same field, beside cereal crops there can grow a very great number of weeds. The animals likewise do better in the struggle [for existence] the more they differ from one another. On an oak tree are to be found up to two hundred species of insects that have no contacts with one another save those of good neighborliness. Some feed on the fruits of the tree, others on leaves, yet more on bark and roots...in the same way, within an organism what lessens the rivalry between the different tissues is the fact that they feed on different substances (Durkheim, 1893/1984, p. 209).

From this quote and the prior discussion, one can underscore another important idea, namely, the procreation and survival of subsequent generations of a given organism

are bound up in the mutual dependence—moral cohesion—among organisms in an ecosystem. Such is the case of the male Black Widow Spider and the male Praying Mantis, both of which are consumed by the female shortly after completing mating. The will to life is therefore transferred from one generation to the next, a tiny ripple that permeates throughout the entire ecosystem. Larry Olmstead (2016) captures this point in the conclusion of his *Real Food Fake Food* writing:

Like a stone tossed in a pond, deciding what to eat has a ripple effect ... When you choose to eat Real Food, your immediate benefit is that it tastes good. Your long-term benefit is that it is almost always healthier. In many cases it is also more sustainable, healthier for the environment, and supports people whose work, methods, and entire communities make the world a better place (Olmstead, 2016, p.276).

The idea of food choice as a moral choice is a compelling one, not just in the sense of making food moral, but as an opportunity to participate in an already formed moral community. But what is this moral community? One may rightly point out “commensalism,” or symbiotic relationships between organisms, seems to imply that organisms are just living together rather than subsisting on one another. In addition, it might seem to ignore within-species variation producing better consumers since certain organisms possess a genetic mutation making them better suited to the task of consumption. I do not deny that organisms subsist on one another, nor do I ignore the charge of evolution producing more capable predators. However, in both cases there is an implicit relationship between organisms already place which is important for two reasons.

First, evolution presupposes that a predator has evolved to be a better consumer of animals, while the prey has evolved to protect itself against its predators and to be a

better consumer of its food supply whether ant, plants, and other small animals. Successive generations of poison arrow frogs do not evolve more toxic poison unless another organism depends on them for sustenance. Second, the consumption of one organism by another is both moral and necessary when one understands a given ecosystem was formed through a relationship based on interdependence and mutual modification.

Humans possess the ability to abstract from their sense perceptions and intuitions, an ability we do not share with plant and animals. As such, humans possess the ability to create abstract representations to illustrate intuitively understood “rules” at work in the animal kingdom, which include humans’ ability to represent their dependence on their food sources, their environment, and each other in abstract forms. It is important to note abstract representations run the risk of interfering or blocking the intuitive perceptions of humans and leading them to ignore the moral constraints naturally at work in their ecosystem. In this sense, human morality comes from recognizing our dependence on other organisms, the environment, and our need to sustain the moral relationships upon which our ecosystems were founded. To this end, humanity is not greater than the other organisms linked together in this ecosystem, but merely distinct organs that have their place and function. To this end, I use the term “food” to refer to the products of such an arrangement. Producers of deranged food, the topic of my next section, view food as something to be fixed, not as something holistic and possessing its own natural interrelations. One might note that this is a very

democratic view of food, since it topples any aristocratic pretenses that might suggest one part of the system matters more than another part.

### **Deranged Food**

The result of a forced division of labor is unhealthy food and an unhealthy food system, but the issues pertaining to a deranged food system will be taken up in subsequent chapters. For now, I wish to focus on deranged food as an individual phenomenon. Michael Pollan succinctly summarizes the pervasiveness of this problem in his book *In Defense of Food* (2008) writing:

And you're better off eating whole fresh foods rather than processed food products. That's what I mean by the recommendation to "eat food"...For while it used to be that food was all you *could* eat, today there are thousands of other edible foodlike substances in the supermarket. These novel products of food science often come in packages elaborately festooned with health claims, which brings me to another, somewhat counterintuitive, piece of advice: If you're concerned about your health, you should probably avoid products that make health claims. Why? Because a health claim on a food product is a strong indication it's not really food, and food is what you want to eat (Pollan, 2008, p. 1-2).

Pollan draws the distinction between whole fresh foods and processed food products, a distinction that needs some clarification. Pollan is building up to his rules for eating food, outlined earlier in this chapter, so he first establishes whole foods from processed food products. Processing food is difficult to define because it is difficult to advance a definition that doesn't demonize foods that are not eaten straight from the ground or from the animal. This is problematic since products like cheese, especially parmesan reggiano, could be considered processed if the definition was too limiting in terms of the role that people played in producing it. Conversely, too loose a definition makes it so that Kraft American singles are considered cheese, when they are in fact a

processed cheese product that has been tailored to increase its shelf life indefinitely – a process that drastically reduces the nutrients found therein.

I will content myself to say that food has passed from prepared to processed when chemical compounds are isolated from their naturally occurring source and used to extend the shelf life or increase the appeal to customers. In this sense, bacon that is made by curing a pork belly with salt, sugar, and celery – which naturally contains the nitrites that are often replaced by sodium nitrate, or “pink salt”— is food that has been prepared with respect to the natural division of labor between all the ingredients. Similarly, most forms of pickles and preserves including those made with meat (jerky), fish (salt cod), fruit (jam, jelly, preserves, marmalade), and vegetables (pickles, kimchi, sauerkraut) are historically made with only a small handful of ingredients – salt, sugar, and spices. Only a handful of methods are employed in this regard such as salting, smoking, sun drying, boiling off impurities, and canning. On the other hand, beverages that have been fortified with extra vitamins and minerals are processed—by which I mean deranged—because their present state was achieved through manipulating their naturally occurring nutrients and mechanically changing the division of labor, an arrangement that had slowly come into being through a process of mutual modification over the course of thousands of years. The addition of vitamin d to milk and iodizing salt are good examples of deranged foods although both were deranged because of deficiencies within the average American diet. Iodized salt is particularly deranged since increasing one’s daily iodine intake with iodized salt simultaneously increase’s one’s intake of sodium. In summary, the primary characteristic of deranged food is the interference with and subsequent rearranging of the

natural division of labor found within the food itself. This involves destroying the linkages between the physical food and its nutrient components with the goal of isolating these components.

To illustrate this practice and its many nuances, I will discuss the food technology company, Soylent. Following Durkheim, I contend that the removal of traditional constraints and their subsequent replacement with new rules that are lack of rules is to be characterized as derangement. To this end, Soylent is the quintessential example of the derangement of food as I will showcase from an analysis of its own website.

Soylent's website greets its visitors with a microcosm of the issues to be discussed in this chapter, "Food that frees you. We fuel our bodies every day, and often it feels like hard work. That seemed wrong, so we created Soylent." The idea of being freed from food, is an interesting one since its consumption is common to all members of the human race as well as organic life on the whole. Rob Lyons (2011) noted, "[m]ost of the world's population, for most of human history, has lived in a constant struggle to obtain enough food to survive and thrive" (p. 1). Lyons is correct, and his comments illuminate another important idea, that humanity has *struggled* for most of its history to get enough to eat and, by extension, expended much energy in pursuit of more energy. The modern "problem" of expending more calories than one consumes is the exception to the historical rule. To be freed from food would be to be freed from nature, perhaps even to have conquered nature.



The intersection of the struggles for freedom from nature and dominion over nature was of particular interest to Freud in his *Civilization and its Discontents* (1932). Regarding the origins of this dualistic struggle, I again turn to the story of Adam and Eve as a story that captures the intersection of these struggles and the concerns that underlie them. Adam and Eve had dominion over the Garden of Eden, but their *desire* for the fabled fruit was the first sin, the original sin as it were, humanity committed and it has served as the prototype ever since. In the previous section on the origins of derangement, I discussed how St. Augustine characterized the sin of Adam and Eve as a sin committed first in their hearts and only second in the world of phenomena, that is, in the eating of the apple. The temptation of the serpent aroused the slumbering desire to conquer Eden – despite their present guardianship of it— and to usurp God and thus be free of his constraints. The story of Adam and Eve points to a metaphysical truth, namely, whatever material difficulties—including environmental and social—one is confronted with, the simultaneous longing to escape these difficulties and to conquer them leads us to harm ourselves and all of our relations. C.S. Lewis broadly describes this paradoxical relationship writing, “Man’s conquest of Nature will have brought about Nature’s conquest of Man: the Abolition of Man.”

Humanity’s struggle against and over nature brings us back to the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the food technology company known as Soylent. Soylent’s claim that it is hard to fuel our bodies is interesting one since, as omnivores, we possess more dietary autonomy than most species on the planet. However, as Fromm (1941) reminded humanity, freedom is something to be escaped and so one is confronted with the foodlike

substances produced by Soylent. In contrast to the vast diversity of what our diet could consist of in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Soylent offers its products in the following forms:

1. Soylent Bars
2. Soylent Powders
3. Soylent Coffiest (a coffee like beverage)
4. Soylent Drinks
  - a. Original Flavor
  - b. Nectar Flavor
  - c. Cacao Flavor

The idea of a cheap and portable meal is appealing to people who are on the go and who do not have time to meal prep during their busy work schedules. A bottled beverage or snack bar is an admittedly easy way to consume one's daily nutritional requirements - one Soylent Drink contains 20% of these daily nutritional requirements. Soylent Drink is marketed as "engineered ingredient design," which is an honest reflection of just what it is – engineered ingredients in a bottle – as opposed to what it is not, namely, food in the sense that I have used it. Soylent is not food because it is composed of a forced division of labor, nutrients specially selected for the benefits they extend to their consumers linked together by scientists in a laboratory. The bonds that held these nutrients components together in their naturally occurring sources had to be severed so they could be studied individually to better understand their effects. However, in their natural state their effects are never felt in the absence of the other nutrient components, thus studying nutrients as if they occur in a vacuum is deranged in itself while their implementation ignores the fact that the division of labor in the human body arose from mutually modifying processes and therefore cannot be understood in a unilateral manner. Soylent's idea of tailored nutrition and subsequent description of

Soylent Drink as engineered ingredient design includes the tagline, “each ingredient in Soylent drink provides essential nutrition.” What are these essential nutrients?

1. Soy Protein – “Soy protein isolate provides a smooth texture and robust amino acid profile” (See Figure 1.)
2. Sunflower oil – “High oleic sunflower oil is a high-quality source of monounsaturated fats and contains no trans fats.” (See Figure 2.)
3. Isomaltulose – “A slow metabolizing disaccharide synthesized from beets offers sustained energy without the spikes of refined sugar.” (See Figure 3.)
4. Vitamins and minerals – “Each bottle of Soylent Drink includes 20% daily requirements of all essential micronutrients.” (See Figure 4.)



**Figure 1. Soylent Depiction of Soy Protein Isolate**



**Figure 2. Soylent Depiction of Sunflower Oil**



**Figure 3. Soylent Depiction of Isomaltulose**



**Figure 4. Soyilent Depiction of Vitamins and Minerals**

Apparently essential nutrition consists of products derived from the things depicted in each figure with the notable exception of Figure 4., which conveys vitamins and minerals as a fine white powder. This exception is an important one since vitamins and minerals do not naturally occur as powders in nature, rather, their appearance in this form is the result of the derangement of their division of labor. Pollan (2008) describes the discovery of vitamins and their subsequent impact, writing:

Clearly the chemists were missing something – some essential ingredients present in the fresh plant foods (like oranges and potatoes) that miraculously cured the sailors. This led to the discovery early in the twentieth century of the first set of micronutrients, which the Polish biochemist Casimir Funk...christened “vitamines”... These special molecules, which at first were isolated from foods and then later synthesized in a laboratory, could cure people overnight...it really wasn’t until late in the twentieth century that nutrients began to push food aside in the popular imagination of what it means to eat (2008, p. 21-22).

As Pollan points out, vitamins were originally isolated from foods and only later synthesized in laboratories. To remove something that is a vital part of a food’s identity is to derange its natural and spontaneously arising division of labor. Durkheim deployed his synonym for derangement, anomie, in a wide variety of social contexts – so I extend it to food.

In his discussion of the prevention of anomie in *The Division of Labor* (1893) Durkheim wrote, “we may say *a priori* that a state of anomie is impossible wherever organs solidly linked to one another are in sufficient contact, and in sufficiently lengthy contact” (Durkheim, 1893/1984, p. 304). One must ask what could possibly be in greater contact and be more solidly linked together than the vitamins and minerals that naturally occur in food? Yet the scientists disregard this and derange this division of labor all the same, introducing isolates and synthetic versions of both into the Western Diet with reckless abandon. Soyent proudly advertises that “each bottle of Soyent Drink delivers essential nutrients and eliminates hunger immediately.” There is no naturally occurring food that I have ever eaten or heard about that immediately eliminates hunger. This claim is likely a gross exaggeration, nevertheless, the creation of food that eliminates physical hunger is liable to release hungers of another sort – especially existential hungers. Indeed, if one was not constrained by hunger, thirst, or exhaustion and could live without attending to these basic needs, what would one do with all this extra time? Would the addition of chronological resources be sufficient to live a fulfilling life? These questions are interesting but they are not central tenants of this project, but I ask them to illustrate the bottomless pit that is at the heart of the human experience.

Filling this bottomless pit is the topic of Michael Moss’s (in)famous book *Salt Sugar Fat* (2013) which describes the food industry as trying to get consumers addicted to its products. Far from just offering one too much food, or even food that is merely of a poor quality, Moss describes an industry actively engaged in producing ways to make people physiologically addicted to food. As such, dietary adages like “eat to live, don’t

live to eat” are foiled by the food industry’s efforts towards hooking people on their products.

Of course, eating can be one of life’s great pleasures, especially with good company, and cultural practices centered around eating are a common feature of cultures all over the world. In the case of America, holiday meals like the turkey and dressing served at Thanksgiving are part of this “living to eat” collective representation since participation tends to involve overconsumption of very rich foods. The French obsession with food and wine is world-famous, as is the French paradox of low rates of heart disease, cholesterol, and diabetes despite a diet full of rich and fatty foods like butter, foie gras, and cheese. The division of labor’s moral force is felt keenly at table in both the American holiday meal case and the French case. Cooks and diners break bread together as the individual’s hunger is balanced by their moral community, usually represented through the people at table with the individual.

The moral community’s role as a counterbalance to individual desire is not necessary unless the food supply is sufficiently developed so that an excess is attainable and available to a large group of consumers. In the absence of such technological development the moral community demands consumption on the part of its members as in the case of starving families who do not have enough food all their members. The decision of the parents to eat some of the food rather than let their children eat it all does not stem from individual egoism, but from social obligation to renew their will to life for another day. To refuse would mean to leave their child without a parent and so to

derange the familial division of labor. The topic of food and morality will be taken up in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

The derangement of the division of labor is at the heart of the derangement of food in the 21<sup>st</sup> century America and the derangement of our relationship to it. Consider the following picture (Figure 5.) of Soylent Bar taken directly from the company website.



**Figure 5. Soylent Bar vs Junk Food**

The aim of the picture is a marketing strategy to suggest that one could eat a bunch of junk “food,” or they could eat the nutritious “Food Bar” that Soylent has engineered. While the picture is clearly meant to convey the “Food bar” as superior to the junk surrounding it, the picture could very well be titled “Engineered Ingredient Design” and be displayed in an art gallery as a work of satire. Nothing in the picture is food in the sense that I have stressed it from the beginning, that is, as the product of the spontaneous division of labor and consisting of its own unique division of labor formed through a mutually modifying process. What’s more, the things contained in the picture are perhaps better described as “edible foodlike substances” than as food (Pollan, 2008, p.1). In *Socialism and Saint Simon* (1928/1958) Durkheim wrote, “what caused the

failure of Saint-Simonianism is that Saint-Simon and his disciples wanted to get the most from the least, the superior from the inferior, moral rule from economic matter” (p. 240). Similarly, one can see Soylent and the food industry at large deranging food in an effort to get the superior from the inferior, health from foodlike substance, moral food from pursuit of profit.

Perhaps it is unfair to single out Soylent, or the food industry for that matter, since the derangement in which they are engaging is, as I have said throughout, a rule that is a lack of rule, and one that is by no means confined to the food industry. Farmers markets are replaced by grocery stores and convenience stores while farmers and ranchers sell their products to these outlets without knowing when or where their products are being sold. To be sure, the earlier discussed antagonism between freedom from nature and dominion over it is the root of our present derangement of food, which is simultaneously the derangement of the relationships between producers and consumers. In modern life the principle of the strong linkages is excised from its place within the division of labor, and employed in the service of the food industry to produce cheap new foods that conjoin massive amounts of salt, sugar, and fat with the aim of hooking consumers, but as I will discuss in the next chapter, the food producers are hooked as well. There is one final layer to deranged food that I have yet to explore, the problem posed by adulterated and fake foods which I examine in the next section.

### **Adulterated Food & Fake Food**

Having taken such great pains in the preceding sections to define a word that most researchers believe is self-evident, I wish to take another step and argue that “real”



food should not need to be described as real, it should be sufficient to refer to it as food. In contrast, consumed substances that do not meet my definition of food should bear the scarlet letter of “food product,” “fake food,” or perhaps even “deranged food product” on their label.

Deranged food’s final problem is that it is a wolf in sheep’s clothing, that is, it pretends to be harmless when it is actually harmful to the consumer’s body, their mind, and the political economy of the countries involved in its circulation<sup>13</sup>. Part of this problem lies in the realm of vested interests—food companies, diet gurus, supplement sellers—but the other part resides in the realm of consumer deception. Here I return to Michael Pollan who wrote, “For while it used to be that food was all you *could* eat, today there are thousands of other edible foodlike substances in the supermarket” (Pollan, 2008, p.1). Pollan wants consumers to eat more natural and sustainably raised foods, but he is mistaken in arguing that food is all that one could eat in the distant historical past. Although certainly not derangement in the sense of restricting their intrinsic division of labor, there has been deranged food in the sense of adulteration for long as there have been people to sell food.

Deception is immoral in the context of the division of labor because the organs are interdependent and strongly connected to one another. One of Durkheim’s best

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<sup>13</sup> The article “Don’t Take Your Vitamins” (2013) by Paul Offit cites multiple studies that show vitamin supplements result in poorer health. Offit discusses the “some is good so more is better” argument used by vitamin companies to justify the excessive doses contained in their pills. Finally, Offit explains that antioxidant pills do not work like antioxidants work in food since their concentration in pill form leads to an imbalance between free radicals and antioxidants in the body and, correspondingly, to health issues.

examples of the derangement of the division of labor is his discussion of cancer and tuberculosis of which he writes:

In the same way that tuberculosis and cancer increase the diversity of the organic tissues without it being possible to see in this a fresh specialisation of the biological functions. In all these cases there is no allocation of a common function, but within the organism, whether it is individual or social is formed another one that seeks to live at the expense of the first one (Durkheim, 1893/1984, p.291).

In the context of the context of the economic division of labor where each producer specializes in one product to increase productivity and quality, adulteration of food is parasitic since its practitioners do not introduce a specialty, but only a fake with a specialty price tag. The production of a new specialty food stuff depends on its creator harnessing the natural properties of the foods involved, which need not be the result of conscious effort but could result from a mistake like adding too much of something to the recipe or letting it age until fermentation takes over. In the case of these “accidental” creations, the cook must return to the kitchen to try and figure out what happened to produce these results. The culinary faker need only devise a way to cloak his/her wares enough to fool unsuspecting consumers, a process that is much easier when the product being peddled is exceedingly rare. Bill Briwa of the Culinary Institute of America summarized this point with his example of truffle oil writing, “There’s nothing even remotely natural about it. Truffle oil is all manufactured. Truffles are one of those one-percenter foods that very few people get to ever taste, so it’s easy to pawn off manufactured oil” (Olmstead, 2016, p.105). While the adulteration of rare food stuffs either by stretching them—adding canola oil to Tuscan olive oil to raise the profit margin—or by faking them outright – truffle oil is not produced with truffles, but with

organic compound called 2,4-Dithiapentane. This is to say, adulteration relies on consumers remaining ignorant and sellers maintaining the trust of their clientele.

Similarly, the introduction of synthesized vitamins, minerals, and antibiotics into our food supply are not new specializations within the food system, but rather parasitic manipulations that make us and our food system more dependent on these rogue elements. As I discussed earlier, ecosystems are the products of a moral community formed through the spontaneous mutual modifications of the division of labor acting on a wide variety of organisms. The strong mutual dependence eases the struggle for existence and leads to the destruction of organisms that are parasitic without introducing some new specialization to the division of labor. Monocultures are becoming the rule, rather than the exception, when it comes to industrial agriculture and the lack of diversity produces many problems for the crops which must be treated with pesticides. This rule that is a lack of rule, the crowning feature of derangement for Durkheim, destroys the moral community of the ecosystem and its degeneration is marked by plants and animals with considerably less nutritional value. In addition, the introduction of these chemicals produces insects that are resistant to the toxins and crops that are subject to mutated forms of common plant diseases.

Genetically modified organisms (GMO) are considered deranged principally because their modification is not mutual, that is, because their modifications are aimed at adding nutrients to a particular plant with the goal of filling a nutritional gap in the diet. The continued manipulation of crops to produce new crops with different nutritional properties sounds innocent enough, however, should these new crops become popular or

useful in processing food they will quickly receive the same mono-culture treatment that has been given to corn, wheat, and soy and their nutritional value will be sacrificed for higher yields and longer shelf life.

One may be able to develop a strand of corn or wheat that is resistant to extreme heat or cold, but the question becomes if it is resistant to other organisms that are also adapted to the extreme heat and cold? If this GMO crop produces more nitrogen or needs more sunlight than the plants that appear naturally in this environment, then the GMO crop will have a negative effect on the environment. The introduction of foreign species to domestic habitats serves a cautionary tale since some of these foreign species can become invasive, displacing native organisms and harming the environment. The rusty crayfish, northern snakehead, and carp are all invasive aquatic organism whose primary impacts on their environment are the displacement of native fish by predation – reducing the types of species—and the destruction of aquatic plant environments including stirring up the bottom. This reduces the clarity of the water making it difficult for birds to feed, other fish to mate, and other species to feed on the invading species.

The damage wrought on an environment by species that are not in sync with the ecosystem can be truly devastating. Again, since ecosystems arise from moral communities formed among organisms engaged in the spontaneous mutual modification of the environment and their fellow organisms, there is no way for humanity to engineer and introduce a GMO food into an environment without considerable risk, and the inevitable consequences which could be good, but are most likely bad. A full discussion of these consequences is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but future work could

investigate the consequences that GMO food has on environments and their interdependency.

Returning to the topic of GMO foods, another issue raised by their use is food scientists, far from taking account of what a plant had to offer in its unadulterated state, view the plant as deficient from the outset and in need of repair. Such is the case of the high yield variations of wheat, corn and soy that are grown in vast farms all over the world. These crops are engineered to produce a very high yield, which means less of the volatile nutrients that attract pests which also reduce the shelf life of these crops. Moreover, their widespread use in all corners of the food industry is frightening since these monocultures must all be heavily “medicated” if they are to survive in their drastically less diverse ecosystem and make it all the way to the factories where they are processed into millions of different products.

As I have maintained throughout, the intersecting stream of the division of labor give rise to the ecosystem through the gradual process of mutual modification. Food adulterators rely on modifying the food, since it cannot modify the consumer, but this adulteration is not what the consumer wants so measures must be taken to fake what the consumer wants. Larry Olmstead (2016) offers the instructive example of farmed salmon writing:

Of course, in the wild salmon don't use any antibiotics. And they don't have to be artificially colored pink. Most fish-farm feeds don't include krill, a mainstay of the salmon's natural diet, which is what gives the fish its distinctive color, so farmed salmon are dyed to look like naturally occurring salmon (Olmstead, 2016, p.62).

One may rightly be disgusted that farmed salmon must be dyed to produce the color that we have come to expect from its wild relative. Moreover, the adulterating of salmon, and fish in general, is pervasive and widespread leading to mass consumption of deranged food that is actively advertised as healthy by the USDA<sup>14</sup> to say nothing of Diet Gurus, chefs, and personal trainers. It boggles the mind to think of dyeing salmon pink -there is a specific shade of pink named after the natural color of the fish- and recent studies on the fish used in sushi restaurants only serve to throw the mind into greater chaos. A nonprofit marine conservation group, Oceana released the result of their study that found diners who order red snapper in a restaurant receive the real thing less than 6 percent of the time. A *Boston Globe* investigation of seafood fraud turned up:

Minado, a bustling buffet restaurant right off Route 9 that churns out hundreds of rolls of sushi and nigiri pieces daily, admitted it labeled tilapia as red snapper. 'Not because we are trying to trick,' said Alexa Poletti, a Minado manager. 'We're doing it how everybody does it (Olmstead, 2016, p. 54).

If adulteration is so widespread that managers feel that they are not being morally dubious by claiming that their products are something that they are not –Tilapia a farm-raised scavenger fish is completely different than the carnivorous wild Red Snapper- then there is sufficient evidence that the food system itself has become deranged, that is, subject to rules that are actually lack of rules.

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<sup>14</sup> Consumer advocate and activist Alexandra Morton offer two important points about this: 1. Farm raised salmon are good sources of Omega 3 Fatty Acids, but they also contain considerably more fat than their wild brethren since they swim in circles while their relatives swim down rivers, into oceans, and then back up to rivers. 2. Farm raised salmon must be treated for sea lice at least once during the course of their life using a neurotoxin – Slice.

## CHAPTER VI

### POSTEMOTIONAL FOOD

In the preceding chapters, I sketched the particulars of food and derangement that have come to characterize the food system in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Up until this point I have made a concerted attempt to avoid talking about the broader forces at play, particularly those social forces associated with economics and culture. The central argument of this chapter is that modern society—and the modern food system by extension—can best be described as “postemotional.” Recent studies of the American food system focus on the food system as a capitalist enterprise, often invoking Marx or Marxist concepts, they criticize food companies as exploiting consumers, especially the poor, racial minorities, and female consumers. Such studies, while certainly informative, serve to further distort our picture of the modern food system as driven by exploitation of knowledge and skill. Drawing from Mestrovic’s *Postemotional Society* (1997), I wish to argue, “synthetic, quasi-emotions become the basis for widespread manipulation by self, others, and the culture industry as a whole” (p. xi). In extending Mestrovic’s thesis to the study of food, I seek to break the sociology of food from its modernist and postmodernist habits of mind, which have prevented it from adequately theorizing the problems faced by members of all social classes, racial groups, and genders. To better understand our present situation in capitalist America, this chapter begins with a recontextualization of Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* with special attention directed to the role of emotions. I then move to discuss Eros as a force in the individual and within society through a comparative reading of Plato, Freud, Durkheim, and Mestrovic.

Finally, I recontextualize Eros and its sickly modern relative, postemotional Eros, in the context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century American capitalism- specifically in the food businesses.

### **The Role of Emotions in Weber's Protestant Ethic**

Weber's famous *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904) identifies the religious doctrines of the calling and predestination as the driving forces for the explosive growth of capitalism in America. From the outset, Weber points out that the Protestant countries most influenced by these doctrines corresponded with high economic development not seen in their Catholic counterparts (Weber, 1904/2001, p.1-8). He links this worldly asceticism primarily to two Protestant Doctrines, Luther's doctrine of the Calling and Calvin's doctrine of Predestination. Weber summarizes Luther's doctrine of the calling, writing:

it is an obligation which the individual is supposed to feel and does feel towards the content of his professional activity, no matter in what it consists, in particular no matter whether it appears on the surface as a utilization of his personal powers, or only of his material possessions (Weber, 1904/2001, p.19).

One should note that the calling is not merely representation—it is much more than a doctrinal idea— it is felt, hence rooted in emotion, by the person at the perceptual level. By describing the calling as an obligation that is immediately felt, Weber's discussion of the Protestant Ethic recalls earlier sections of this work on the division of labor and the immediate need that the parts of a healthy organism have for one another. In the forced division of labor, the parts of an organism do not recognize their common need for one another, and the transmission of the signals of pain do not pass from one part of the social body to the other—consequently, nothing is done to alleviate their suffering.



The calling takes a dramatic turn when paired with John Calvin's doctrine of Predestination, which states some people were predestined for eternity in heaven with God and others predestined for eternity in Hell. The lists were set before the creation of the world, and one's deeds and actions did nothing to change which list they were one. There is an important distinction between the Doctrine of the Calling and the Doctrine of Predestination, namely, the individual person can feel their obligation to succeed and work hard in their activity as part of their Christian duty, but God has no duty to the individual. The feeling –used here in the literal sense to connote an emotional state— produced by the interplay of the two religious doctrines was an ever-present anxiety about which list a person's name was on. Weber's summary of this idea is as painfully poignant:

In what was for the man of the age of the Reformation the most important thing in life, his eternal salvation, he was forced to follow his path alone to meet a destiny which had been decreed for him from eternity. No one could help him. No priest, for the chosen one can understand the word of God only in his own heart. No sacraments...no Church...Finally, even no God. For even Christ had died only for the elect (Weber, 1904/2001, p. 60-61).

To this end, Heaven was not a place that the believer could journey, but one of only two possible final destinations. Unsurprisingly, this produced an “unprecedented inner loneliness of the single individual” such that even when they were surrounded by like-minded believers they were always alone (Weber, 1904/2001, p. 60). The combination of the two doctrines resulted in the multiplication of their individual effects, producing a collective and normative state of anxiety from which the religious person could never free themselves. One means of coping with this anxiety was the search for signs that one was a member of the elect. Following the death of Calvin –who argued we

could never know the mind of God and, consequently, never be certain of our salvation—theologians working in his tradition prescribed worldly activity as the most suitable means for attaining the self-confidence needed to be sure of one’s own status as a member of the elect (Weber, 1904/2001, p.65-67).

### **Recontextualizing Weber’s Protestant Ethic**

The overwhelming response to these doctrines was a shift in the habits of mind to worldly asceticism, the practice of which produced the thriving capitalism of which America is so (in)famous. The primacy of emotions in such prescriptive measures is essential to understanding the Protestant Ethic, as worldly activity was both a response to the anxious *feelings*, and a rational deterrent of such feelings. The lonely individual of Weber’s Protestant Ethic is recontextualized in Riesman’s famous work, *The Lonely Crowd* (1950). Riesman argues that for much of America’s history its population could largely be labeled as inner-directed. Riesman described inner-directed society, writing:

Such a society is characterized by increased personal mobility, by a rapid accumulation of capital (teamed with devastating technological shifts), and by an almost constant expansion... The greater choices this society gives—and the greater initiatives it demands in order to cope with its novel problems—are handled by character types who can manage to live socially without strict and self-evident tradition direction (Riesman, 1950/2001, p. 14).

Inner-directed societies, as their name implies, implant their values and goals *within* members while they are young. Traditional constraints are loosened, tradition governed responses to every situation are impossible, so the individual is equipped with a psychological gyroscope that keeps them “on course” (Riesman, 1950/2001, p.14-16). As Weber already noted, America’s social character was largely influenced by religious

doctrine, which set both the gyroscope and the motor in motion<sup>15</sup>. Today, modern capitalism is still marked by these religious doctrines as companies act with anxious fervor to prove they are on the “good list,” and hence, one of the saved. Wall Street serves as the penultimate example of this phenomenon since dramatic shifts in stock prices are frequently linked to investor’s fears and anxieties –both feelings stemming from emotional responses— related to a company’s future prospects at domination or being dominated. This is very interesting given large financial companies advise their stock traders never to trade with emotion. In her article in *Business Insider*, Linette Lopez describes the emic perspective of Wall Street traders writing,

The Wall Street trader, at least in Wall Street's imagination, is a cowboy swaggering with silent confidence. Knowledge and logic are their guides. Emotion, whoever is teaching you will tell you, distracts your mind from solid facts — and in trading, they say, those are all that matter (Lopez, 2016).

Contempt for emotion and the privilege accorded to rationality are values derived from the Enlightenment in the Western intellectual tradition. The advice seems to be that ignoring emotions and focusing purely on reason will lead traders to make fewer poor investments and produce greater financial gains. However, whispers about the possibility of corporate takeovers or the declining health of a CEO can send stock prices into a freefall. The stock trading website Tradeking.com says as much reporting, “unofficial news, also known as "rumors", can have as much impact on stock prices as official news announcements. The stock market often anticipates these news stories and "prices in" its

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<sup>15</sup> Weber noted that idleness was among the greatest sins in the Protestant religion

expectations accordingly.<sup>16</sup>” However, as anyone who has taken an in-class exam they feel ill-prepared for can attest to, the anticipation of an emotion can trigger another, and perhaps a stronger, response in an individual. In the student’s case, stress at the prospect of doing poorly on an exam magnifies the anxiety triggered by taking a timed exam in class.

The problem here is not reason, it’s the belief that emotion leads to nothing but poor decisions and, consequently, should be constrained by the super-power common to all humans – reason. Yet, as Weber’s Protestant Ethic demonstrates, reason is not up to the task of downplaying emotion since the feelings of anxiety and despair are ever-present—and extremely powerful— even if they are not supposed to be consciously contemplated.

The problem of reason vs. emotion was taken up by famed Portuguese Neurologist, António Damásio, who described Rene Descartes’ mind/body dualism as perpetuating the belief that reason and emotion are entirely separate. In his book, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (1994), Damásio advanced his “somatic marker hypothesis,” which states emotional processes exert considerable influence on individual behavior—including decision making—through the associations forged between bodily feelings and emotions, like the association of anxiety with rapid heartbeat or nausea with disgust. In light of Damásio’s hypothesis, my characterization of the Protestant Ethic as rooted in emotion AND reason gains ground on the

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<sup>16</sup> Tradeking.com “How News and Rumors Effect Stocks”

characterizations of capitalist society advanced by the Critical School and the Post Modernists,<sup>17</sup> which focus almost exclusively on rationality. The nature and power of these emotions will be explored in subsequent sections of this chapter. For now, I only wish to say that modern capitalism is driven by synthetic emotions, revived for the purpose of driving consumption.

### **The Labors of Eros: Plato, Freud, & Durkheim**

Damasio's hypothesis leads one to rethink much of one's position on the interplay between rationality and emotion, and by extension, the interplay between the individual and the group. Plato's comments on the purpose of education—to teach people to love the true, the good, and the beautiful—and the importance of ordering the soul are made even more startling in light of Damasio's hypothesis. In his dialogue *Phaidrus*, Plato offers the allegory of the charioteer and the two winged horses. The charioteer represents Reason, while the noble white horse represents spirit and the ennobled black horse represents desire. One could argue that the charioteer, Reason, is supposed to restrain the two horses and order them. However, I believe there is a different argument to be made, namely, the Charioteer depends on the horses to drive him and the horses depend on the charioteer and each other for restraint. This requires a bit of unpacking since the dependence of the charioteer is perhaps not immediately noticeable, but it is obvious when brought into dialogue with Durkheim's discussion of

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<sup>17</sup> For an intensive discussion of the Critical School and the Postmodernist neglect of emotions see Mestrovic's *Postemotional Society* (1997)

the division of labor. Describing the roles of the various organs in the body, Durkheim writes:

What gives unity to organized societies... is the spontaneous consensus of parts. Such is the internal solidarity which not only is as indispensable as the regulative action of higher centres, but which also is their necessary condition, for they do no more than translate it into another language and, so to speak, consecrate it. Thus, the brain does not make the unity of the organism, but expresses and completes it (Durkheim, 1893/1984, p. 297).

Since the chariot is pulled by horses, it might be argued, the absence of horses renders the chariot useless and the charioteer stranded. The reins keep the horses bound together—dependent on one another in the sense that one tripping or getting injured likely means the other one will fall too—and connected to the charioteer. In the absence of a charioteer and reins, nothing binds the horses together or constrains their free expression. One may argue that Reason is linked to spirit and desire and depends on them for the essential energy for existence—Eros. Schopenhauer captures this idea in his *The World as Will and Representation* (1819/1969) writing:

Because the inner being of nature, the will-to-live, expresses itself most strongly in the sexual impulse, the ancient poets and philosophers—Hesiod and Parmenides—said very significantly that Eros is the first, that which creates, the principle from which all things emerge (Schopenhauer, 1819/1969, p. 330).

According to Freud, whose debt to Plato was very great<sup>18</sup>, the purpose of Eros is “to establish ever greater unities and to preserve them thus—in short, to bind together” (Freud, 1938/1974, p. 18). Freud builds on this idea in *Civilization and its Discontents* writing, “civilization is a process in the service of Eros, whose purpose is to combine

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<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of this see Mestrovic’s *In the Shadow of Plato: Durkheim and Freud on Suicide and Society* (1985)

single human individuals, and after that families, then races, peoples and nations, into one great unity, the unity of mankind (Freud, 1930/1961, p.81). One may immediately recall the claims made earlier in this work about the primary function of the division of labor as a moral force that binds organisms together towards greater interdependence, in short, towards greater unity. Durkheim captures this idea succinctly and hints at an additional dimension, writing:

The most notable effect of the division of labour is not that it increases the productivity of the functions that are divided in this way, but that it links them very closely together. In all these cases its role is not simply to embellish or improve existing societies, but to make possible societies which, without these functions, would not exist (Durkheim, 1893/1984, p. 21).

Durkheim's depiction of the division of labor as the driving force towards greater unity between all organisms, including humans, mirrors Freud and Plato's depiction of Eros. Following Freud's description, Eros strives towards greater unity, which Durkheim points out makes new societies—and new moralities by extension—possible that were not possible before. Presumably, Durkheim developed this idea from Schopenhauer—whose influence on Durkheim was very great—who depicted the creative essence of Eros by referencing the Greek thinker Pherecydes who wrote, “Zeus transformed himself into Eros, when he wished to create the world” (Schopenhauer, 1819/1969, p. 330). Plato's allegory of the charioteer and the two horses, when revisited in light of the essential function of Eros, becomes increasingly rich. The reins binding Reason to Spirit and Desire express and complete the unity of the chariot, they are the culmination of Eros' project. Consequently, in their absence—or the absence of Reason, Spirit, or

Desire—there results a derangement of the division of labor where some parts thrive at the expense of others<sup>19</sup>.

### **Postemotional Eros – The New Spirit of Capitalism**

Having discerned the interplay and interdependence between rationality and emotion, and the centrality of Eros in social life, a new problem presents itself. How is the depiction of the division of labor, with its uncanny resemblance to Eros in Plato & Freud, similar or different from the division of labor in modern society, that is, can the preceding section be recontextualized to inform the present fin de siècle? I believe the misunderstandings of the division of labor, like the reduction of Eros to pure sexual desire, provide a false starting point for our investigation of modern capitalism and, following Plato and Schopenhauer, I argue that the most important part of an argument is its starting point. To this end, a few more remarks about the parallel forces of Eros and the division of labor are necessary.

The power of Eros is legendary in Plato's philosophy as well as Freud's psychology and, like all powerful things, the risk of harm resulting from misuse is a constant danger to those driven by the divine madness as well as the those around him. However, one may note that Plato's *Republic* is much more an education about Eros than an attack on its attendant problems. Indeed, it is Glaucon's Eros that drives the entire dialogue and pushes Reason, personified in the character of Socrates, to account for and define justice when his other interlocutors fail to provide the impetus. The *Republic*

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<sup>19</sup> This idea is given manifest expression in Durkheim's division of cancer and tuberculosis in *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893), which I discussed in earlier chapters



begins with the famous line, “Down I went to the Piraeus,” which is typically described by Plato scholars as describing Socrates’ descent from the heights of philosophy—and its focus on Eros’ drive towards love of wisdom— into the realm of common men. Keeping Schopenhauer & Plato’s claim that the most important part of any argument is its starting point in mind, this first line must contain information that is vital to understanding the rest of the dialogue. Socrates serves as the narrator for the entire dialogue—he is recounting to another person the events of the day before—and as Athens’ great teacher, one may suppose that his retelling of this story is supposed to be educative. Even the final portion of the work, the myth of Er, is an education in the raw power possessed by Eros and the importance of the alliance between Reason and Spirit to educate Eros, for if left to its own devices, it could never find fulfillment<sup>20</sup>. Returning to the allegory of the charioteer and the two horses from Plato’s dialogue, *Phaedrus*, the charioteer represents Reason, while the noble white horse represents spirit and the ennobled black horse represents desire. Capitalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen Reason—in a perfect example of the irrationality of rationality<sup>21</sup>— prescribe the black horse steroids and, in accordance with Riesman (1950), reduced the spirited white horse to

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<sup>20</sup> In the myth of Er, Plato sketches a troubling vision of the afterlife, one where the people who lived good lives get to spend time in a quasi-heaven and those who lived a bad life spend time in a quasi-hell. Aside from the souls of tyrants and murders, who are forever banished to the quasi-hell, everyone else returns to a middle ground where they draw lottery tokens and choose their next life in the order their tokens are called. Er observes that most souls pick a different life than the one they lived before – the good man becomes a tyrant, the bad man becomes good, animals become humans, and humans choose animal life—the implication being that all souls eventually choose to become tyrants and end up getting banished to eternity in the quasi-hell. Plato believes the Philosopher, whose Eros is sublimated towards love of wisdom, can break this cycle.

<sup>21</sup> For an excellent discussion of this idea see George Ritzer’s *The McDonaldisation of Society* (1993)

fake niceness and curdled indignation. Consequently, the chariot continues to go in circles with no signs of stopping or slowing down, even if the Charioteer wanted to stop, the spirited horse is no match and cannot keep up. The vigorous Eros which Plato, Freud, and Durkheim all viewed as the driving force of existence is deranged in postemotional society. One might be tempted to describe this process as “disenchantment,” as Ritzer does<sup>22</sup>, but this would be incorrect since it implies that the spell has been broken, when it is really a more powerful and restrictive spell. The desiring part is artificially ignited, while the spirited part smolders beneath the weight of extreme rationalism which draws on past emotions to express present states of being. The essence of Eros—its drive towards greater unity, complexity, interdependence, and completeness—has been abolished in favor of rational man and his rationalized, pre-packaged emotions. In short, the modern situation finds expression in C.S. Lewis’ *Abolition of Man*, in Freud’s writing on Thanatos, and Durkheim’s conception of anomie—in each case, the rule has become the lack of rule. This driving force towards greater unity, divided against itself, fueled by recycled emotions and inflamed desires is postemotional Eros.

The extension of Mestrovic’s postemotional theory, with its implicit conception of Eros—owing to Plato, Freud, and Durkheim’s influence on Mestrovic—to my explicit use of the term postemotional Eros is theoretically useful insofar as it allows one to account for the discrepancy between the driving forces behind modern Capitalism and

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<sup>22</sup> See Ritzer’s *Enchanting a Disenchanted World* (2009)

the Capitalism of the American past best exemplified in Weber. In addition, I follow Mestrovic's lead in arguing that the role of emotions has been neglected at best in sociological theory and deserves further investigation (Mestrovic, 1997, p. 3). The theoretical study of the relationship between emotions and food seeks to reconcile the two poles of human experience: reason and emotion.

The food industry exploits the emotions of consumers—specifically the prepacked emotions related to comfort, happiness, and belonging—to boost sales and increase the value of stock. Through a recontextualized reading of Mestrovic's postemotional theory, I analyze the practices of the food industry and what might broadly be termed the 'consumption industry.' Mestrovic (1997) writes, "postmodern culture feeds parasitically on the dead emotions of other cultures and of the past in general" (p. 1). One need only look into Coca Cola's marketing campaigns to immediately get at the truth of the matter. As I write this, the Coca Cola billboard off the highway by my San Antonio home proclaims, "taste the feeling." Taste, which is sensory and genetic, has little if nothing to do with emotions, which are, historically, powerful and unpredictable. A 1980's advertising campaign included Bill Cosby touting Coke as "the real thing," implying that Coke's competitor, Pepsi, was not the real thing (Moss, 2013, p.107). One is left to wonder how a beverage made with artificial flavors and colors—and which induces artificial feelings of hunger— can claim to be real anything? In both cases, Coca Cola appeals to the emotions of potential consumers particularly the fear of being cheated, the anxiety of being left out, and the promise that

consumption of one of its products will produce a pleasant bodily feeling (from the sugar and carbonation) and a pleasant emotional feeling (social approval).

Investigative journalist Michael Moss interviewed former Coca Cola Executive Jeffrey Dunn as part of his book on the food industry, *Salt Sugar Fat* (2013). Dunn summarized the marketing strategy of Coca Cola saying, “Why does Coke market?...The answer is because you’re either going forward or you’re going backwards” (Moss, 2013, p.108). Consider the following quote from famed Nutritionist and Sociologist, Marion Nestle who writes:

The primary goals of food companies are to sell products, increase returns to investors, and report quarterly growth to Wallstreet...food companies can argue that what you eat is your responsibility, but their corporate responsibility is to induce you to buy more food, not less. Eating less – a principal strategy for managing weight—is very bad for business (Nestle, 2002/2013, p. xiii).

There is perhaps no better personification of this point than a sign I have seen hanging in multiple Jimmy John’s sandwich shops which reads, “the gap between more and enough never closes.” Indeed, if companies are not selling more, they are selling less and, if they are selling less, then someone else is likely selling more<sup>23</sup>. The quote’s relevance applied to the consumers of these products as well, since the consumption of these products or the abstaining from them marks one as a member of the “good list” depending on their group associations and culture. For example, if eating some low fat foods is good then eating more of them must be better. Yet the overconsumption of low-

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<sup>23</sup> The principle for determining how much of the market a given company controls is referred to as “stomach share,” as in, how much of a person’s stomach is filled by a particular company’s products

fat fare results in diets that are not markedly different from those of people who eat full-fat foods but eat less of them<sup>24</sup>. What's more, low-fat foods are frequently deranged—in the sense that I used the term in the preceding chapter, that is, fortified, artificial, GMO, or otherwise reconfigured for greater shelf life— so their over-consumption produces new health problems associated with the overconsumption of artificial sweeteners and artificial flavors, which are added to the recipes to elicit somatic responses amenable to overconsumption. An important caveat to this is food companies do not want to stimulate your appetite for another company's products. The alliance between food companies may appear to make strange bedfellows, but the alliance formed through symbiosis since their products work together to increase consumption. The high levels of sodium in fast food induce thirst in their consumers and the high levels of sugar in the beverages light up the pleasure centers in the brain without alerting the stomach that it is full. The food industry cannot make money if people don't consume its products, and individual companies cannot increase their share if their products produce cravings for another company's products. In this regard, the reciprocal relationship between soda manufactures and fast foods is the best case scenario in the industry since one company's success fuels success in the other.

However, success is an abstract phenomenon without defined limits, as such, margins are always approached from the perspective that costs can be cut further and profits increased. This unresolvable tension between more and enough, a problem with

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<sup>24</sup> See Michael Pollan's *In Defense of Food* (2008)

tremendous philosophical and existential significance, has its roots in the Protestant Ethic discussed earlier in this chapter. In lieu of the doctrines of the calling and predestination, a person can never truly be sure that they are saved and, consequently, remain forever in a state of unrest and anxiety<sup>25</sup>. Durkheim captures this phenomenon in his book *Suicide* (1897), writing:

When there is no other aim but to outstrip constantly the point arrived at, how painful to be thrown back...Since imagination is hungry for novelty, and ungoverned, it gropes at random. It is everlastingly repeated that it is man's nature to be eternally dissatisfied, constantly to advance (Durkheim, 1897/1950, p.257).

Recall that Calvin's solution to the problem of an unknowable future was his teaching that, "we should be content with the knowledge that God has chosen and depend further only on that implicit trust...he rejects that one can learn...if one is chosen or saved...it is an unjustifiable attempt to force God's secrets" (Weber, 1904/2001, p. 65). Furthermore, followers of the Reformed Churches that accepted the doctrine of Predestination were taught that doubt of one's salvation was a sign of imperfect faith, hence, of damnation. Understandably, this resulted in tremendous mental anxiety and tremendous physical, spiritual, and emotional effort to curb one's inclinations towards conformity with the religious doctrines. The tremendous self-control and worldly asceticism lead Protestants to acquire tremendous wealth in their business ventures, and the teachings of the calling and the sin of idleness saw to it that all task masters had a highly-motivated work force. In so far as people were all children of God, business

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<sup>25</sup> This is made all the more problematic since the doctrine of the calling contends that idleness is one of the greatest sins a Protestant can commit

owners were to treat their employees well and to resist the temptation to exploit, cheat, or steal from them. Of course, not all business owners followed this course of action and the exploitation of the worker was rationalized by the same doctrines that sought to remedy the problem on the grounds that great success in worldly endeavors, particularly the accumulation of profit, was a sign of one's status as a member of the elect. In *Suicide* (1897), Durkheim touches on the normalization of ceaseless desire, writing:

Yet these dispositions are so inbred that society has grown to accept them and is accustomed to think them normal...The longing for infinity is daily represented as a mark of moral distinction, whereas it can only appear within unregulated<sup>26</sup> consciences which elevate to a rule the lack of rule from which they suffer (Durkheim, 1897/1950, p.257).

One should note Durkheim's use of the phrase "rule that is a lack of rule," since the presence of a rule, even one directed towards infinity, cannot be equated with that vulgar translation of anomie as "normless." That is, Durkheim points to the rules as the sources of the problem for the human capacity for feeling is limitless and, with nothing to define its limits, the person breaches all boundaries and possibilities, none of which satiate their desires. In the past, American society's inner-direction came from its Protestant roots, which advocated worldly asceticism on the one hand, but set definable limits to what the wealth acquired from such practices could be used for. However, these religious motivations began to fade as society shifted towards other-direction. Riesman outlines the attributes of the other-directed in *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), writing:

What is common to all the other-directed people is that their contemporaries are the source of direction for the individual—either those known to him or those

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<sup>26</sup> This translating is misleading. The French word *déreglé* is better translated as "without rule," in the sense that the rule is "there are no rules."

with whom he is indirectly acquainted, through friends and through the mass media. This source is of course “internalized” in the sense that dependence on it for guidance in life is implanted early. The goals toward which the other-directed person strives shift toward with that guidance: *it is only the process of striving itself and the process of paying close attention to the signals from others that remain unaltered throughout life* (Riesman, 1904/2001, p. 21, *emphasis added*).

Other-directed society equips its members with radars capable of picking up signals from others, as oppose to the gyroscope inner-directed society equips its members with. The shift from inner-directed capitalism to other-directed capitalism results in the development of a character influenced by the Protestant past, but decidedly modern in its approach to business. For example, the capitalist culture –influenced as it was by the doctrines of the calling and predestination— mean no admission of weakness is allowed. The giant food conglomerates must act as if they are one the good list and are not allowed to doubt their presence on it. One would be wrong to characterize this behavior as rational, since, in the case of food companies, the anxious fervor is worked out in a variety of ways including: product line extensions, product reformulations, funding neuropsychological research, sponsoring sporting events, targeted advertising campaigns, and corporate takeovers. On the other hand, the shift towards other-direction has resulted in large companies trying to clean up their image and appealing to consumers’ emotions. For example, McDonalds refers to their children’s meal as a “Happy Meal” complete with a small entrée, small fries, small soda, and a toy. These meals, believe it or not, actually do make children happy even if only for a limited time. The shift towards increasingly the likeability of one’s brand was not just for McDonalds, in fact, other-directed capitalism saw food companies line up to impress consumers with their niceness and likeability.



This illuminates another part of former Coca Cola Executive Jeffery Dunn's quote about moving forward and backwards, namely, those who are saved are always moving forward and those who are damned are always moving back. The exercise of worldly asceticism, here personified through aggressive marketing tactics, acts to combat the doubts that a company is destined for bankruptcy or corporate takeover. Dunn's quote should not surprise anyone who has studied the tendencies of companies in capitalist societies, but it should give them pause rather than increased certainty about the nature of the capitalist beast. It should give them pause because it illustrates a collective state of enhanced desire, one that was once naturally lit but has since become mechanically inflamed—postemotional as it were. The artificially induced hunger designed to increase consumption and prevent the body's natural defenses against overconsumption may appear to resemble Plato's divine madness, but this would be an error in judgement. For one, Plato's divine madness has the individual forget himself in his madness, lost as he is in his desire for another. In contrast, the engineered ingredients—deranged food was the term used in the previous chapter—induce hunger precisely at the moment a person seeks to sate it, for consumption only increases appetite. A person who begins thinking about something and cannot stop thinking about it until they have resolved it, may be diagnosed with obsessive compulsive disorder. According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*,<sup>27</sup> these obsessions are defined as:

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<sup>27</sup> American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing.

Recurrent and persistent thoughts, urges, or images that are experienced, at some time during the disturbance, as intrusive and unwanted...the individual attempts to ignore or suppress such thoughts, urges, or images or to neutralize them with some other thought of action (i.e. by performing a compulsion) (DSM 5, 2013, p. 129).

Modern American foodways consists of food companies instigating persistent thoughts and urges to eat by engineering foods to increase appetite, constantly placing food in front of people either through advertisements or through product location, and appealing to individual's emotions through the marketing campaigns tailored to emotions. This is to say, the obsessions and compulsions experience in postemotional society are both cognitive and somatic, that is, both representation and will. One may ask if my characterization of modern foodways as the normalization of obsessive and compulsive consumption—consumption of food as well as consumption used in a broader sense—is too strong and sacrifices precision for shock value? My retort is a quote from Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950):

My own belief is that the ambulatory patients in the ward of modern culture show many analogous symptoms of too much compliance and too little insight....Their lack of emotion and emptiness of expression are as characteristic of many contemporary anomics as hysteria or outlawry was characteristic of anomics in the societies depending on earlier forms of direction (Riesman, 1950/2001, p.244-245).

As I have already said, it is not a lack of emotion than characterizes the modern anomic, but a postemotional Eros, in other words, a drive towards superficial unity. Material comfort concerns satiated, the modern person seeks emotional comfort which the food companies, cookbook authors, and television shows claim they can receive through the consumption of comfort food. In the past, eating a favorite dish prepared by a family member or friend was Erotic in the Platonic sense, that is, it was the fulfillment

of a desire for greater unity stemming from one's feelings of incompleteness<sup>28</sup>. The displacement of Eros in the sexual sense to another object or desire – Plato argued that the philosopher's displaced Eros pursued wisdom— was termed sublimation by Freud. However, modern foodways are driven by postemotional Eros and the desire for greater individual complexity and completeness through the consumption of other people's comfort foods produced by grandmothers, street vendors, television chefs, and cookbook authors. There are three important problems with the postemotional approach to authenticity. First, it is thoroughly postemotional to assume comfort can be found on one's plate simply because the emotional attachments attached to grandmothers is employed. Second, the milky way galaxy of choices described by Riesman in *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) may seem like a good thing for sublimation since each person is likely to find an outlet for their Eros. Yet, the vast quantity of choices and the fickleness of the force that directs sublimation (other-direction in modern society) lead to many small sublimations which cannot produce the outlet traditionally attributed to sublimation of Eros. The postemotional person craves authenticity and connection, seeks greater unity with the other which directs him, but all such attempts are akin to Sisyphus' attempts to push a bolder up a hill only to watch it roll back down again. One cannot be increasingly united to an abstract other without forfeiting their individual attributes. This is not the same as retribalization or a return to tradition-direction since both of those cases

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<sup>28</sup> I choose the phrase “feelings of incompleteness” to resolve two issues: 1) feelings of incompleteness do not need to be consciously processed to be acted upon since they are under the surface. 2) It follows from St. Augustine's claim that humans are “eccentric beings” and Durkheim's claim that our capacity for feeling is unlimited.

presuppose attachment to something concrete – a set of beliefs, customs, language, attire, foodways, and lifestyles. Postemotional society lacks this concreteness, for its organizing principles are democratization of thoughts and feelings such that there exists a repudiation of elitism—even the slightest inclination that someone might be more naturally gifted than others— with feelings of curdled indignation and fake sincerity since one should be liked rather than authentic.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSIONS

#### **Postemotional Society & Postemotional Foodways**

In my new hermeneutic reading and recontextualizing of Durkheim, Weber, Riesman, Mestrovic, & Plato I sought to expand their insights into the realm of theoretical food studies, which tend to have a Marxist bent to them and focus on exploitation along racial, gender, and class lines. In choosing these theorists, I hoped to illustrate that the derangement of the modern food system in America, which offers post-emotional food choices to people of every class, race, and gender. Thus, culinary elitism—particularly the drive towards providing everyone with local and organic foods—is an insufficient means to fix our current problem. The mass production of such foods would entail their derangement. The problem is not one of ability—advances in science have increased our agricultural knowledge so that we understand what plants need to grow—but a problem of relations. The knowledge of how plants grow is one thing, but their cooperation within an ecosystem is quite a different way of thinking about their growth, relating more to perception and intuition than abstraction. To this end, the problem of derangement in the modern food system is one of relations, which have been cast in Spencerian terms of “survival of the fittest”—note the egoism and selfishness implicit in such a statement—rather than Darwinian terms of cooperation. Consequently, even though the infrastructure exists to transport food to every nook and cranny of the United States—whether on foot, by car, plane, boat, or mail—the

emotional infrastructure that facilitates cooperation between people is no longer a fixture in postemotional American society.

One may be tempted to criticize my emphasis on the role of relations and cooperation in the food system on the grounds that it sounds too sensational to be true, but this would be an error in judgement. It is the emotional infrastructure of society that orients Eros' drive towards greater unity. This is why Socrates wanted to censor the poets in *The Republic*, because he viewed the poetry of Homer as directing Eros towards egoism, rather than justice. The emotional infrastructure binds the individuals and institutions that comprise society together through myths and rituals. Durkheim described the importance of such rituals in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, writing:

I have shown what moral forces it [society] develops and how it awakens that feeling of support, safety, and protective guidance which binds the man of faith to his cult. It is this reality that makes him rise above himself... This is so because society cannot make its influence felt unless it is in action, and it is in action only if the individuals who comprise it are assembled and acting in common (Durkheim, 1912/1995, p. 421).

The absence of these face-to-face experiences, which are increasingly replaced by communication via technology, weakens the emotional infrastructure of society, and threatens the very existence of society as a system of collective representations. In the absence of such rituals, with their emotional fervor and collective effervescence, society cannot consecrate itself and the fabric of society begins to decay. The hyper-rational American society deconstructed its myths and labeled them as racist, sexist, imperialist, and the like. The myths—including the story of the first Thanksgiving—now ring hollow, offering no comfort or common sense of belonging. We are not immigrants in a

strange land, but strangers in a land that has purged its sense of Eros. What remains is a tapestry woven in shades of gray. This is not simply the disenchantment of society; it is a new spell altogether. According to Durkheim's disciple Maurice Halbwachs, the health of society under this new spell can be more or less approximated if one uses suicide as a measure of the suffering a given society. Halbwachs expands this idea, writing:

We can assume that the number of suicides is a rather exact indicator of the amount of suffering, malaise, disequilibrium and sadness which exists or is produced in a group. Its increase is the sign that the sum total of despair, anguish, regret, humiliation, and discontent of every order is multiplying (Halbwachs, 1930/1978, p.314).

One may consider the relatively recent diagnosis, and subsequent explosion, of compassion fatigue in America in light of Halbwach's assertion. Compassion fatigue, a condition associated with loss of empathy and understanding for the suffering of others, was first diagnosed in nurses in the 1950's. World War II was over and the American economy was thriving, but the common sense of purpose that characterized the war years had faded, leaving nothing to take its place. The timing of this diagnosis is especially interesting if one considers that David Riesman published *The Lonely Crowd* (1950)—with its characterization of other-directed society—at approximately the same time. The shift from inner-direction to other-direction saw compassion, which is directed outward in inner-directed societies, directed inward in other-directed society. Compassion is necessary to work in fields where people are hurting or in pain, whether the pain is physical (medicine), mental (psychology), or spiritual (religious life). What is interesting about compassion fatigue is that it is not a loss of compassion, but a redirection of compassion inward. As such, the rise of compassion fatigue can be viewed

as a rather exact measure of the lack of compassion that individuals feel they receive from outside, which is to say, from their relationships.

Just as the relationships in society at large have changed, so the relationship between consumers and producers have changed as well—becoming much more impersonal. The result has been a shift in the attitudes of both producers and consumers from the emotionally potent Eros, to the impotent postemotional spirit that was best described by Simmel as blasé<sup>29</sup>. The problem then is not just the relations between producers and consumers, but the relations between politics and economics, between environmental awareness and production are all postemotional—hence, deranged. Postemotional relations can, at best, foster a spirit of superficial unity. At their worst, postemotional relations replace genuine feelings of unity and connection with prepackaged emotions that are the equivalent of painting in grayscale. Even rage, which is theoretically anger to the nth degree, has become postemotional—as in the case of people “rage quitting” online video game matches—since the sight of an enraged person does little more than expedite the blasé emotions within the modern person. Finally, the explosion of online grocers and food subscription services has dovetailed with another interesting phenomenon, the dual disappearance of the store front and the telephone in business life. Many subscription service companies do not have store fronts since their business consist of packing up their wares and shipping them to customers directly from their warehouse, thus the person’s first interaction with a product comes after they have

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<sup>29</sup> See Simmel’s *The Metropolis & Mental Life* as well as his essay, *The Stranger* both of which can be found in *On individuality and Social Forms*



already purchased it. Second, these same companies tend to only be available for support and complains via email. This is all the more surprising since the overwhelming majority of Americans own cell phones, but not these businesses. These are just two small examples of the derangement of relations between consumers and producers that is the rule in postemotional society.

In describing American society as postemotional, I am drawing attention to the vast differences between modern American society and the inner-directed American society prior to World War II. These changes have yet to be adequately considered in the food studies literature, particularly in the literature that seeks to inform public policy. Indeed, in seeking to inform public policy the researchers are out of step with postemotional society at large, which has many weak convictions but only one truly strong conviction: all strong convictions are equally bad. Marx's prediction of increasing class consciousness and the subsequent revolution that results from people's shared sense of identity is impossible in postemotional society, irrespective of the country's growing concentration of wealth in the pockets of the economic elites. The blasé attitude is the rule, rather than the exception, in postemotional society.

### **Summary of Contributions**

From my perspective, there are at least ten contributions made to sociological inquiry in this dissertation. First, the integration of Schopenhauer's philosophy of the will, which was implicit in the classical social theory of Durkheim, is made explicit and extended to the sociology of food.

Second, Mestrovic (1988) and Mestrovic & Brown's (1985) etymological studies of anomie were expanded with additional emphasis placed on the division of labor's role in Durkheim's conceptualization of anomie as "derangement." Mestrovic's (1985) claim that anomie is the secular equivalent of sin was similarly expanded with special reference to St. Augustine's theological anthropology—human beings are eccentric creatures who long for God—which was compared with the metaphysics of Schopenhauer and Durkheim to illuminate their common conception of limitlessness and ceaseless desire which are the hallmarks of anomie.

Third, I discussed the ubiquity of the term "food," critiqued of the various definitions of food, and subsequently advanced my own working definition of food. Food refers to something that sustains life, but does so through the utilization of the collective constituent elements (vitamins, minerals, calories) that naturally occur within a material substance. In other words, food is the product of ecosystem which arose from the formation of moral constraints between organisms dependent upon one another. My insistence on the collectiveness of these elements is important, leading to the conclusion that the whole of any food is greater than the sum of its collective parts.

Fourth, Durkheim's conception of the division of labor as a spontaneous and moral force was employed to aid in defining the difference between food and deranged food, thus creating a new means of talking about moral food that doesn't rely on abstract models – economic or philosophical.

Fifth, the influence of Darwin's emphasis on cooperation—as opposed to survival of the fittest—between organisms was made explicit in Durkheim's work, through direct

quotes from Darwin as well as the American Sociologists Park and Burgess (1921). The primacy of cooperation for these theorists was presented and then extended to this project, which drew heavily from Durkheim.

Sixth, the role of emotions in Weber's study of the Protestant Ethic was illustrated with quotes from the original study and a corresponding discussion of the downstream societal effects as primarily driven by emotion. The most important of these emotions was anxiety, particularly as it presents as anxiety about one's fate as either saved (good list) or damned (bad list).

Seventh, Weber's work was recontextualized to discuss the practices of large food companies in modern capitalism, specifically, their efforts to appear on the "good list." Of particular note was the tendency of publicly traded companies to disparage emotions and emphasize rational choice when making decisions. Nonetheless, the stock market seems to fluctuate based on emotional response, including the public perceptions of a company as weak, exploitative, or otherwise engaged in morally dubious practices. Consequently, modern companies appear to be concerned with being on the "good list" – which includes high profit margins, positive public image, and high sales volume—and the company must engage in business practices that give the impression that this is the case, even if the company is struggling.

Eighth, I introduced a new term to the sociological lexicon, "postemotional Eros," to describe the driving force of modern society as one of superficial unity. Raw emotion, with its overwhelming highs and lows, is traded for the more stable

prepackaged emotions which inform the economic, political, cultural, spiritual, and relational lives of modern people.

Ninth, the work of food studies scholars and investigative journalists—Michael Pollan and Michael Moss in particular—concerning the marketing of large food companies was reevaluated in light of the Mestrovic’s postemotional theory, that is, advertising based on emotions was recontextualized within the broader framework of a society that feeds on prepackaged emotions.

Finally, Durkheim’s writings on derangement were refracted through a discussion of the food industry’s manipulation of natural cognitive, somatic, and emotional responses. This final contribution is perhaps the most significant since it acts as a midpoint between placing all the blame on the company or on the individual consumer since the manipulation of these natural responses is widespread throughout “the consumption industry” and, moreover, throughout modern consumer society.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

This study was undertaken with the goal of using classical sociology theory and recontextualizing it to discuss the problems and inner-workings of the modern food system. In deciding to rely heavily on primary sources, I was often forced to go along with the translations of those works that were not written in English—Durkheim and Weber in particular. In order to bridge the various interpretations that each translator offered, I strove to showcase the consistency of ideas as they appeared in each author’s work. In the case of Durkheim in particular, I endeavored to show how anomie concerned him from the publication of his dissertation (*The Division of Labor in Society*

– 1893) until the end of his life when he died before completing *La Morale* (1917). Future research may explore the accuracy of the translations used, and in doing so, improve the precision with which such works could be recontextualized.

The methodology of this dissertation—in particular, its use of hermeneutics to understand social theory and food— is meant to serve at the starting point for a new approach to food studies and sociological theory. The art of understanding requires a considerable commitment to an individual author’s work, but anything less will yield only pieces of the puzzle. Without such commitment, the theorist’s picture of the world will remain hidden and the depth of their insights beyond our reach. The implementation of food as a vehicle for discussion gave the theories discussed herein a more definite medium for expression while also allowing observations to me made about the finite and the changing. It is hoped that future studies will imitate this method so they too can benefit from the clarity that it adds to abstract theoretical concepts. Finally, future research could also extend the hermeneutic approach used in this dissertation to the study of other social theorists, as well as to cookbooks, nutrition labels, and the packaging of processed food products.

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