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University of Nevada, Reno

**Resolving My Dietary Disconnect: Food and Place through the Perspective of the Humanities**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

**BACHELOR OF ARTS, ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES**

by

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## Abstract

As a post-industrial consumer, I have become confused and overwhelmed with the choices involved in the current food system. The confusion and anxiety presented by the post-industrial food system override many of the pleasures I once associated with the act of eating. As a conscious consumer, I am searching for more natural and healthier choices that will lessen my environmental impact. Local food is one choice that has gained recent popularity amongst conscious consumers. Science and technology, which often dominate modern food discussion, do not provide satisfactory answers to the fundamentally humanistic issue of finding what is best to eat. This thesis questions how I might use the resources and approaches of the humanities to help navigate the decision-making process of the current food system? And how might disciplines such as history, literature, and philosophy help me gain a better understanding of local food and its potential to reconnect me with food production, preparation, and knowledge? After the foundation of the current food system has been established, local food will be explored through the lens of the humanities. The humanities provide insight into how eating locally can assist conscious consumers in reconnecting with food knowledge and the natural world. Ultimately seeking to cultivate mindfulness, the humanities are a valuable resource for relieving the confusion and concern that face conscious consumers in the post-industrial food system.

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## Chapter 1 - Personal Motivation

While attending St. George's Independent School in Memphis, Tennessee, I learned the importance of acting consciously towards the environment. St. George's lists an environmental philosophy as a part of their mission statement declaring: "St. George's also believes it must take a leadership role in the conservation of environmental resources. As good stewards of these resources, St. George's will uphold the principles of sustainable design and continue its history of environmental education to promote these values within its student body" ("Mission & Philosophy"). I thought having an environmental philosophy so central to one's goals in life was normal behavior and a reasonable expectation for everyone to have. However, I soon learned that not everyone valued and prioritized the environment as St. George's had. I did not encounter another organization with similar importance placed on the environment until I attended a student college fair and introduced myself to Dr. Jen Huntley at a booth for the environmental studies major at the University of Nevada, Reno. That day, I found a major I would enjoy and a place to further cultivate my environmental consciousness. The environmental studies major allowed me to continue my environmental education, and stressed the importance of acting upon what was being learned.

One trend that kept reappearing throughout my environmental education was how large environmental problems were and how much work, time, and effort would be needed to solve them. I felt a sense of hopelessness that I was unable to have a significant impact on the issues I care about. Peter Berg relates to this sense of hopelessness stating, "Rescuing the environment has become like running a battlefield aid station in a war against a killing machine that operates just beyond reach, and that

shifts its ground after each seeming defeat” (qtd. in Devall and Sessions 3). Not only did I feel powerless to create significant change, but I also felt that others would not inconvenience themselves to lessen their impact on the environment. Part of this hopelessness stemmed from the constant dread communicated through the news, magazines, and other popular media channels of the impending environmental crisis. My other concern was the amount of time and resources that would be needed to solve these problems during an economic crisis. My worry of lacking sufficient resources to solve important environmental problems was reaffirmed when the environmental studies major was eliminated in 2010 due to a lack of funds and interest at the University of Nevada, Reno. At this point in my environmental education, I had gained a large amount of knowledge, but was convinced that as a college student, with limited time, money, and influence, I could do very little.

My defeatist attitude improved whilst taking environmental literature, the first English class of my college career, which introduced the works of prominent environmental authors such as Rachel Carson, Michael Pollan, and Wendell Berry. This class opened my eyes to using the humanities as a source for navigating common human issues and environmental problems. Environmental literature brought my attention to others dealing with similar problems within their personal lives. Colin Beavan, an author included in the syllabus, wrote *No Impact Man* because he was feeling “voiceless, helpless, and powerless” and his project of having no impact on the environment and the resulting book ultimately provided him with a voice (101). Beavan demonstrated how valuable of a source the humanities are for introducing people with similar issues, opening my eyes to new issues, and restoring my hope in the possibility of a solution.

Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* turned my awareness to environmental aspects of food I had not previously considered. I had been a vegetarian for 8 years and had looked into the potential consequences of my food choices, but I very much remained an un-informed consumer. Pollan describes the current state of food affairs to be a "national eating disorder" driven by the lack of "a single, strong, stable culinary tradition to guide us" and an overabundance of choice (5). Choosing which food is best for the environment and my health is a difficult task when lacking traditional knowledge for guidance. Pollan uses Claude Levi-Straus's famous quote of "not only good to eat, but also good to think" to describe the issue facing conscious consumers today (qtd. in Pollan, *Omnivore's* 289). As a conscious consumer, I am looking for food choices that can satisfy both my body and my mind. I want to make mindful food decisions that reflect on my ideals and values and do not leave me with feelings of guilt. The problem of what is best to eat and think has developed into the omnivore's dilemma, a problem I personally struggled with after being assigned Pollan's book in class. Initially, I felt a strong sense of disconnection from my food by not knowing what it was comprised of and where it came from. I knew that the act of eating fundamentally connected humans to the natural world; I just did not feel that connection.

After reading *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and searching for a choice that was both good to eat and think, I was convinced that eating locally was a viable solution. I became a member of the Great Basin Food Cooperative and decided to buy local goods whenever possible. I remember walking back from the co-op after my first purchase feeling a sense of relief and happiness to have made the "right" food decision.

My relief reverted back into uncertainty after reading James McWilliams' *Just Food: Where Locavores Get it Wrong and How We Can Truly Eat Responsibly*.

McWilliams presents a very persuasive criticism of the local food movement by debunking several popular misconceptions that form the basis of the movement.

McWilliams' alternative argument demonstrates the strength of the humanities as a source for thinking critically about what has largely been accepted as true in society and with popular movements. Although there may not be one single solution to my dietary dilemma, I can make better choices if I am better informed.

All of the concern, confusion, and anxiety surrounding the best choice of food lessen the amount of pleasure I associate with eating. In order to make shopping for and consuming food pleasurable again, I need to gain a better understanding of the current food system. By gaining a more in depth understanding, I will feel more confident that choices I make, as an informed consumer, reflect my ideals and values. I will also further develop as an environmentally conscious consumer so I can support those who value the environment as I do.

What follows are my findings as a conscious consumer who wondered: Given the fact that I live in a world of food complexity, a world in which the seemingly simple decision about what to eat for dinner confronts me with a moral, physiological, and ecological quandary, how might I use the resources and approaches of the humanities to help me navigate the decision-making process? And how might such disciplines as history, literature, and philosophy help me gain a better understanding of local food and its potential to reconnect me with the pleasures of eating?

## Chapter 2 – Introduction: The Role of Food in Human Lives

No doubt food is necessary for every human life; however, being so intertwined with humanity throughout history, food has come to mean much more. Food has always been an integral part of daily life, but only recently has it become associated with confusion, disappointment, and a myriad of other emotions that once were not connected with the basic function of eating (Hyman 18). Henry David Thoreau describes food as a necessary that all creatures share stating, “To many creatures there is but one necessary of life, Food” (9). As well as a basic necessity of life, food has long been associated with a number of human emotions and values such as gratitude and happiness (Luomala 233). Traditionally, food has been associated with family, knowledge, regionalism, and the pleasures that accompany them (Rozin 20). In “The Pleasures of Eating,” Wendell Berry explains the importance of taking joy in the act of eating, stating: “Eating with the fullest pleasure- pleasure, that is, that does not depend on ignorance – is perhaps the profoundest enactment of our connection with the world. In this pleasure we experience and celebrate our dependence and our gratitude, for we are living from mystery, from creatures we did not make and powers we cannot comprehend” (326). I face a new and different kind of mystery in the modern industrial food system than the mystery of natural processes Berry refers to in “The Pleasures of Eating”. The mystery of the modern industrial food chain is due in part to the hidden production processes and unknown contents of food. The mystery of the contents and origins of my food creates a deep disconnection between my mind and my food. Modern food products are distanced from the raw material and land from which the food was originally derived. The result of this mystery is an industrial

food system that is dominated by processed and adulterated foods and a consumer base that lacks in valuable food knowledge (Vileisis 246).

In the past, food was a direct connection to the natural world, and essential knowledge was passed down from generation to generation as families were informed about their food choices and the origins of their food. Pre-industrial families were deeply connected to the food they ate because they, with the help of local farmers, were in control of the food supply. In the post-industrial western world, however, choosing what to eat is a common source of confusion and can cause more anguish than pleasure (Vileisis 252). In order to combat the confusion presented by the post-industrial food era, I turned to history, philosophy, and literature as core humanistic disciplines to better understand how the complex food system provides not only physical nourishment to my body, but also meaning to my mind.

### Chapter 3 – Using the Humanities to Better Understand My Role in the Food System

Recently, I have noticed numerous attempts to increase awareness of my role in the food system through popular media. Movies, documentaries, and articles relating to food and the often “behind the scenes” methods of production are bringing related issues to my attention through the lens of the humanities (Pollan, *Omnivore’s Dilemma* 2). The humanities can be broadly defined as disciplines of learning that explore human constructs, concerns, and values. The humanities, a cluster of intellectual disciplines, allow the reader to explore human concerns and their origins, identify social impacts, and predict future trends (Geoghegan-Quinn). One of the most fundamental human concerns is the search for food that best meets our needs. Therefore, the humanities are a valuable resource for providing strategies when attempting to navigate the complicated decision-making process that is created by the current food system. The strength of using the humanities to help navigate the current food system lies in the practice of working toward a better understanding of an issue, rather than simply aiming to find a definitive answer. Literature, philosophy, and history, sub-disciplines of the humanities, contribute unique perspective and meaning to an issue that prove beneficial when addressing fundamentally humanistic problems.

#### 3.1 The Accessibility of the Humanities

One reason history, literature, and philosophy aid in developing a deeper understanding of a humanistic issue is because of the accessible manner in which these sub-disciplines of the humanities are presented. Popular works of environmental literature are comprehensible and available to the common consumer. Scientific studies,

journals, and jargon, which dominate food discussion, have proven difficult to read in detail and apply to my everyday life. While modes of presenting the humanities, such as books and documentaries, are created with the viewer in mind and take on a humanistic point of view. Daniel J. Philippon, an Associate Professor in English at the University of Minnesota, argues that the humanities contribute perspective and meaning to an issue that other sources, such as science and technology, cannot satisfy (164). Philippon acknowledges that meaning and perspective are not tools unique to the humanities. However, only the humanities provide a “distinctive depth of understanding that is the result of the breadth of disciplinary and interdisciplinary conversations that have been taking place around these subjects” (166). This “distinctive depth of understanding” provided by research in the humanities seemed like the perfect way to combat the confusion I have encountered as a conscious consumer in the current food system.

Conventional methods of research typically include turning to science for answers, but as Conway, Keniston, and Marx point out “many, perhaps most, of our most pressing current environmental problems come from systematic socioeconomic and cultural causes and for this reason their solutions lie far beyond the reach of scientific or technical knowledge” (qtd. in Philippon 164). Societal problems are often a direct result of human behavior. Therefore, it only makes sense to include the humanities, sources that are “focused on human societies and their basic functions”, when researching a fundamentally human problem (Sorlin 789). Science is no doubt a necessary discipline when working to solve common human issues related to the environment. Even writers of environmental literature must have “a sturdy appreciation for, and a firm grasp on, the

scientific world” (Slovic 26). However, a focus on the humanities when looking at environmental issues allows for critical thinking, self-examination, and a deeper understanding of issues so closely connected to human behavior, values, and emotions (Philippon 164).

### 3.2 Literature: Enrichment for the Mind

Literature, or the art of written work, can take on many forms, including “oral, poetry, fiction, nonfiction and drama” (Slovic, 8). Literature contributes meaning to an issue by provoking the reader into “imagining and questioning the products of that imagining through story and image” (Philippon 164). With food production occurring far from where I live, imagination is a valuable tool in uncovering these processes and thinking critically about my role and responsibility as a part of the current food system. Literature also provides an easily accessible humanistic perspective on environmental issues that may sometimes be out of reach to consumers because of either economic or educational boundaries.

Since the late 1960s, and ever increasingly today, environmental literature is presenting readers with manageable works that investigate the “relationship between humans and their natural surroundings” (Slovic 7). Robert Kates describes this relationship as humans existing “apart from nature as well as a part of nature” (qtd. in Slovic 5). The duality of being one with the natural world because I am alive but separate from the natural world because of my consciousness is explored by authors of environmental literature (Slovic 5). The humanities are written to serve multiple purposes and work towards many different goals, but Slovic offers a simplified objective

stating, “the goal of environmental literature is to impress readers with a vivid, visceral sense of their own naturalness and, by extension, to encourage readers to pay attention to the nonhuman world on aesthetic, ecological, and political levels” (26). By reminding humans of their essential naturalness and the nonhuman world they are responsible for; environmental literature can have a large impact on developing environmental consciousness. Slovic describes careful literary analysis as “a process of exploration and reflection, and anyone who participates thoughtfully in this process is likely to end up having worked through a set of ideas that will lead to an enriched consciousness of language, mind, and the world” (28). An enriched environmental consciousness developed with the help of environmental literature is closely connected to philosophy, a sub-discipline of the humanities.

### 3.3 Philosophy: Development of Environmental Consciousness

Philosophy, the study of fundamental problems, contributes meaning to an issue through “theorizing and questioning theory” by attempting to explain an issue or critically examining theories of those in the past (Philippon 165). Philippon elaborates, “Without theories, or ideas that seek to explain something, meaning cannot exist, whether in sustainability or any other field of inquiry (165). By studying the theories of philosophers and other educated persons, I am able to better understand the fundamental questions involved with the issue of food and to work toward cultivating my own environmental consciousness.

Philosophy in the humanities offers opportunities for conscious consumers to examine their personal beliefs and values in order to work toward living a more

meaningful and informed life. Martha Nussbaum, an American philosopher, argues for the importance of a liberal education, one focused on the humanities, in order to truly cultivate humanity. Nussbaum believes there are three capacities essential to cultivating humanity (9). The first of the three abilities Nussbaum deems essential for cultivating humanity is critical self-examination. Nussbaum explains:

First is the capacity for critical examination of oneself and one's traditions – for living what, following Socrates, we may call 'the examined life.' This means a life that accepts no belief as authoritative simply because it has been handed down by tradition or become familiar through habit, a life that questions all beliefs and accepts only those that survive reason's demand for consistency and for justification. (9)

Living the examined life implies critically examining and questioning my life in the present in order to develop a strong personal philosophy to aid in struggling with issues in the future.

Nussbaum's second essential capacity for cultivating humanity is seeing oneself not only as a local citizen but also as a person "bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern" (9). Also, recognizing that "the world around us is inescapably international" is essential to cultivating environmental consciousness (Nussbaum 9). Discourse surrounding the current food culture often leans towards a strong local mentality. Nussbaum reminds me that although it can be easier only to concern myself with the local, humanity is firmly connected by the natural world we share for sustenance and thinking globally is equally as important.

The third capacity essential for cultivating humanity is using the narrative imagination to "think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story, and to understand the emotions

and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have” (Nussbaum 10-11).

Nussbaum’s three intellectual capacities are fundamentally relevant to environmental consciousness in society today. I consider the ability to think internationally while living locally essential to being a conscious and thoughtful consumer. One way to act upon my thoughtfulness throughout life is to challenge traditions that do not seem right or to be backed by reason. I have noticed and actively participated in the disconnection between eating and critical thinking in the post-industrial food era. Because of the disconnection between eating and thinking, eating has become an unexamined process driven by habit that I believe ought to be reexamined by the conscious consumer. I can become a well-informed and responsible consumer by gaining a deeper understanding of the current food system and my connection to the natural world.

### 3.4 History: Connection with the Past

History, or methodically collected information from the past, a sub-discipline of the humanities, provides a historical perspective when searching for a deeper understanding of a human issue, such as the current food system. The historical perspective, in particular, allows me to question how we got ourselves into this situation and could offer suggestions for how we can get ourselves out of it.

The historical perspective, a scholarly approach based in the humanities, allows the reader to look back at how previous generations addressed similar human concerns in the past. Philippon elaborates, “A historical perspective also allows us to trace the emergence, growth, and development of ideas, people, organizations, and movements, which subsequently enables us to understand sequence and transitions, or see influence

over time and to trace causes and consequences” (165-66). Using the historical perspective, I am able to better understand where an issue originated and how it formed the issue I am familiar with today. This approach includes studying how the shared predicament of acquiring food has been both similar to and different from the current state of food complexity. The historical approach is vital to appreciating important aspects of contemporary food issues because it provides a historical perspective of human emotions, behaviors, and actions towards a common problem. By looking at the emergence and development of the current food system, I am able to better understand how and why we got ourselves into the current state of food confusion. A historical perspective is essential to answering the question: How did we get into the situation of having so little knowledge about what we eat?

#### Chapter 4 – Connection to Food in the Past: A Historical Perspective

Ann Vileisis, an environmental historian, answers this very question in *Kitchen Literacy: How We Lost Knowledge of Where Food Comes from and Why We Need to Get It Back*. Vileisis explores the history of American Food culture and how Americans lost track of the origins and contents of their food. One day, Vileisis noticed that indifference about the production and origins of food had become the norm in modern American food culture, especially in supermarkets (7). Vileisis uses history to explore the food system and the origins of our disconnection from food knowledge, she believes that history “can sharpen our outlook with its perspective and its ironies, and remind us of the opportunity for change” (11). Vileisis displays how American society was once connected to their food, but alongside the industrial revolution, American society became more and more disconnected from the origins, contents, and knowledge of their food. Looking back at how communities were once connected to food in the past could offer ideas for reconnecting with food in the present as a post-industrial consumer.

The local community was once accountable for the production of all food within the community. If a family could not produce the food necessary, the local farmer within the community took on this responsibility. Vileisis explains that in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century home gardens were “central to the family’s household economy” (13). A strong connection with the production and preparation of meals allowed for the retention of valuable food knowledge that was passed down from generation to generation. For example, knowing the age of the animal that was to be prepared was essential to cooking it properly and this food knowledge ensured the health and satisfaction of those who

consumed the meat (35). As well as knowing the age of the animal, pre-industrial families were aware of where the food originated because the taste was directly connected to the place of origin. Consumers were able to pinpoint which part of the river they preferred their fish to originate because of the superior taste associated with fish from one location as opposed to others (Vileisis 39). However, the importance and availability of food knowledge began to change dramatically alongside the industrial revolution.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, people began to move into the cities looking for jobs leaving their local farmers behind. The new urban populations were no longer responsible for producing their food, but passed on the responsibility to their local markets and to the farmers that supplied them. With the introduction of railroads and canals for rapid transportation, markets were able to procure food from all over the country. For the first time, due to the advancement of transportation, a citizen's food shed could potentially span the entire country. Citizens were intrigued by the idea of more choices from distant locations, and some locally produced foods became "less desirable" (Vileisis 38). City dwellers had once relied on local sources for food, but now they had choices from all over the country. These choices allowed for consumers to pick and choose from products and their respective locations based on factors such as taste and price. For example, many city dwellers had once relied on inferior tasting and poorer quality milk that was fed the fermented mash left over when whiskey was produced because pre-industrial consumers had no other choice (Bunger 170). But with the introduction of quick and relatively cheap transportation provided by railroads,

consumers had access to better tasting milk from grass-fed cows that was shipped into the city. Little did consumers know, but they were letting go of traditional knowledge at an extremely rapid rate in exchange for an abundance of readily available choices.

This abundance was most prominent in the markets of New York City where F.A. Benson tried her best to retain food knowledge in the earliest years of the markets. Every two weeks beginning in 1885, Benson reported on what was entering the market and where it originated from in *Good Housekeeping* magazine (Vileisis 53). Benson believed there was still importance to knowing the origins of food products, especially in a time where any product could be travelling hundreds of miles by railroad. Benson believed that the origin of food was important knowledge to have because it could indicate quality and if the price was right (qtd. in Vileisis 52). However, Benson was unable to keep up with the increasing number of food products entering the market and had to discontinue her column in 1887. With the discontinuation of Benson's article and others alike, consumers no longer had easy access to the origins of the food found in markets (Vileisis 52). For the first time, after efforts to inform consumers of where their food came from were halted, consumers were unaware of the origins of the food they were buying. The city populations continued to grow, as did the means of production to ensure needs were met. The more products that became available to these city dwellers, the less they knew about the contents and origins of their food. The massive upheaval from rural to urban played a significant role in the disconnection from our food and would lead to further disengagement from traditional food knowledge and nature.

Chapter 5 – Disconnection of Food from Knowledge and Nature: Historical  
Perspective

Vileisis acknowledges that all modern food products have a story of where they came from and how they came to be, but modern consumers are generally unaware of these stories (4). Food ignorance recently developed into the norm over the course of a couple of generations (5). Industrial processes not only separated consumers from food production and food knowledge, but also distanced consumers further from nature.

One of the turning points in the disengagement of food from nature can be traced to the introduction of processed or prepared foods. The beginning of the industrialization of the food chain has been credited to the introduction of rollers, comprised of iron, steel, or porcelain, that were used to grind grain in Europe in 1870 (Pollan, *Defense* 106). Around 1890, manufactured or processed foods began to stream into the western diet in response to the demand created by increasing city populations. Marion Nestle describes processed food as “a code word for low or minimal nutritional value” (306). Processed foods were specially designed to withstand transportation with the addition of preservatives that reduce the chance of spoilage on long journeys across the country. Vileisis believes these processed foods satisfy a need, asserting manufactured foods answer “urban society’s needs for cheaper, convenient, less-prone-to-spoilage, sanitary foods, whose producers were accountable for their quality and safety” (74). Consumers living during the industrial revolution appeared to be willing to sacrifice food knowledge for the convenience and extended shelf-life of processed and prepared foods. However,

these foods are denatured and comprised of additives and adulterants, which results in products that barely resemble a natural or raw form.

New industrial food products eliminate the opportunity to utilize “sensuous cues” that have traditionally been used to determine the quality of food (Vileisis 77). Because consumers can no longer evaluate the contents of their food using traditional cues, they have to rely on other sources such as product labels and advice columns to decide what is best to eat. Vileisis describes the early stages of the disconnection from food production stating: “responsibility and authority for knowing foods would steadily migrate from the kitchen of the homemaker to the province of experts in distant laboratories, government offices, and corporate headquarters” (133). Consumers are beginning to accept this disconnection as the norm and appear content knowing less about where their food comes from and what it contains (Vileisis 133).

The loss of traditional food knowledge in the early industrial years set the precedent for generations to come. Now, for example, it is common to have absolutely no idea where food comes from or what it contains. For a very long time, I did not question my food ignorance because buying whatever was cheapest or tasted the best was the extent of my food decision-making process. Henry David Thoreau describes the practice of behaviors turning into habits in *Walden*, stating, “It is remarkable how easily and insensibly we fall into a particular route, and make a beaten track for ourselves” (166). The manner by which post-industrial consumers choose foods with minimal food knowledge has become habitual but has also had noticeable consequences for those involved. Vileisis provides a historical perspective of the transition to the industrial food

system and the implications for consumers at that time, which helps me to answer the question: How did we get into this predicament?

Pollan also writes from the historical perspective, beginning *In Defense of Food: An Eaters Manifesto* with a section titled “The Age of Nutritionism,” dedicated to understanding “how we arrived at our present state of nutritional confusion and anxiety” (6). The historical perspective allows for a better understanding of and therefore a stronger connection to my current predicament. Pollan states, “By gaining a firmer grasp on the nature of the Western diet – trying to understand it not only physiologically but also historically and ecologically – we can begin to develop a different way of thinking about food that might point a path out of our predicament” (11-12). By looking at an issue so integrally connected to human life through different perspectives, I can use these outlooks to help me lessen confusion and generate ideas for a solution. When the problem I face with the current food system stems from confusion, different perspectives shed light on the issue in ways that could lead to a better understanding and confidence in my ability to tackle an issue. Pollan acknowledges the confusion present in the current food system and presents two facts that can increase confidence on the journey to resolving my dietary dilemma. The first fact Pollan believes can help guide conscious consumers is “that humans historically have been healthy eating a great many diets” (Defense 12). The second fact consumers can take comfort in is that “most of the damage to our food and health caused by the industrialization of our eating can be reversed” (Defense 12). Pollan reminds conscious consumers that historically humans

have lived perfectly healthy lives regardless of region or diet, and that the effects of industrialization on human health have the potential to be reversed.

However, James McWilliams, who also writes from the historical perspective, stresses the importance of not thinking of the past, or the pre-industrial food system, as a part of the “golden age of ecological purity” (6). McWilliams firmly believes that the popular notion of an ecological golden age is strongly misguided and that humans have been abusing the environment since the beginning of time and “often without mercy” (6). McWilliams uses the historical perspective to show that humans have always “enslaved nature to satisfy hunger” and agriculture has always and will continue to have a significant impact on the environment (7). McWilliams’ historical perspective demonstrates the importance of aiming for realistic goals for the future based on historical precedent and suggests not looking at the past as the ecological ideal.

I am faced with the issue of a disconnection from food knowledge and production in my relationship with food. I acknowledge that the disconnection between my food and my mind results in discontent with the current food system. Gaining a historical perspective connects me to consumers with similar issues in the past and allows for me to understand how this issue came to be. Authors such as Pollan, McWilliams, and Vileisis provide valuable historical perspectives that allow me to build a foundation for deeper understanding of the current food system.

### 5.1 How is the Disconnection Manifested in My Diet?

Today, I am confused about what foods are best for my health, where to buy my food, what food has the least impact on the environment, which food gives me the most value for my money and other questions parallel to Michael Pollan's basic question in *In Defense of Food*: "what should we eat?" (2) This confusion stems from the previously discussed transition to the modern industrial food system. One of the main reasons I am confused about what food to consume is because I am uninformed about the products I purchase. As Pollan explains, "the only information communicated between consumers and producers is a price" (Defense 160). Being told only the price of food products at the time of exchange would have mattered much less in the pre-industrial food era because more products resembled their original form and traditional knowledge prevailed. Today, a lack of food knowledge is problematic because consumers cannot depend on traditional or sensuous cues to determine the quality of modern food products. Processed and prepared foods do not allow for traditional knowledge to be used as a resource for decision making and do not come pre-packaged with extensive food knowledge.

One reason traditional knowledge has been lost is because of the abundance of choices presented by the current food system. Marion Nestle found that "about 320,000 food and beverage products are available in the United States," and this number continues to grow with "seventeen thousand new food products every year" (133). More and more products are being produced while consumers are left bewildered and overwhelmed with the myriad of choices that continue to grow in number. Harvey Levenstein, a researcher of American food culture, believes that this overwhelming abundance of food has bred "a

vague indifference to food, manifested in a tendency to eat and run, rather than to dine and savor” (154). Along with an indifference to food, the abundance of choice has created an ignorance of what is available to consume and the potential consequences that accompany my choice. The modern food system allows for me to make food decisions but concern myself with neither the contents nor the consequences of those food products. Food ignorance is made possible by the disconnection between my mind and my food and only adds to the confusion presented by the post-industrial food system.

The disconnection from food production and knowledge creates anxiety for me and other conscious consumer who “sense a dark side to our foods production” (Vileisis 9) and recently, conscious consumers are beginning to ask questions about food choices, contents, and consequences. Modern consumers retrieve food knowledge by means of labels and advertisements from the scientists, nutritionists, and industries that create these goods. This food information, which is generally minimal, can be communicated in ways too difficult for the general public to understand, let alone challenge. The post-industrial food system thrives off of consumers’ confusion and inability to challenge the claims of these industries (Pollan, Defense 6). I can admit that I have bought products I know very little about in a state of blissful ignorance. However, disconnection from food knowledge and production has had noticeable negative consequences that prove the disconnection is a problem that should be addressed.

## 5.2 Why is the Disconnection a Problem?

One of the main reasons I began to look into my food choices was because of the potential effects diet can have on human health and the environment. Articles, studies,

and stories of the negative consequences my food choices have on my health and the environment are prominent in popular media. The recent surge of food stories in the media shows that consumers are interested in discussing food and knowing more about its potential impact on physiological and environmental health.

Today, there is a distinct group of diseases named “Western diseases” that result after people abandon a traditional diet. Cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and obesity are some of the diseases considered to be directly correlated with diet (Defense 108). The large amount of scientific studies and findings I encounter through popular media channels seem overwhelming and contradictory. These findings have also proven difficult to apply to daily life because of the use of nutrients to explain the interaction of food with the human body. Michael Pollan believes that nutrients are “compounds and minerals in our food scientists identified as important to our health” (Defense 20). As a conscious consumer, I have noticed the dominance of nutrients in modern food discourse. Pollan believes that using nutrients to explain the contents of food increases the difficulty of identifying the right food choice. Pollan describes the problem presented by nutritionism stating: “You’ve got to be up on the latest scientific research, study ever-longer and more confusing ingredient labels, sift through increasingly dubious health claims, and then attempt to enjoy foods that have been engineered with many other objectives in view than simply tasting good” (Defense 53). Speaking in terms of nutrients only distances myself further from a connection with my food and has yet to positively influence the health of consumers. Critics of nutritionism, like Pollan, believe that “Thirty years of nutritional advice has left us fatter, sicker, and more poorly

nourished” (Defense 81). As well as a negative impact on physiological health, the current food system and mass production of food products have a significant impact on the environment.

As with most industrial processes, there are implications for the health of the environment and for those who rely on the environment for sustenance. Because of increasing populations, “some less-pure-than-desirable forms of agriculture are necessary” and have grown in size and number to meet demand (Devall and Sessions 149). Two examples of post-industrial agricultural processes include monoculture and confined animal feed operations or CAFOs. Industrial agricultural processes value high yields over all else, even the health of the land which falls victim to these processes. Some of the negative consequences that result from industrial agriculture include: land degradation, pollution and contamination of nearby sources, topsoil depletion, decreasing water reserves, loss in biodiversity, long term loss of natural vegetation, decreasing land productivity, and excessive energy use (McWilliams 119). Due to popular media, I am increasingly aware of the potential impacts industrial agriculture can have on the environment, even though the production processes are often intentionally kept out of the public eye.

### 5.3 Reconnecting through the Humanities

As a conscious consumer, one who wishes to reconnect with food once again, I am asking for alternatives to industrial food products. There has been recent demand for local, organic, and other food products that claim to be more connected to the original

raw material of the natural world. I am aware of the consequences food choices can have on my health and on the environment and I am in search of the “better” choice.

Determining the “better” choice depends entirely on personal values, and I first need to figure out what I value in life before determining which foods will help me fulfill it. It does not seem possible to try and gain a better understanding about what I value in life from scientific studies, advertisements, or even food labels. Instead I, and conscious consumers alike, can turn to the humanities, a discipline devoted to the understanding of what it means to live a human life, for answers. Food complexity and the disconnection that results is an entirely humanistic problem and I believe it should be studied as such. The humanities provide a means of navigating such human problems by dealing with questions of meaning, justice, order, normality, and value (Peer 6). By further exploring these issues in social, moral, and ecological frameworks, the humanities provide a deeper understanding of the complex interconnected relationships that affect everyday life. I do not believe there is a single solution for the disconnection from food modern consumers face, but a better understanding of my principles and the food system I am a part of will lessen confusion.

One source of uncertainty lies in a recently popular category of food: local food. The common physiological and environmental concerns are used both for and against local food as a choice. A greater understanding of the issue from a humanistic perspective is necessary to eventually deciding if local is a better choice for me and if it coordinates well with my own personal philosophy.

## Chapter 6 - Local Food as a Choice

Recently, I have been searching for healthier and more environmentally conscious choices in a food system that has come to be dominated by processed and adulterated foods. One popular choice in the current food system is local food. Local is a relative term and its meaning differs drastically depending on who is using it and where it is being used. Prior to the industrial revolution, all food was local because transportation and preservatives were not yet developed to make acquiring distant goods possible. Now, however, I have to scour in order to find goods that are raised within a close proximity to my home. Local food is generally defined by a food shed consisting of a 100 mile radius circling around one's city, town, or home (McWilliams 2). What differentiates local from non-local food choices is the size and span of a food shed. A "food shed" is defined as "the area of land from which food is drawn" (Vileisis 15). Proponents of the local food movement believe that food drawn from the local community is better suited than that drawn from distant locations. Because of the close proximity to the raising of produce, local food choices are limited by climate, season, availability of land, and other factors that differ by region. Therefore, local food choices are limited by one's locality and its potential to produce food. Today, with the local food movement gaining popularity among environmentalists and conscious consumers, local food can be acquired in a number of ways.

### 6.1. How Do I Find Local Food?

The most direct way to obtain local food is to raise the food in a home garden as those in the past have for the majority of time. If the consumer wants more variety and

less responsibility for food production, they can purchase local goods at farmers markets. Recently gaining popular momentum, farmers markets are where local farmers come together to sell their goods to a number of people in one location. Farmers markets are a great place for the conscious consumer to shake the hand of the person responsible for food production and get competitive prices on local goods (Pollan, *Defense* 160). In my experience, farmers markets are friendly locations where consumers can congregate with the local community and access local food knowledge. Food knowledge can be derived either directly from the farmer or from other conscious consumers familiar with the produce unique to that region. Farmers markets can be and often are scheduled regularly, but are not always open and ready for business. For more regular access to local produce, consumers sign up to be a part of a CSA or community supported agriculture.

A CSA is a system in which consumers come together before a harvest is collected and pledge an amount of money to the farmer to cover the costs of production (Lang 62). In doing so, the consumer becomes involved with the production of food but take the risk, along with the farmer, that the harvest is favorable. These consumers get a variety of produce delivered to their door on a reoccurring schedule, generally every one to two weeks. The basic idea behind a CSA is the shared responsibility of the production and a shared economic benefit between the farmer and consumer (DeMuth 1). CSA members have increased food knowledge of where and how their food was grown and participate in a portion of the traditional agricultural system of the past (Lang 63).

The way I choose to access local goods is through a food cooperative, commonly known as a community co-op. It is not a requirement of co-ops to support local farmers

or sustainable practices but most choose to. Co-ops provide the convenience of a one stop shop, similar to a grocery store. Co-ops are different from grocery stores because they are owned by the customers, workers, or a combination of the two. Generally, customers pay a yearly fee and are therefore directly connected to the decision making process of what types of food is available and how food is sold (Lang 62). Co-ops have a limited variety of choices in comparison to grocery stores but sales support the local community. Each method of obtaining local food has its advantages and disadvantages, but each has gained popularity and continues to fulfill customers' specialized needs across industrialized nations. Farmers markets and CSAs have seen significant increases between 1990 and the present (McWilliams 22). McWilliams believes farmers markets are gaining popularity because people genuinely believe local food is better for the environment. However, McWilliams calls the popular consumer belief, which assumes the less transportation the less of a negative impact on the environment, an "unexamined axiom" (22) that when examined properly is not as environmentally conscious as it may seem.

## Chapter 7 – James McWilliams: A Criticism of the Local Food Movement

James McWilliams, a historian and associate professor of history at Texas State, presents a criticism of the local food movement in his book, *Just Food: Where Locavores Get it Wrong and How We Can Truly Eat Responsibly*. Up until reading McWilliams' book, I believed that eating local was the answer to my dietary worries. However, even from the title, I could tell that McWilliams was going to present a different view of the local food movement and challenge what I had previously thought to be true. McWilliams begins by challenging food miles, a popular concept that has formed the basis of the local food movement.

A food mile is the metric that has come to describe the distance food travels from farm to fork (McWilliams 17). It is generally assumed that the less food miles a meal travels, the less of a negative impact the transportation of that meal has on the environment (McWilliams 21). This idea has a firm basis in the fact that burning fossil fuels, such as gasoline, has a well-known negative impact on the atmosphere, climate, and the local air quality (Archer et al. 118). As well as an environmental impact, food miles are considered a detriment to the food itself because of a loss in flavor, texture, and sometimes nutritional value that result when goods are picked before they are ripe, treated to ensure they last, and transported across the country or even world (Nestle 33). The reduction of food miles and the transportation of local food is a well-known reason consumers choose to buy local (McWilliams 22). However, McWilliams seeks to prove that food miles are only one small factor to be considered in the production process of food.

McWilliams claims that what I eat is more important than from where the food is derived. McWilliams wonders if the reason food miles have gained recent popularity is “because of its accessibility and simplicity rather than its inherent ability to actually solve an incredibly complex problem” (22). Food miles are a relatively simple idea for consumers to comprehend and I had always generally assumed that the less transportation and fuel that are expended, the better for the environment. McWilliams argues against the idea that food miles account for a significant amount of energy expenditure in the production process of food. McWilliams seeks to prove the notion of food miles as incorrect with the use of LCAs or life cycle assessments. A LCA is an energy evaluation that “ultimately uncover[s] the hidden links in the food-supply chain that are the most environmentally damaging and in turn in most need of repair” (McWilliams 23). LCAs take into account the energy expenditure of every step in the production process including: “water usage, harvesting techniques, pesticide application, fertilizer outlays, the amount of carbon absorbed through photosynthesis, disposal of product, packaging, crop drying techniques, storage procedures, nitrogen cycles, climatic conditions, and dozens of less obvious cultivation inputs” (23). McWilliams points to several studies that show production is the significant “energy sink” when it comes to our food, not transportation (24). In one study, Rich Pirog found that out of all of the factors in which energy is used to produce and consume food; transportation has the lowest impact (22). So why would I bother buying local food if food miles account for such a small portion of the energy expended in the production of my food?

McWilliams asserts that buying local is an “easy gesture” that “offers environmentalists otherwise deeply involved in a commercialized life an easy way to register their discontent with the excesses of modernity” (30). McWilliams supposes that buying local food is a comfortable way for consumers who are unhappy with the modern industrial system to rebel and feel good about making food choices. Before reading McWilliams, I felt as though local food was the perfect way to demonstrate my discontent with the industrial food system. By buying local, I was happy to support sustainable practices within my community and I was even happier to stop supporting the industrial food chain. McWilliams suggests that hoping to rebel by buying local food is a misguided intention because he does not believe that local food systems are “somehow immune from the disruptive aspects of normal market forces” (32). Normal market forces have been demonstrated with the recent corporate takeover of the “eat local” proposition.

### 7.1 Green-washing: Corporate Takeover of Popular Environmental Movements

Just as with organic food, or any other concept that becomes popular enough to be marketable, big business began to imitate local branding in order to generate a profit. This corporate takeover results in an “eat local” brand that is exploited and perverted from its original intention (McWilliams 37). Wishing to rebel against the industrial food system, I have to be cautious not to be fooled by these big business imitations of local. Environmentalists are increasingly aware of the practice of making a product appear to be environmentally conscious with advertising and labeling and have named it “green-washing” (Dahl 247). Producers are attempting to meet an unprecedented consumer

demand by making “unwarranted or overblown claims of sustainability or environmental friendliness in an attempt to gain market share” (Dahl 247). The reason green-washed claims are currently allowed to fool consumers is because of the loose regulation on marketing guidelines of green goods. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) created the “Green Guides” in 1992 in attempts to protect the public from “unsubstantiated or unscrupulous advertising” and the guides were recently revised in 2012 (“Green Guides”). The Green Guides were established to help consumers, like me, find food that is what it claims to be so I can feel confident buying goods that reflect my ideals. McWilliams believes that a consumer’s food choices should not only reflect personal ideals but also consider the well-being of other members of humanity.

## 7.2 Food Security: Thinking Globally and Locally

One prominent issue related to food choice is food security. Food security can be defined as sufficient access for all populations to safe food and nutrients (Lake et. al 1520). The fact that the definition of food security includes both food and nutrients independently shows how the two have become separate in the post-industrial food system. Pollan explains the decrease of nutrients in industrial food products stating, “We’re getting substantially less nutrition per calorie than we used to” (119). Pollan believes that the separation of food and nutrients creates “a new creature...the human being who manages to be both over fed and undernourished, two characteristics seldom found in the same body in the long natural history of our species” (122). Post-industrial consumers face a modern threat of being well-fed but undernourished. McWilliams

addresses the different threat nations face with not being able to provide their populations with a safe and sufficient food supply.

McWilliams acknowledges that it is good to seek local food when possible, but believes the idea of local food systems sustaining populations universally is misguided (42). Not all regions have access to appropriate climate, soil, water, and fossil fuel conditions to leave local farmers responsible for feeding the community (43). Post-industrial American citizens live in regions that could never have been inhabited by such large populations prior to modern technology. Expecting citizens of these regions who now depend on outside sources for food to revert back to depending entirely on local food systems is unrealistic and impossible. In this sense, the local food movement appears selfish and selective towards regions that have agricultural potential and citizens whose only food issue is that of choice, not survival. If local food is not as environmentally friendly as I once thought, does not effectively allow me to rebel from the industrial food system I am discontented with, is imitated by those who seek to make a profit, and alone cannot be a dependable source in every region, as McWilliams seeks to prove; why would I wish to eat local?

McWilliams, primarily a historical thinker, refuses to take received knowledge for granted and tries to offer an alternative argument. McWilliams' argument demonstrates the humanistic value of "critical thinking" by criticizing local eating as the primary way to overcome contemporary estrangement from food production and knowledge. The importance McWilliams places on thinking critically and challenging popular ideals represents another major way the humanities contribute to our food culture. "Critical

examination of oneself and one's traditions," one of Nussbaum's three capacities to cultivating humanity, is essential for understanding the problems inherent in our current food culture. Critical self-examination is necessary due to the fact that these problems are created and perpetuated by society's habits and traditions (9). Although McWilliams' arguments against the local food movement are problematic, I believe there must be other reasons consumers value buying local foods.

## Chapter 8 – Reconnection: The Humanities and Local Food

By exploring resources of the humanities for inspiration, I hope to discover ways in which eating locally can reconnect me with food. In doing so, I discovered that the humanities and local food could help reconnect me with much more than just food. I found that conscious consumers are motivated to buy local food by the possibility of reclaiming a connection to food, land, place, seasonality and the food knowledge that accompanies these connections.

### 8.1 Connection between Food and the Human Body: Reconnection with Raw Material

My disconnection from food production, preparation, and knowledge is problematic because food is the one of the few products I actually consume, or ingest. Food is intended to nourish human bodies and directly connect humans with the environment. As Pollan states, “In nature eating has always been relationships among species in systems we call food chains, or food webs, that reach all the way down to the soil” (Defense 102). However, the food chain is not commonly associated with the industrial food system that dominates today. In my mind, food webs and food chains are reserved for animals because food has come to be so far disconnected from its natural form. The industrial food system has “disrupted the circular flow of nutrients through the food chain ... by breaking the links among local soils, local foods, and local peoples” (Defense 100). Although the industrial food system offers advantages, industrial food products have shown to take a toll on the human body that now takes in more preservatives, additives, and adulterants than ever before.

Stacy Alaimo, in *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*, discusses the notion of trans-corporality or movement across bodies and nature. Alaimo believes an idea central to trans-corporeality is that the body is a group of open ended systems that can and will be penetrated by the surrounding environment (10). The environment shapes human bodies and this is especially true for the consumption of food. As previously discussed, there are diseases that are linked directly to certain types of food and diet. Along with the threat of disease, modern food products are full of unnatural ingredients, additives, preservatives, and adulterants. These chemicals are regulated, but have a relatively new connection with the human body (Pollan, *Defense* 105). Post-industrial humans are of the first generations to consume additives and adulterants on a regular basis. The implications of regularly connecting my body to these unnatural products are worrying. In a food system dominated by abundance and convenience, I do not feel a strong connection to my food and am concerned about the consequences of the disconnection on my health. Even though I ingest food and it becomes a part of my body, I am uninformed of the origins and contents of my food. This realization prompted me to put more thought into food choices because food is both necessary for my survival and connected directly to my human body through consumption. One of the simplest ways to avoid worrying about the contents of food is to begin with the raw material or food in its natural form. As Pollan states, “You don’t need to fathom a carrot’s complexity in order to reap its benefits” (*Defense* 66).

Eating locally allows consumers to reconnect with the raw materials specific to their region. By physically connecting with the raw produce of a region, I am reminded

that food is fundamentally a product of the natural world. These raw materials provide little worry to consumers about what is contained within, or how many unnatural processes the food product went through before entering our consciousness. One worry I have encountered that faces modern consumers with raw materials is the lack of knowledge of how to prepare these raw materials. However, food being derived from the local community ensures an accessible store of food knowledge somewhere nearby, whether it is from the local farmer, or from a conscious consumer.

## 8.2 Reconnect with Food by Increasing Food Knowledge

One way consumers can reconnect with food choices is by seeking well-developed food knowledge. I feel a much stronger connection to my food by knowing where it came from and how it came to be. Consumers can confront the origins of their food by buying local goods from farmers markets, CSAs, or a local farmer. All of these local options generally allow for the consumer to visit the farm and question about the methods used to grow and produce food. Consumers are able to find out far more information from the farmer than from that presented on food labels. For example, consumers are able to inquire about what pesticides were used and other processes that could have implications for the health of human bodies and the local community. Local farmers are more likely to use safe or environmentally friendly agricultural processes because the implications of the production result directly on his or her customer. Farmers are aware that the health of the environment is linked to bodily health and the health of their farm and the community (Pollan, *Defense* 144). Also, when farms are in sight and within reach, there is more of an incentive for farmers to act responsibly because they are

accessible and their practices visible to the public. Farms within a close proximity of the communities they provide for both foster an environment of responsible farmers and allow for a deepening of food knowledge.

The disconnection I face from my foods origins and contents demonstrates the loss of intuitive ways of interacting with the land and especially my food. Wendell Berry in “The Unsettling of America” reminds consumers to “consider the associations that have since ancient times clustered around the idea of food – associations of mutual care, generosity neighborliness, festivity, [and] communal joy” (40). Because the majority of food is prepared prior to purchase, consumers have become distanced from the social associations of food. The distancing of food from social and intuitive interactions has aided in the loss of local and food knowledge. Bill Devall believes an important part of the knowledge modern consumers are giving up is “land wisdom” (151). Devall cautions that modern technology and scientific models “are a dangerous substitute for land wisdom,” which contains a great deal of ecological wisdom that had been passed down through families for generations (151). Land wisdom embraces knowledge of natural processes and human interaction with the natural world. Devall notes that these more intuitive ways of interacting with the natural world “have been swept away and labeled ‘superstitious’” in more recent times (151). Thoreau questions why land wisdom has been pushed aside and asks, “Should I not have intelligence with the earth? Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mould myself?” (74). Thoreau describes a fundamental disconnection between our minds and the natural world that has noticeable consequences in the post-industrial food system. A loss of both food knowledge and local knowledge

are two factors that contribute to my personal feelings of confusion and anxiety, which have been echoed by conscious consumers of current food system. The abundance of choice in the modern food system impacts the amount of readily available traditional knowledge. Eating locally allows for consumers to reconnect with food knowledge, specifically, the origins and processes involved. I can reconnect with the food I consume by becoming more knowledgeable about the choices I am presented with. The food knowledge I recover in the present can be built up and developed into a store of trusted, traditional knowledge that can be passed down through generations to minimize confusion and increase the pleasures of eating in the future.

### 8.3 Connection to the Natural World: Reconnecting with the Humanities and Local Food

Another connection that has been lost along with the modern food system is a connection to the natural world. In the past, the livelihood of the land was essential to the livelihood of one's family. However, today, food is barely associated with the land from which it was derived. With industrial food production often occurring out of sight, the way food comes to be remains out of mind to the common consumer. The end product of these processes is a food-stuff that hardly resembles the raw material it began as in nature. These food products are the result of the post-industrial food system and the disconnection from the land from which food is originally derived. I believe that I too, have become more and more disconnected from the land because of the dominance of industrial processes. This disconnection is problematic because healthy land is a necessity for humanity's well-being; even if it has become less apparent that raw

materials are needed for food production. Members of the deep ecology movement seek to revive land appreciation and empower consumers to evaluate their values and manage themselves “as responsible members of the ecosphere” (Drengson 25). These members recognize the inherent value of ecological processes and believe that the quality of life depends on the quality of humanity’s relationship with nature (Drengson 27).

Arne Naess, a Norwegian ecological philosopher and founder of the deep ecology movement, encourages a strong harmony between individuals, communities, and nature (280). The deep ecology movement promotes organizing land into natural categories called ‘bioregions’ to aid in connecting individuals with the natural world. Bioregions place importance on natural systems “both as a source of physical nutrition and as the body of metaphors from which our spirit draws sustenance. To understand natural systems is to begin an understanding of the self” (Devall, 21). Understanding natural systems and what I value in life is essential for a reconnection with the land. The philosophical perspective of Arne Naess and other member of the deep ecology movement, presented in *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered*, provide valuable insight into developing my consciousness.

The deep ecology movement includes working towards “cultivating ecological consciousness” (Devall and Sessions 8). Naess firmly believes that “mature persons should be able to say what their values and priorities are; they should have the ability to express their own philosophy of life through actions and other means” (30). Deep ecologists believe that cultivating ecological consciousness is a vital need of human beings, and in turn is closely related to the needs of the planet (Devall and Sessions 8).

Naess explains that this prioritization of natural processes over selfish motives is not always easy: “A person can fail to identify with an ecological community, when he or she identifies too narrowly with an insecure, small ego-self. Sometimes, expanding one’s awareness beyond ego requires painful self-examination and self-criticism” (38). Naess acknowledges that becoming a part of the ecological community is difficult, but possible by establishing a strong personal philosophy and acting upon it. Devall summarizes the process of cultivating an ecological consciousness stating, “Deep ecology is a process of ever-deeper questioning of ourselves, the assumptions of the dominant worldview in our culture, and the meaning and truth of our reality” (8). Deep ecology is the practice of deep philosophical thought and self-examination that can be intimidating for those unfamiliar or unpracticed with philosophy as a discipline. The challenge that faces post-industrial communities of navigating the complexity of the current food system is also intimidating, but can be aided with a strong personal philosophy. The struggle to find food that is good to eat and think is a challenge that can be overcome with a greater appreciation of the natural world and better understanding of individual environmental consciousness. I believe that being closer in proximity to the hands that grow my food allows for more opportunities for reconnection with the natural systems and food knowledge of my locality. The closer proximity that is presented by local food ensures that the land that provides me sustenance is also the land that I inhabit. Eating and living from the same land reestablishes a relationship between myself and the natural world that has become rare in the modern industrial food system.

Eating local is a simple way to reconnect with the land. A connection to the land is imperative because “the most fundamental human relationship is the relationship between human beings and the natural world,” yet a connection with the land seems like a relationship that must be reclaimed (Slovic 9). The best way for me to connect with the land would be to raise crops and work directly with the soil. Henry David Thoreau, in *Walden*, states that the beans he raised in his bean-field literally “attached him to the earth” (82). A connection this strong to the land creates responsible stewards of the environment. Wasting and littering, two modern consumer habits related to food, are examples of how some do not highly value the land. However, littering holds a much higher consequence if it directly impacts my own food shed. Thoreau, who is often referred to as the father of the American environmental movement, strongly believes in the idea of “kinship to the non-human world” (Slovic 10). Thoreau’s idea of kinship reflects the extension of “ethical and legal consideration to animals and other natural phenomena” such as the land on which humans depend (Slovic 10). Locally, I am able to demonstrate ethical consideration of the land by supporting and participating in sustainable practices. Thoreau’s *Walden* demonstrates two of “environmental literature’s most important traits: attentiveness to the physical world beyond human beings and stimulus for ethical reformation” (Slovic 27). Both attentiveness to the natural world and the sustainable practices that can result, help reestablish a connection to the land I inhabit and depend on for vitality. Extending ethical consideration to the land and other non-human processes raises questions of my responsibility to my place in the world.

#### 8.4 Connection between Food and a Sense of Place: Reconnecting with the Help of the Humanities and Local Food

Very closely connected to an increased appreciation for the land is a stronger sense of place. Naess defines a place as a location with meaning and emotions attached to it, where one feels they belong. In this sense, place is used with different intentions than the geographic place that most are familiar with. A sense of place implies a strong identification with an area, often relating to its unique attributes and a feeling of emotional attachment.

A sense of place is an abstract idea and because of this, “a myriad [of] literary studies of what it means to live a responsible and engaged life in a specific location on this planet” surround the notion of place (Slovic 29). Naess claims that industrialization and a switch to a global perspective are to blame for the loss of a sense of place. Naess asserts that “humanity suffers from a place-corrosive process” and that “there seems to be no place for PLACE anymore” (46). Naess asserts that dependence on modern processes that are considered to be blessings, such as transportation and the importation of goods, hinder my ability to belong to a place (46). Contemporary conveniences distance me from my locality and weaken my connection with place. The modern disconnection from place makes it harder to feel attached to the place I call home. As well as an emotional attachment, a strong sense of place includes a deepened familiarity or “situated knowledge.”

Situated knowledge has been defined as “the intimate acquaintance with local nature and history that develops with sustained interest in one’s immediate surroundings”

(Heise 30). Situated knowledge is unique to different regions and allows for a distinct local perspective and a deeper understanding of my place. The humanities and environmental literature in particular, stress the importance of exploring “what it means to live meaningfully and constructively while being rooted in a specific place on earth” (Slovic 30). Having a deep-rooted, situated knowledge of my locality reestablishes a connection between my human mind and place I call home.

One area of situated knowledge that changes depending on the region is the types of food that are able to grow in that region. Local foods differ depending on the region and therefore localized food knowledge will be necessary. Berry believes that the current disconnection from local produce is “regrettable” because “these domestic creatures are in diverse ways attractive; there is much pleasure in knowing them” (325). Local food provides limited choices depending on factors such as: climate, what kind of agriculture and industry are available, water supply, and how much room is available for food production. However, these limited choices indicate what a locality is capable of producing at that moment in time and provide insight into the productivity of the place I call home.

#### 8.5 Connection to the Seasons: Reconnecting with the Humanities and Local Food

Food is rarely associated with the seasons in the post-industrial food system. Prior to modern technology, eating with the seasons was the only way in which consumers could eat. Traditional food knowledge was essential for knowing what foods were not in season because those were the foods that would have been sitting in storage for the longest (Vileisis 54). However, today, with modern technology such as

preservatives, refrigeration, and transportation, produce are available year round and prepared foods can last a lifetime. Industrial food products are strongly disconnected from the seasons, but local foods offer choices that can help me reconnect with the seasonal produce specific to my locality.

Since 1900, labels and advertisers have used “the allure of the natural” to get consumers to buy their food products (Vileisis 115). However, the appeal of natural food products created a demand that transformed into a corporate takeover of the natural and the word began to lose its meaning (Vileisis 125). I believe one way I can reconnect with eating naturally is to eat with the seasons. Today, the closest connection some prepared foods have with nature is the nature falsely presented upon the advertising (Vileisis 125). The disconnection of these processed foods and those transported long distances from nature can be apparent in their taste. Wendell Berry asserts that no one has truly tasted a fruit until they have harvested it themselves stating:

It is a vulgar error to suppose that you have tasted huckleberries who never plucked them. A huckleberry never reaches Boston; they have not been known there since they grew on her three hills. The ambrosial and essential part of the fruit is lost with the bloom which is rubbed off in the market cart, and they become mere provender. As long as Eternal Justice reigns, not one innocent huckleberry can be transported thither from the country's hills. (92)

Berry firmly believes that any transported food loses its natural taste and therefore its identity. Authors, such as Nestle, agree that taste is lost in the industrial food chain because most are plucked before they are ripe and designed specifically to withstand transportation resulting in a “loss of flavor, texture, and perhaps, nutritional value” (33). Not only are these goods produced out of season, they are harvested before they are fully

ripe. Therefore, eating locally provides one way for me to reconnect with the seasons and experience the pleasure and superior taste natural foods offer.

## Chapter 9 – Conclusion

Food has become an “abstract idea” that is not considered by post-industrial consumers until it appears in front of them, often fully prepared (Berry 322). Wendell Berry agrees that industrialization is to blame for our transformation into “mere consumers” stating, “the specialization of production induces specialization of consumption” (322). Rather than being connected to food as my ancestors once were, I am becoming increasingly disconnected from food due to the specialization of production. As a consumer, I am increasingly unaware of the origins, contents, and processes behind the production of my food. The ignorance that accompanies the modern food system has had noticeable implications for human’s physical health and the health of the environment. The negative implications my diet has on my health and the environment have created an ecological, physiological, and moral quandary for me three times daily. I want to be empowered to make informed food choices that reflect my values.

To buy and eat local food is one choice in the current food system that caught my attention due to recent popularity among my environmentally conscious peers. However, the choice to eat local does not present the sole solution to my eating worries as members of the local food movement would have me believe. Nevertheless, eating locally allows me to reconnect with food and other natural processes eliminating the confusion and anxiety presented by the post-industrial food system. Also, eating locally provides me with the opportunity to reconnect with food knowledge, the land, a sense of place, and the

seasons, all of which I have felt disconnected from due to the industrialization of the food system.

The humanities provide particularly valuable information for those struggling with local food as a choice in the current food system. Some sources, such as McWilliams, provide criticism of the recently popular local food movement. McWilliams demonstrates a strength of the humanities by thinking critically and considering both sides of an issue as complicated as our current food system. On the other side of the criticism are authors who show that eating locally can help me reclaim multiple connections with my food and the natural world. First and foremost, the humanities help to reconnect me with food by reminding me that food is the one of the few products I actually consume. The connection between consumer and food can be strengthened by buying from local sources that often sell produce in the raw form. When buying local, I can take comfort in the fact that my food travels a short distance and that a farmer produces local goods with the community in mind. Secondly, the humanities helped me to revive an intuitive connection with my food by showing the importance of developing food knowledge. I am easily able to reconnect with food knowledge by buying locally. When buying locally, I can retrieve knowledge directly from the local farmers, shopkeepers, and community. Food knowledge and the knowledge of the natural world can be compiled, built upon, and stored for aiding future generations with similar problems. Thirdly, the humanities reconnect me with the land in a number of ways. Most importantly environmental literature acts as a reminder that I am integrally connected to and dependent on the land for survival. By doing so, environmental

literature reminds me that food is a product of my relationship with the land and attempts to revive this connection in my mind. A stronger conscious connection between my mind and the land leads to increased responsibility and a revived land ethic. Fourthly, the humanities can aid in reconnecting the human mind to a strong sense of place. Eating locally strengthens my sense of place by connecting me to my locality on an emotional level and allowing for the development of a situated knowledge. Lastly, the humanities aid consumers in reconnecting with the seasons by reviving an appreciation of all natural processes and the pleasures that accompany them. I feel as though one of the most effortless ways to connect with the seasons is by eating locally. Local food can help reconnect consumers to food by increasing access to food knowledge and allowing for a stronger relationship between the human mind and the natural world. Ultimately, the humanities aim to cultivate mindfulness and mindfulness is a strong technique that can be used to combat the confusion, anxiety, and concern that surround consumers in the post-industrial food system. While eating locally does not solve all problems inherent in my dietary dilemma, it does allow for a stronger connection between food and the human mind, the natural world, and the place I call home.

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