

Rui Costa and Paola Pittia (eds.), Food Ethics Education, New York: Springer Publishing, 2018, 239 pp.

Food Ethics Education, edited by Rui Costa and Paola Pittia, is the selection of texts in which authors approach the topic of implementation of ethical principles in the food value chain. The book consists of three parts: Food Ethics Issues (I); Ethics for Food Professionals (II) and Food Ethics Case Studies (III). To begin with the question—how are food and ethics connected in the first place? As Rui Costa in the introduction writes, while in the past public interest focused primarily on the nutritional aspect of food, nowadays it focuses also on ethical aspects of food production—fair trade, novel foods, animal welfare, climate change and the sustainability of the natural resources (3). Consumers as well as professionals everyday face number of ethical judgments regarding food.

In the first part of the book “Food Ethics Issues”, authors emphasize the main societal issues that influence the food value chain and that bring into light the importance of teaching food ethics. Harris N. Lazarides and Athanasia M. Goula in their text “Sustainability and Ethics Along the Food Supply Chain” alarms us with the fact that “the world population is increasing much faster than our capacity to increase food production” (41). The prediction is that by 2030 the growth of global population and the climate change effects will increase food production needs by 50%, energy demand by 45%, and water demand by 30% (41). This alarming fact is a result of climate changes, soil erosions, and the lack of water which leads to loss of farmland; infrastructure expansions such as large-scale recreations projects which also lead to decreasing access to farmland; uses of farmland for production of nonfood products such as oil also results in loss of farmland, as well as unsustainable production, handling, and distribution techniques which result in decreasing food production capacities. “Sustainable development”, a socially and politically constructed, “a slippery and broad-ranging term”, as Lazarides and Goula describe it, is defined by the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs as “a better quality of life for everyone, now and for future generations” (43). Precisely the lack of sustainability within the food supply chain which includes an extensive number of hu-

man activities covering all areas from farming to consumer table is a major cause of ambiguous production and consumption ethics with serious socio-economical consequences (58). Lazarides and Goula show how every part of food supply chain from raw material production, food processing, handling/distribution, food consumption, water use, food waste, and use of energy should incorporate sustainable practices. Lack of sustainability opens room for number of ethical issues and democracy, as well as human rights which come to be at stake here.

Judith Schrempf-Stirling in her text “Ethical Issues in the Food Supply Chain” focuses on frequent ethical issues within the domain of production and consumption of food. Above mentioned “food supply chain” consists of broad range of activities including agriculture and farming, food processing and manufacturing, food engineering, food transportation and distribution, food marketing, retailing and restaurants (85). Ethical question regarding the workers who wither work on the farm, in the factory or grocery store or in a restaurant have a common denominator—they are subject to low wages, health and safety risks and demanding working conditions (86). Another ethical issue concerns the food industry where many farming practices such as use of pesticides have negative impacts on eco-systems. Storage and transportation in our globalized era is responsible for high CO₂ footprint; food packaging is also a practice with big environmental impact and here the role of consumer and his/her behavior treating the product waste also holds strong ethical dimension. Marketing, labeling and price promotions are practices immersed with ethics—Schrempf-Stirling asks is it ethical to advertise products high in sugar, fat and sodium content that lead to diabetes and other negative health consequences; is it ethical to target the vulnerable consumers such as children; is it ethical not to provide information needed for consumer to make a fair decision?

Anna McElhatton in her interesting text “The Ethics of Consumption” writes how food is a complex issue stated in social and cultural context and in our, Western environment, ongoing interest in “healthy food” is connected with increased consumer concern in healthy food and beverages, where “healthy” refers to essential material nutrients (63). Contemporary food chain, due to globalization, is perplexed. How McElhatton explains, on the one side there are large corporations which provide the food; at the other side, there are consumers who often consume in hedonistic way, as well as people who do not have access to quality food due to finances or time. As consequences, obesity and diabetes became epidemics of our contemporary age. According to McElhatton, healthcare, food science and associated professions have an ethical obligation to promote quality, healthy food. Consumerism is based on the paradigm of free choice which is good for consumer as well as for economy, but emphasizing that “choice without information is not real choice” (81). She singles out GM food—industries have an aversion towards positive labeling and without a mandatory labeling policy, consumers cannot make an informed choice (81).

Second part of the book “Ethics for Food Professionals” includes texts focused on ethical issues of the food production chain which can be used by teachers in order to prepare training materials as well as students, as future professionals to be aware of food ethics issues. Paola Pittia in her text

“Codes of Ethics of Food Professionals: Principles and Examples” focuses on issues concerning quality and safety. Namely, as Pittia states, increasing issues regarding food security, animal welfare, environmental occurrences, and climate change, together with labor conditions within the whole food production chain “led to the definition of a complex set of requirements to meet the expectation of the consumers and the civil society in terms of quality, healthiness, and safety of products” (107). Expanding complexity of contemporary global food system from agricultural production to consumers table requires the implementation of ethical practices. According to Pittia, first-level approach correlates with enterprises, farms, distributors, services, organizations and associations, while second-level approach is related to individuals at various levels from scientists and researchers to entrepreneurs, employees and workers. Apart from skills and knowledge, Pittia advocates that every individual is obliged with ethical responsibilities (107, 108). “Code of ethics” refers to formal documents issued for technologies and professionals by organizations and public entities and it “confirms the importance of the ethical behavior, morality, and integrity in all the activities of the food value chain” (118). Code of ethics can contribute to the work, profession and everyday life with its “guarantee of wholeness, safety, and quality of food to the consumers as well as to promote the sustainability and innovation of the food value chain” (118).

Louise Manning in his text “Corporate Social Responsibility” is also focused on ethics and he writes about corporate social responsibility—a concept gaining popularity in recent years while grasping social responsibility of individuals of different organizations as well as governments (121).

Yasmine Monterjemi in text “Whistleblowing: Food Safety and Fraud” engages with whistleblowing as a civil action. Whistleblower is defined by the Council of Europe as “any person who reports or discloses information on a threat or harm to the public interest in the context of their work-based relationship, whether public or private” (147). Monterjemi gives an example of a famous whistleblower in the domain of public health—Ignaz Semmelweis (1818–1865), a physician working in Vienna who linked high mortality rate in Viennese hospitals due to puerperal fever with the lack of hand washing by doctors who had earlier performed autopsies. However, as it often is the case with whistleblowers, his observation was ignored, as Motarjami states, perhaps because his colleagues were not willing to change or they disapproved criticism (148). Whistleblowing is, as Motarjami indicates, often negatively perceived due to different reason: idea that information is obtained through illegal means; or that information can sabotage national security or interests; or that whistleblowers are motivated by some sort of revenge; or perhaps the idea that whistleblowing evokes some kind of denunciation or collaboration with repressive states. Despite the reason why some people perceive whistleblowing as a negative action, the reality is that whistleblowers are doing a great favor to society, and it usually comes with great personal sacrifice. Whistleblowing should be seen as a civil action, as Motarjami appeals, especially in today’s globalized food supply chain where illegal actions, imprudent risk taking or negligence by purpose can have huge consequences on health and trade, as we witnessed with melamine adulteration of milk powder and the horse meat scandal (149).

As Merve Yavuz-Duzgun, Umit Altunatas, Mine Gultekin-Ozguven, and Beraat Ozcelik argue in their text “Communicating Food Safety: Ethical Issues in Risk Communication”, ethics is inseparable from communication domain within food sector. They strongly argue how food safety risk communication is essential due to uncertainty of consumers about food quality and safety (165). They call upon cooperation between media, food scientists, and food industry in order to clarify uncertainties regarding food quality and safety and finally, to give consumers clear information in understandable language. In labeling and media, two important communication tools, ethical issues should not be neglected.

Also one important area where ethics is unavoidable relates to publication, as Luis Adriano Oliveira in his text “Publication Ethics” writes. Namely, as he claims, research is driving force leading to social progress, but nevertheless, the competition and pressure to publish is best suggested in phrase “publish or perish” (168). Imperative to publish might lure some researches to “shortcuts” in order to achieve a high publication rate and those “shortcuts” confronts ethical standards. As Oliviera points out, the growing number of exposed cases which testify unethical behavior illustrates the frequency of this kind of practice.

The final part of the book “Food Ethics Case Studies” consists of three case studies on ethical issue and together with underlined critical points they are excellent material for a broader discussion in classrooms. In contemporary world shaped by globalization, food becomes a burning issue. Confronted with loss of farmlands, soil erosions, lack of water, unsustainable practices within food production chain and increase in world population, food becomes major concern in global arena. As this book greatly shows, ethics should be incorporated throughout the food supply chain—from raw material production to final consumer who buys the goods. As the second part of the book shows, it also refers to scientist and researches as well as corporations and entrepreneurs. Precisely because food travels globally these days, handling it with practices containing ethics can assure quality and safety of the products and that is the reason why ethics is unavoidable when thinking about food in contemporary world.

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