FOOD MATTERS
Biopsychosocial Perspectives

Edited by

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PHOENIX
PUBLISHING HOUSE
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CHAPTER 7

Food and money

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We humans dress up, decorate, and enhance our basic needs and desires. Consider just our foundational requirements for food, water, and shelter. Water can be colored, spiced, flavored, or carbonated. Food can be broiled, basted, roasted, or fried. Often, people serve food on carved wooden tables adorned with white tablecloths and ornate candelabras. Fancy china, silver flatware, and elaborate serving dishes further enhance dining. Psychopathologies around food range from starving anorectics to obese, compulsive overeaters. Shelters range from the primitive tents of the unhoused to the $100 million mansions of the super-rich. These elaborations on basic needs result from our unique capacity for projecting our inner worlds outward, and, in parallel, ingesting the external world. In turn, these foundational psychophysiological processes participate in forming the world of symbols.

Pursuing one angle of this book's study of food from a biopsychosocial viewpoint, I focus specifically on how projection, introjection, and identification affect our relationship to food and money. Further, I scrutinize one realm where food and money meet—namely, at the socioeconomic extremes of the restaurant industry. What does it mean,

for example, when wealthy people pull strings to make reservations at difficult-to-attain, Michelin-rated restaurants and spend vast sums on the unique dishes they offer? Why does the international fast-food industry succeed in making huge profits from essentially poisoning people? Responding to these two questions will illustrate how psychological processes color our relationships with these basic needs. These considerations ultimately lead to reflections on personal freedom and on our shared responsibility for enabling poor people to disproportionately patronize venomous fast-food outlets.

Before proceeding, let's briefly review what comprises our basic human necessities. Abraham Maslow (1943), famous for constructing a five-layer pyramidic chart of universal human requirements, lists needs for food, water, and shelter at the bottom, foundational layer of his pyramid. Needs related to safety and security, such as health, employment, and social stability, are placed atop that one. The third layer contains needs for loving and belonging—friendships, family, and social relations. Next comes the fourth level, concerning self-image and consisting of self-confidence and self-respect. Maslow places needs for self-actualization, referring to personal striving for purpose and meaning, at the pyramid's apex. One can only pursue self-actualization after these other needs have been satisfied.

The biological urges Freud (1920g) emphasized necessarily rest upon human beings satisfying these more basic, underlying needs. With a deserving nod to Freud, sexuality remains, of course, another primitive, human need. No sexuality, no procreation. No procreation, no survival of a species. The ways humans garnish sexuality arguably exceed how they deal with water, food, and shelter. Animals copulate in a brutal, revolting manner. Human beings, on the other hand, satisfy sexual needs in wildly divergent ways—using internet pornography or lingerie from Victoria's Secret, experimenting with polyamory instead of monogamy, or engaging in sexual activities with homosexual, bisexual, or non-binary partners.

In sum, our species scrutinizes the world like patrons of the arts view tapestries. The neurophysiology of perception suggests viewers *literally* perceive glue, color, and wrapped-together pieces of string. However, our minds' eyes convert woven, textured, dyed fibers into beautiful works of art. Introjective and projective processes run parallel to all

our sensory systems, imbuing them with meaning. Jacques Rousseau (1755) was among the first philosophers to identify these unique human propensities. Freud (1894a) expanded on those ideas further, as did, more recently, Lacan (1978, 2002a, 2002b).

After framing the exploration, I provide further understanding of how processes of projection, introjection, and identification create symbols. Next, I illustrate what food and money symbolize using two extreme ends of the restaurant industry. At one far end, I use the Michelin three-star-rated French Laundry, which intentionally attracts the wealthiest consumers, as an example. At the distant other end, I study the McDonald's restaurant chain which deliberately targets (and corrupts) the poor. The chapter concludes with reflections on how our relationships to food and money reveal how we identify ourselves in the sociopolitical sphere. Meanwhile, even these few, initial reflections on how complex mental processes map onto basic needs risk enveloping readers in vortices of complexity. The resultant anxiety requires reduction through the setting of some boundaries.

Restricting portion sizes and budgets

The psychoanalytic processes of introjection, projection, identification, and symbolization provide some grounding to the investigation, as does the focus on the two specific restaurants. However, potentially overwhelming vortices remain, calling for further limit-setting. For example, many areas within the world of food and money will not be covered. The details of economics and finance are irrelevant to this investigation. The same applies to the nearly infinite realm of food. Food preparation, particularly among the upper echelons of society, is an art form. Food can also be studied in terms of sources, such as animal agriculture versus cultivation, how it is processed, and its origins as organic or not. Yet another limiting factor: I evade middle-ground considerations, that is, how the middle class may, on occasion, dine at each end of this restaurant continuum. These and similar tangents stray beyond the confines of our discussion.

I utilize the concept of perspectivism as another way of compressing our journey (Karbelnig, 2020, 2022). The term *perspectivism*, traceable to the Ancient Greeks, was popularized by Friedrich Nietzsche (1878).

It suggests that highly complex subjects, such as the human mind, can be viewed from only one perspective at a time. Mind, for example, can be explored using psychoanalysis, neuroscience, cultural anthropology, sociology, epidemiology, and other viewpoints. Because of the complicated, dynamic movement of so many complex components, one overarching model of mind cannot exist. Therefore, no one model, theory, viewpoint, discourse, or theme can capture all phenomena—not anywhere, not in the inside world or the outside one, and not even in the (allegedly) purely material world. Even if physicists obtain their grand unified theory, innumerable phenomena will be left out: governments, for example, or the arts, or your experience of reading this sentence right now. Further restricting focus, I set aside the relativism associated with postmodernism. Postmodern philosophers offer fascinating ideas about the nature of truth itself, suggesting entire fields of inquiry, such as the sciences, represent nothing more than a grand narrative. I assume food really exists, and money, although a social construct, is also, nonetheless, real.

Restrictions also apply regarding how deeply to dive into psychoanalysis itself. The field emerged as a distinct discipline as the nineteenth century transitioned into the twentieth. Many psychoanalytic theorists have commented upon food and money. I rely primarily upon the pioneering ideas of Freud (1894a, 1900a, 1908b, 1920g, 1921c), of the concepts proposed by Lacan (1978, 2002a, 2002b) who extended Freudian thought, and on the work of Melanie Klein (1946, 1959). These psychoanalytic clinicians, with their biologically tinged models, use a visceral terminology most relevant to the study of food and money. Having limited portion size and budget, I turn now to explaining the psychoanalytic processes of projection and introjection.

Projection, introjection, and identification

An overview of the extreme economic ends of the restaurant industry, and the symbolism associated with them, invites a more detailed study of how introjection, projection, and identification work. Psychoanalysis, hardly deserving credit for inventing the concepts, certainly examined these processes. Nancy McWilliams (2020) defines projection as the process of misinterpreting what is "inside" as coming

from "outside". Projection forms the basis for empathy wherein one party projects their own personal experiences to understand the other party's experiences. Echoing the process of projection is the related process of introjection, which consists of the psychological incorporation of stimuli from the outside world. These two processes operate simultaneously.

Sigmund Freud first used the term *projection* in an early and relatively obscure 1896 paper titled "The neuro-psychoses of defence". Describing the subjective experiences of paranoia, Freud writes: "In paranoia, the self-reproach is repressed in a manner which may be described as *projection*. It is repressed by erecting the defensive symptom of *distrust of other people*" (1896b, p. 184, original italics). Freud makes one of his earliest comments on introjection in a paper about group psychology two decades later, describing how an attachment to a caregiver becomes transformed "by means of introjection of the object into the ego" (Freud, 1921c, pp. 107–108).

Unsurprisingly, Freud's language requires deciphering. He considers identification, in line with Lacan (2002a, 2002b), a result of modeling the images, behaviors, cognitions, and emotions of caregivers. The idea of a substitution for an object-tie means that, instead of relying solely upon the real, other caregiver, like a mother, individuals develop a self (along with an internal m[other]). Lacan (2002a, 2002b) believes introjections morph over time. His concept of the mirror stage, occurring approximately from age six months to eighteen months, reveals how these internalizing processes combine to form an actual, if quivering, identity. More known than Freud for his use of obscure language, Lacan (2002a) crams crucial information about identity formation into a few sentences:

> the mirror stage is a drama whose internal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation—and, for the subject caught up in the lure of spatial identification, turns out fantasies that proceed from a fragmented image of the body to what I will call an "orthopedic" form of its totality—and to the finally donned armor of an alienating identity that will mark his entire mental development with its rigid structure.
>
> (p. 6)

As anyone familiar with him knows, Lacan's writing requires even greater decoding than Freud's. Lacan's hypothesized mirror stage may be compared to a drama in which audience members create an internal drama from witnessing an external one on the stage of their early childhood experiences. His ideas comport with my own conception of how internal worlds function like dramas in constant, dynamic relation with external ones (Karbelnig, 2020, 2022). We must begin somewhere, in terms of our models of ourselves. We begin by unconsciously studying our parents, caregivers, and older siblings—focusing on their objects of desire. What areas interest them or get their attention? Children's identities are created around what they perceive to be their caregivers' desires. The initial, primitive self-images assume disjointed forms, which is why Lacan uses phrases such as "archaic" and "fragmented". The insufficiency to which he refers denotes their primitive nature. Perhaps, also, he refers to the general sense of diminishment children experience: they form their first senses of themselves when they are, in reality, small, weak, and inadequate. Finally, Lacan's reference to alienation identifies the limitations inherent in our capacity to *only* view ourselves as subjects rather than objects.

This quotation from Lacan, despite its obscurity, proves relevant to our discussion of food and money. The ongoing, dynamic processes of introjection, projection, and identification contribute to how we relate to them. Food and money play a considerable part in all our internal dramas. The advertising industry provides stimuli about food and money, which we internalize. In turn, we project onto these images, altering them. We then internalize the morphed images, project again, and so on, *ad infinitum*. Regarding Lacan's phrase, the donned armor of an alienating identity, he remarks upon how we see ourselves in relatively rigid ways which, nonetheless, change over time. So-called *nouveau riche* persons may have been nourished by McDonald's foods during childhood, only later to become caught up in the competition to dine at as many Michelin-rated restaurants as possible.

Melanie Klein (1946, 1959), as well as Wilfred Bion (1965) and others, elaborated still further on these dialectical forces of projection and introjection. They identified that these two primary mechanisms prove crucial to the development of identity. In other words, infants' minds come into being at the intersection of their biological temperament

and the interpersonal field between them and their caregivers. Effective caregivers receive infants' communication of hunger, for example, through introjection. They interpret its meaning. Ideally, they respond by feeding. As the years pass, infants project their discomfort (hunger, thirst, etc.), caregivers introject these needs, respond properly to them, and infants introject these responses, and so on. It is this process through which a stable self or ego forms. Such models of development appear consistently in various British Middle School theorists. They also form the foundations for Heinz Kohut's idea of the "cohesive self" (Kohut, 1977, 1984). Writ large, this process of introjecting experiences, projecting onto them, and synthesizing these processes creates personal identity. And such identification, as it turns out, proves extremely relevant to our study of where food and money intersect.

The concept of identity

The French philosopher Jacques Derrida (2001), a contemporary of Lacan, coined the term *bricolage* (p. 278) to refer to the process through which we create our identities from found objects. His defining the term as a combination of sources "more or less coherent or ruined" (p. 280) speaks to the piecemeal, somewhat fragmented, sense we all have of ourselves. In other words, we humans borrow incomplete bits and pieces, some DNA here, some early childhood experiences there, and some influences from culture, history, and everywhere imaginable to form identities. Some portions contribute to a large, cohesive sense of self. Others become "ruined" through their splintered, distorted natures. It is only fairly late in life that you make choices contributing to the narrative you call self—marital status, for example, or occupational choice.

Other forces sculpt people's lives as they move forward. An open-heart surgery, or a brush with cancer, for example, will most likely cause an enduring shift in identity. Some shifts enrich you, others traumatize you. Your character—an excellent, accurate word because of its illusion to theater—consists of sets of labels. When meeting strangers at a party, people often discuss their family status—married, single, with or without children; they may disclose their occupation—teacher, musician, or speech therapist; they may share recreational interests—hiking, bicycle riding, or stamp collecting. These nouns hardly represent the verb-like

nature of actual living experiences. We use them like we would use place markings in a book or addresses on a street—to represent a seemingly fixed aspect of our lives.

The international advertising industry massively influences how we form identity. They promote the brands of companies which hire them and, more relevantly, make us identify with them. Unlike how government controls advertising by the tobacco industry (and, more recently, vaping), little control seems placed on limiting to what extent juicy, salivation-eliciting digital, print, or television ads selling fast food proliferate. Of course, Michelin-rated restaurants advertise more selectively, but no less effectively. Magazines directly targeting the extreme rich include *Highsnobiety*, *Robb Report*, *Buro 24/7*, *How To Spend It*, *Tatler*, *Lifestyle Asia*, *Elite Traveler*, and *Luxe Digital*. Persons earning more than, say, $200,000 per year, will internalize any number of concepts associated with wealth: little stress overpaying bills, enjoying a commute in a luxury vehicle, more likely owning rather than renting housing, and socializing mostly with individuals at similar income levels. Those earning less than $50,000 per year typically experience constant financial stress, probably commute using public transit, almost certainly rent in spaces shared with others, and socialize mostly with their peers. Notice how just these considerations of expenses, commuting, housing, and socializing already shape people's identities. And these identities also serve as a means of communication. The man wearing an expensive suit exiting a Mercedes Benz at his office building delivers a completely different message to an observer than the uniformed janitor walking up to the same office building after exiting a subway tunnel. We are now prepared to look more deeply at the symbolic functions of food and money.

The symbolism of money and food

Food, particularly because of its natural embeddedness in everyday life, has great symbolic value. Food engages all the senses, evoking sensory, emotional, and cognitive associations. The British anthropologist Victor Turner (1975) identifies three categories of food-related symbols. Mirroring Freud's (1900a) use of the word "condensation" in dream interpretation, Turner thought food may represent many, overlapping ideas or actions. For example, turkey represents the American holiday

of Thanksgiving, standing for the family gatherings, feasts, and specific menus. (On a darker note, a frozen dinner served on a TV table in a forty-year-old male's mother's basement represents solitude, loneliness, failed relationships.) Turner proposed a second category in which symbols link disparate references. An immense turkey, for example, symbolizes abundance, a romanticized New England heritage, patriotism, family harmony, and the fall season. Finally, Turner noted, food symbolizes diametrically opposed meanings: it offers ideological connotations such as values, ethos, and social norms while also representing sensations. In other words, the taste of a delicious, expensive steak may also symbolize financial success.

For example, apple pie symbolizes, at least in America, both patriotism and maternal nurturing. These strengthen the referential power of each while also lending emotional associations to them. Foods can also become symbolic because of analogous qualities: that is, bananas commonly represent phalluses, apples may be used to represent wholesomeness and innocence, and peaches may represent female attributes. Most relevant to our discussion here, foods also become symbolic through their use and practice. The concept of the *Michelin Guide* (2022) represents just such an organic symbolization process, as does the branding of companies such as McDonald's. That company's symbols of golden arches, or of Ronald McDonald, emerged as broad cultural signifiers in the mid-twentieth century. The two terms themselves, Michelin Guide or McDonald's, lacked universal meaning prior to that time.

Money has at least as many symbolic meanings as food—but with one crucial difference. Money is a symbol in and of itself. It lacks any intrinsic value. The dollar or the Euro, to use two examples, are created by governments—namely the United States (US) and the European Union (EU), respectively. Their value results from citizens accepting them as a symbolic medium of exchange. Economics studies the value of money, but it fails to explain how human beings and societies came to accept these currencies as a medium of exchange. These processes are psychological *and* social. Money acquired its all-pervasive value through a slow evolutionary process best understood by tracing its origins from ancient times—an endeavor definitively beyond the scope of this investigation. What Native Americans called "green frog skins" (Lame Deer & Erdoes, 1972, p. 31) have represented value for centuries now. They remain in common use in all but the few remaining, isolated,

indigenous peoples. And these green frog skins play an immense role in obtaining satisfaction for human needs. Unlike any of the needs thus far mentioned, all of which have a solid, real basis to them, money is, again, purely an agreed-upon, imaginary means of exchange. As such, it likely overshadows food as a screen onto which human beings project their inner worlds.

Freud (1908b), unsurprisingly, commented on the psychological meaning of money early in his career. He considered money as, symbolically, having a "most intimate relationship with dirt" (pp. 173–174). Jacques Lacan (1978, 2002a, 2002b) extended the symbolic value to include loss (experienced when spending money) and debt. Toward the end of his seminar on Edgar Allan Poe's *The Purloined Letter*, Lacan noted, "Everyone knows that money [… has …] the function of neutralizing something infinitely more dangerous than paying in money, namely, owing somebody something" (Lacan, 1978, p. 204).

Money, then, is more than dirty. The process of exchange creates a tension between losing something, and then owing it to another person. Unwittingly linking the symbolism of food and money, Klein (1946, 1959) believes feces represent food. And the image of infants creating their own "food" implies their capacity to create something of value, like money. Klein believed that if caregivers failed to properly feed infants, they would, ultimately, look at their own feces. Why? Because it symbolizes production of *something*, edible or not. Most importantly, it signifies need satisfaction not requiring connection with others. Herein lie the origins of the narcissistic spectrum—a phrase which applies to a wide range of compulsive behaviors wherein persons satisfy needs without the involvement of others. Behaviors ranging from anorexia to alcohol abuse, from compulsive gambling to heroin addiction, satisfy needs without the messiness of interpersonal relationships. Having reviewed introjection, projection, identification, and symbolism, we finally can transition into our two, specific examples.

The broad socioeconomic spectrum of the restaurant industry

The extreme ends of the restaurant business run along a continuum. If financially impoverished, or simply a lover of hamburgers, any number of fast-food chains beckon. Advertisements ranging from

print to digital, from television to radio, exude images of "charbroiled burgers", "super-sized fries", and "32-oz soft drinks". These images literally create salivary, neurochemical, and other physiological responses. Advertising firms excel at stimulating the unconscious mind, either creating desires or intensifying them. Written copy, visual images, and sometimes even smells (like ones emanating from BBQ restaurants) insist we attend to our desire for certain foods.

At one end of this spectrum lie fast-food outlets, which, in many ways, contaminate their customers. Poor people seek out fast-food outlets more than the rich, usually due to a combination of convenience and cost. Members of the lower classes often work more than one job, leaving them little time for food preparation. And, naturally, they have little disposable income to spend at restaurants. Additionally, advertisers target this social class by emphasizing deals like "one dollar for a hamburger" or the like. In fairness, individuals across the socioeconomic scale patronize a low-cost, drive-in restaurant for efficiency's sake. When on an extended driving trip, for example, people might want something they can eat in the car. Perhaps they crave a particular item, like onion rings or a diet Coke. But many of these individuals can also enjoy the experience of fine dining once they reach their destination. Finally, and in fairness, some people are so poor as to prevent them from dining in any restaurant, however low-end and noxious.

At the other end of the spectrum lie the wealthy people in search of "the best". Multiple sources exist for determining, for example, the "best fine dining" experience in whatever city or town you might be driving through. For these individuals, quality and status matter. Any computer or mobile phone provides internet search capabilities which deliver variations of top ten lists for fine dining. Subtypes such as steak houses, seafood restaurants, or specific ethnic foods can be separately located. At the time this chapter went into print, for example, the *Michelin Guide* listed only thirteen three-star restaurants in the entire United States. The idea behind the Michelin rating, as obscure a social construct as money itself, surrounds quality in food preparation. Coveted by chefs around the world, the three-star rating—the highest possible level achieved by any restaurant—is delivered by the *Michelin Guide*'s specialized inspectors who rate restaurants' food based on five criteria: quality of ingredients, mastery of flavor and cooking techniques, manifestation of the personality of the chefs in their cuisine,

value for price, and consistency of quality. These are quite the opposite of how the fast-food industry presents its menus.

The poor, poisonous end of the spectrum

Fast-food restaurants aim to serve the poor. As noted earlier, they may offer convenience. However, and for the most part, fast-food outlets offer non-nutritious, heavy-in-saturated-fat items, which, intentionally or not, are venomous. The attraction to the poor mostly comes from value. However, they are also enticed by advertisers displaying mouth-watering, sauce-dripping, bacon-cheese-avocado sandwiches. Imagine the working, single mother of three children. Of course, she will take her children to McDonald's on the special days they offer "hamburgers for a dollar". These might be their primary meal for the day. Research supports the essentially poisonous nature of these lower-end food outlets.

According to a 2018 *Washington Post* article, a review of studies regarding consuming fast food found eating at such restaurants weekly correlated with a higher risk of obesity. The article notes that "eating fast food more than twice a week was associated with a higher risk of metabolic syndrome, type 2 diabetes, and death from coronary artery disease" (Brissette, 2018, para. 6). Children also risk developing respiratory diseases if they consume fast food. A *Healthline* article in 2018, citing a study by the International Study of Asthma and Allergies in Childhood (ISAAC), found that "children who eat fast food at least three times a week are more likely to develop asthma" (Pietrangelo, 2018, para. 22). Excessive consumption of fast food also harms neurological functions. *Medical News Today* reports studies linking diets high in saturated fats and simple carbohydrates—typical of fast-food outlets—with a lower capacity for memory and learning, adding, "This sort of diet may also raise the risk of Alzheimer's disease and Parkinson's disease" (Huzar, 2021, para. 20).

If the price paid by the body proves insufficient, consider the economic costs. It is expensive to be poor. In his science fiction book entitled *Men at Arms* (1993), Terry Pratchett's protagonist, Captain Samuel Vimes, explains that the rich remain rich because they make better financial decisions. In the following excerpt, which created the commonly used "boots theory" of poverty, Pratchett writes:

> A really good pair of leather boots cost fifty dollars. But an affordable pair of boots, which were sort of OK for a season or two and then leaked like hell when the cardboard gave out, cost about ten dollars ... But the thing was that good boots lasted for years and years. A man who could afford fifty dollars had a pair of boots that'd still be keeping his feet dry in ten years' time, while the poor man who could only afford cheap boots would have spent a hundred dollars on boots in the same time and would still have wet feet.

The character concludes: "When you can't afford to take care of basic things, like covering your feet properly, problems snowball from there, and the cost of being poor is compounded" (Pratchett, pp. 27–28).

These excerpts speak to the cycle of poverty. Once descended into it, or born into it, escape proves extremely difficult. Poor people devote most of their energies on survival, depriving them of time for even basic levels of self-care. Expanding further upon such a cycle, Craig Landes writes, in his article entitled "The cost of being poor":

> It's expensive to be poor. When you don't have money, you're often forced to make decisions that seem necessary in the short term. Those decisions often add to your long-term burden, adding to the high cost of being poor.
>
> (2021, para. 5–9)

Food-insecure families often avoid purchasing fresh fruits and vegetables because they cost more. Their household budgets are limited. Further, lack of time and resources for meal preparation also contribute to food insecurity. As a result, many low-income and food-insecure households rely on fast-food restaurants. Fast food provides, in truth, a lot of calories for the price. Ironically, the cost the poor pay ends up usually being sufficient to purchase fresh food. However, between the marketing of fast-food outlets, and the time savings associated with them, many poor people skimp on purchasing food of higher nutritional value.

Consider single parents, who often work multiple jobs just to pay for housing and basic food costs. Their workloads preclude time for home

meal preparation. Students, the disabled, and the elderly often lack physical space and storage space for home meal preparation. As a result, they too resort to fast food and pre-prepared meals. Catherine Keske (2020, para. 12–15) surveyed undergraduate students at the University of California at Merced in 2019–2020. She discovered considerable food insecurity among students—usually resulting from constraints on resources and time. Like other poor people, these students often work multiple jobs while attending classes full time. About thirty-seven percent report lacking access to healthy food even when they know about supplemental food resources like nonprofit food banks. Nearly seventy percent report selecting food for familiarity, comfort, or importance to culture, identity, or lifestyle. More than sixty percent stated that they eat at their favorite restaurant—often a fast-food establishment—because of comfort.

Barbara Ehrenreich, author of the best-selling book *Nickel and Dimed* (2001), worked in three, successive low-end jobs in order to personally experience the lifestyles of the working poor. She served food in Florida, worked as a maid in Maine, and clerked at a Walmart in Minnesota. Reflecting on her experiences, she writes:

> What is harder for the nonpoor to see is poverty as acute distress: The lunch that consists of Doritos and hot dog rolls, leading to faintness before the end of the shift. The "home" that is also a car or a van. The illness or injury that must be "worked through," with gritted teeth, because there's no sick pay or health insurance and the loss of one day's pay will mean no groceries for the next. These experiences are not part of a sustainable lifestyle, even a lifestyle of chronic deprivation and relentless, low-level punishment.
>
> (p. 214)

Furthermore, food and beverage marketing specifically targets the diets of children and adolescents. In 2019, fast-food restaurants spent $5 billion in total advertising to children. Black and Hispanic youth are disproportionally besieged by unhealthy food and beverage advertising. A 2014 *Washington Post* article cited studies by the University of Illinois at Chicago and Arizona State University concluding that fast-food

chains targeted predominantly black neighborhoods, and they were sixty percent more likely to advertise to children than in predominantly white areas. These studies also noted that fast-food restaurants in middle- and low-income areas tended to direct ads toward children more often than those in high-income neighborhoods (Ferdman, 2014, para. 2). The foods and beverages most heavily marketed to youth are for unhealthy products, high in calories, sugar, fat, and/or sodium. Other, related research examines how elements of marketing—including product, price, placement, and promotion—influence the food and beverage preferences and choices of children and youth, as well as their weight status.

The profoundly prosperous end of the restaurant spectrum

Sally and Don Schmitt initially opened the French Laundry, in Yountville, California, in 1978. Over the ensuing few years, they grew the restaurant's operations and reputation. In 1994, celebrity chef Thomas Keller purchased it. He worked still harder to create a dining establishment of the highest regard, earning the *Michelin Guide*'s three-star rating in 2007. Dining at the French Laundry runs to around $350 per person for two different *prix fixe* meals: the Chef's tasting menu, which consists of meat and seafood, and the tasting of vegetables. The food arrives in nine courses, not including opening appetizers. Although the menus are set, you can upgrade certain courses for around $100 for each addition. Wines by the glass cost around $35 for whites and $45 for reds. Bottles of wine run in the hundreds of dollars. Local Wally's Napa Tourist Guide (Local Wally, 2018) recommends you "set aside $1000 for dinner for two and, if it goes over a bit just go with it—it's only money." How easily such words drizzle onto the page. Wealthier people use money in any number of perverse ways. They may gorge themselves to health-threatening obesity or demand to eat at only the fanciest of restaurants to validate their success.

In further support of these conclusions, two studies conducted in the Netherlands (Smeets et al., 2020) compared how wealthy versus moderate-income individuals spend their time, and how they view their well-being. The first study revealed that wealthy individuals spend the same amount of time working as others, but "the nature of their time

use differed in critical ways that are related to life satisfaction" (p. 295). The millionaires studied spent more time in active leisure, such as exercising and volunteering. Those with average incomes engaged in more passive activities such as watching television. The second study suggested high-net-worth individuals spend more time working at tasks over which they have more control. When combined, these features of the lives of the rich—being more active than passive, and working in environments in which they experience a sense of control—enhances their sense of well-being.

The motivations for dining at a restaurant such as the French Laundry, which, at various times, has required making reservations a full year in advance, probably vary along with the whims of the wealthy just noted. Of course, exceptions exist. One might be invited to dine there as a guest of another. Some people eat there because they are food writers or food enthusiasts. Others perhaps save for a year for a one-evening experience at the restaurant. If dining there because they are wealthy, individuals most likely feel their intelligence earned them entry, feel entitled to the experience, and respect the chef and the restaurant as fellow businesspeople. They likely view the experience as an expression of the freedom they have earned and, in like manner, another way their wealth provides them with personal fulfillment.

Bringing to mind Klein's (1959) work on envy, one cannot help but wonder how much dining at the French Laundry serves as an expression of stature. It is Eros perfected. Dining celebrates the victory of life over death. From a psychoanalytic perspective, this motivation is probably the most likely. To quote Gore Vidal, "It is not enough to succeed; others must fail." Eating at the French Laundry not only demonstrates your wealth, but also shows how much wealthier you are than others. Ecclesiastes tells us that "everything we do is 'vanity': empty, futile, and short-lived" (Ecclesiastes 1:2, *English Standard Version Bible*, 2001).

Concluding remarks

But one part of the complex tapestry we call human subjectivity, the realm where money and food intersect, lights up numerous, meaningful themes. We have surveyed, thus far, how money and food play out in McDonald's versus the French Laundry. We studied how

psychodynamic processes—introjection, projection, identification, and symbolism—interact with broader cultural themes to imbue both restaurants with special significance. How do these food outlets create meaning for us, and how do we, in turn, project meaning onto them? As noted, we identify one with the rich and the other with the poor; we consider one highly nutritious and the other health-threatening.

A major topic omitted thus far, and most relevant now that our foundational ingredients are prepared, mixed, and ready for baking, concerns the crucial import of personal freedom, of agency. Every variety of psychoanalytic model conceives of ego or self as imbued with capacities for fomenting change or, to be hyperbolic, to foment revolution. Although our identities are created, to a great extent, by culture, we also form them. Herein lies the possibility of personal responsibility for change. We contribute to the fact that few would brag of consuming a bacon-double-cheeseburger from McDonald's while many would feel proud, or at least fortunate, to dine at the French Laundry. The ways we enable the former contributes to the poor becoming embroiled in cycles of poverty which create illness, drain energy, generate debt, and detract from human abilities to work, love, or play.

In terms of damage to our fellow citizens, the French Laundry, obviously, represents less of a problem than McDonald's. Nonetheless, earning the money to pay for a single dinner at the French Laundry, consumable within a few hours, would take poor people months to earn. Furthermore, the fancy restaurant symbolizes the grotesque level of income inequality plaguing the entire world. How do we humans, crassly identified as consumers, contribute to such injustice? The answer lies, again, in the idea of personal agency, of how we allow these extremes to persist. Before elaborating upon existential themes such as freedom and responsibility, a few reflections on how psychoanalysts view the ego or self are needed.

Pioneering psychoanalysts such as Freud, Jung, and Klein considered ego a structure, a relatively stable, mental schema. Jung embedded ego into the broader psyche, basically echoing the Eastern philosophical view, nesting ego in greater contexts of world and universe. However, Jung, too, retained the concept of a stable self or ego with personal agency. As psychoanalysis evolved over the next century, theorists debated over the degree to which biological drives, interpersonal

relationships, or broader culture shaped egos. For example, the British Middle School theorists, particularly Fairbairn (1952), boldly proposed that libido seeks connection—abruptly discarding hydraulic models such as Freud's tripartite one (id, ego, and superego). Bowlby (1980a, 1980b, 1980c), who introduced attachment theory into the psychoanalytic movement, spawned reams of scholars generating empirical studies of infants' interactions with caregivers (Ainsworth & Boston, 1952; Ainsworth, 1967, 1982; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985; Main, 1990, 2000; and many others). They validated how archaic, interpersonal attachment patterns deserved emphasis in ego formation.

As psychoanalysis transitioned into the twenty-first century, most practitioners believed myriad forces created the ego or self. However, the emphasis on social factors gained in popularity. Kohut (1977, 1984), morphing like a cocoon into a butterfly, discarded his prior, ego psychological approach and replaced it with his own self-psychology. Mirroring the work of the attachment theorists, Kohut also highlighted the crucial role caregivers play in creating the self. His movement, along with the subsequently emerging intersubjective and relational schools, marginalized drive theory. Stolorow and Atwood's (1994) "myth of the isolated mind" (p. 233) represents perhaps the zenith of these field theories. The drift toward privileging these interpersonal factors risks eliminating one individual organism in relation to another—a phenomenon Mills (2018) calls the "anesthetized" (p. 316) self.

As often occurs when addressing the tension between binary oppositional phenomena, these either/or field models are better reframed as both/and. Consider two humans in relationship with one another. They are both distinct biological entities with central nervous systems, supportive internal organs (lungs, kidneys, etc.), and external support systems (food, water, etc.). These are, obviously, embedded in culture. These factors are naturally influenced by the presence of the other party. However, despite the real effects of the interpersonal field, the two remain separate individuals. They do not vanish into an interpersonal field. Therefore, regardless of how far contemporary theorists stray in contextualizing us, all psychoanalytic models include, in the final analysis, a personal identity, a character, a schema, or a classification of individuality. And, these egos or selves are imbued with personal agency.

Alas, the idea of agency brings the five-thousand-year-old free will vs. determinism debate to the fore. Anything more than a brief foray into the realm risks severe overeating and overspending combined. Living as we do as citizens of the world community, we share responsibility—despite the influence of culture—for allowing fast-food outlets to poison their customers which, in turn, aggravates the degree of income inequality in the world. Between the extremes of freedom and determinism lies the concept of compatibilism—the idea that free will and determinism coexist. For example, compatibilism acknowledges the lack of control one has over an airplane engine dropping from the sky and killing you; at the same time, however, and unless or until such an accidental death occurs, it invites individuals to take any number of political actions, from writing to their congressperson to developing a lobbying organization, to change the inherently unjust system.

Psychoanalytic models should obviously avoid anesthetizing individual persons, but the advertising industry clearly deleted the memo. Ironically, contemporary culture, particularly as manifested in that industry, intentionally seeks a somnific impact. It motivates them to fill basic human needs, some of which must remain unfulfillable, through consumerism ranging from food items to automobiles. Yet another brilliant contribution of Lacan is that the worst thing possible for any human would be complete satisfaction of all needs. Our yearning is a feature of being human. It is a concept captured by the Buddhist idea of hungry ghosts—a phrase for the nagging presence of needs which nothing will or can satisfy. The advertising industry deliberately manipulates us, essentially shouting from all directions how we must own certain cars, live in certain areas, and eat in certain restaurants. How can such a behemoth force be constrained? And just how much are each of us individuals responsible for the welfare of our fellow citizens?

Once a person becomes aware of another person's subjectivity, he or she enters the realm of ethics. Hegel (1807) emphasizes the tension existing between two self-consciousnesses. When they encounter one another, each one sees the other as a threat. Until one becomes aware of "others", each individual self-consciousness perceives itself as the measure of all things. Its feeling, desires, powers are viewed as the standard of measurement. The presence of another self-consciousness introduces another standard, namely the feelings, desires, and powers of others.

Directly opposing Hegel's elaboration of the conflict as representing "a struggle to the death", more contemporary philosophers, such as Emmanuel Levinas, a Lithuanian-born, French philosopher, thought philosophy begins with the acknowledgment of "the other". Other persons signal, he believes, the primacy of ethics. Levinas privileges our human duty to the other. The alterity, or otherness, of others, is signified by their "face". He famously proclaimed, "For others, in spite of myself, from myself" (Levinas, 1961). In other words, Levinas (1961) believes the relation between self and other is asymmetrical: the self remains more responsible for the other than vice versa. The ego, or self, ideally surrenders itself without demanding or even expecting anything in return. His radical idea implies we live in a constant state of debt toward others. The type of obligation to which Levinas refers directly relates to our exploration of the fast-food industry. Through the action of persons behaving as individuals or gathering into groups, pressure could be placed on state and federal governments to limit these restaurants "poisoning" the public.

Although Fukuyama (2006) falsely thought the rise of liberal democracy signaled the "end of history", he correctly asserted that social democracies effectively balance individual freedoms with societal needs. The idea of a true social democracy, properly implemented, creates a dialectical tension between free markets (illustrated by the fast-food industry's desire to advocate for its services) and governmental controls (illustrated by governmental agencies such as the FDA). From here, we return to the idea of agency. We members of the human family have a responsibility to protect our less economically fortunate relatives from the cultural hype leaving them few choices but poisoning themselves. Thus diseased, they incur greater medical costs, have less productive energy, and are otherwise unempowered to improve their lives. What if, for example, the *Michelin Guide* offered ratings of inexpensive restaurants, including nutritional value, use of fresh fruits and vegetables, and the like? Or, what if the FDA and similar governmental entities placed limits on the amounts of saturated fats and simple carbohydrates in their food products? Or, better, what if it required these industries to offer real, healthy alternatives, not the fast-food salads drenched in Roquefort dressings delivering more calories than a Big Mac? These are big asks, particularly at a time when the climate crisis and the proliferation of nuclear weapons exist as, arguably, larger risks to human welfare.

After purposefully living the life of a working-class person, and struggling to live within the bounds of her income, Ehrenreich concluded:

> If we want to reduce poverty, we have to stop doing the things that make people poor and keep them that way ... Maybe, as so many Americans seem to believe today, we can't afford the kinds of public programs that would genuinely alleviate poverty—though I would argue otherwise. But at least we should decide, as a bare minimum, to stop kicking people when they're down.
> (p. 238)

Foucault (1978) considered we humans as irrevocably involved in the political realm, and, therefore, responsible for hurting others already in trouble. Personal actions, or inactions, cut into the social body as a whole. Further, Foucault (1978) believes these anti-social trends furrow "across individuals themselves, cutting them up and remolding them, marking off irreducible regions in them, in their bodies and their minds" (p. 96). The drastic divide between restaurants such as the French Laundry and McDonald's illustrates what he means by the cutting up and reshaping of our humanity; the irreducible regions become the powerlessness most feel when faced with massive, seemingly unsolvable sociopolitical problems. Understanding how we consciously and unconsciously participate in propagating cultural trends, such as one-dollar burgers, empowers us. Introjection, projection, and identification are far from passive processes. They inform, and, in the final analysis, invite us to understand corrupt practices and, bit by bit, work to alter them in a way beneficial to the broader human family.

And, now, the magical, semiotic, and psychoanalytic tour of how food and money cross paths draws to an end, and perhaps on a surprising note. The journey covered how psychoanalytic concepts of introjection, projection, identification, and symbolization create lasting meaning for individual persons. Such meaning, in turn, becomes mapped onto the broader culture. We create it, internalize it, act upon it, alter it, and internalize it again in a never-ending cycle. The expedition ends with a sobering consideration of our personal responsibility in contributing to how fast-food outlets nutritionally injure large swathes of the international population, aggravating the well-established, and tragic, cycle of poverty.