

'You are what you eat': historical changes in ideas about food and identity*

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Abstract

There is deep historicity to the adage 'You are what you eat'. For a very long time, the relations between aliment and identity – personal and national – were understood in terms of Galenic dietetics and modes of analogical reasoning from the qualities of food to the qualities of people. 'Hot' foods, for example, made for a 'hot' temperament, and the stolidity of the ox might be transferred to people who ate its flesh. This article tracks the historical career and cultural significance of these relations, and, with the decline of both traditional dietetics and of analogical reasoning by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it describes the different cultural vocabulary used in modernity to talk about food and identity.

There is a saying that 'You are what you eat'. It exists in some variant in many languages. There are claims that this is quite a new thing to say in English, cooked up only in the nineteen-twenties, but that may not be right.¹ It is possibly one of those adages that goes back forever in one form or another and that gains its authority by being something that everyone says but that no one is known to have first said. We do have authors for two well-known nineteenth-century versions. In 1825, the French gourmand Brillat-Savarin wrote that if you told him what you eat, he would tell you what you are – 'Dis-moi ce que tu mange, je te dirai ce que tu es' – and in 1850 the German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach wrote that 'Der Mensch ist, was er ißt'.² The Frenchman was saying something about social identity and cultural meaning – about distinction – and the German was inventing a slogan for scientific materialism. Through the first part of the twentieth century, and as it became part of the modern vernacular, the understanding of 'You are what you eat' tended to follow the German sensibility. In 1940, the American popular nutrition writer Victor Lindlahr published a best-selling account of the vitamin, mineral and calorie contents of different foods, and

* This article is a revised version of a plenary lecture delivered at the 82nd Anglo-American Conference of Historians on the theme of 'Food in history', Institute of Historical Research, University of London, 11–13 July 2013.

¹ J. Cresswell, 'Eat', in *Oxford Dictionary of Word Origins* (Oxford, 2010), p. 144; <<http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/you%20are%20what%20you%20eat.html>> [accessed 19 July 2013]; cf. S. L. Gilman, *Diets and Dieting: a Cultural Encyclopedia* (New York, 2008), p. 178.

² J.-A. Brillat-Savarin, *The Physiology of Taste, or, Meditations on Transcendental Gastronomy* (1st pub. 1825; New York, 2002), p. 3; L. Feuerbach, 'Das Geheimniss des Opfers, oder Der Mensch ist was er isst', in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. W. Bolin and F. Jodl (10 vols., 2nd edn., Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 1959–60), x, 41–67. Feuerbach originally used the tag in an enthusiastic 1850 review of a book on nutrition by Jakob Moleschott and then, pleased with the word-play, recycled it in the 1862 piece cited here.

its title was *You Are What You Eat*.³ We now believe things like this: if you eat excess calories, you get fat; if you take too much sugar and refined carbohydrates, you develop diabetes; too much sodium, hypertension; too little in the way of fresh fruit and vegetables, you increase your cancer risk.

There are indeed other modern interpretations of ‘You are what you eat’: in academia, anthropologists following Claude Lévi-Strauss, Norbert Elias, Jack Goody or Mary Douglas, and sociologists following Thorstein Veblen or Pierre Bourdieu, rightly stress how consumption decisions express the civilized state, establish personal and collective identity, and mark social differences. But, while their understandings may describe the public basis of food choice, they probably do not match most people’s sense of what the adage means and what they think as they choose and eat. Rather, the dominant public sensibility is, I suggest, analytic: your food is understood as a bag of chemicals; you are a bag of chemicals, organized into physiological systems; eat the right chemicals and you will enjoy good health; eat the wrong ones, and you will suffer disease and shortened life. That is Feuerbach’s materialism, burnished by special modes of modern biochemical and physiological expertise. The most visible icon of this idiom is the ‘nutrition facts’ label on packaged foods – here is what is in your food, and here is how much of various chemicals (and chemical powers like calories) the state and its experts think you should take into your body.

The modern idiom is about the constituents of foods and the causal effects these constituents have on human bodies, and I will contrast this sensibility with historically prior frameworks which were not about *constituents* but *qualities*, not about analysis but analogy. Our vocabularies for understanding the relationships between what we eat and who we are have always been resonant – a lot of cultural work has been done using them – but much has changed in fundamental ways over time. And as the vocabularies have changed, so we have come to think differently about the sorts of natural and social entities we are and how we come to be who we are. Finally, while respecting that historical change, I will indicate that although analysis is a big part of the modern story, it is not the whole story in present-day sensibilities about food and identity. The way we understand these things now is complicated, comprising incoherent bits and pieces. Like the oil and vinegar in a salad dressing, different sensibilities, with different historical genealogies, are held in momentary cultural suspension.

The historically prior world of qualities has two conceptual pieces: the first uses a medical-physiological vocabulary handed down from Greek and Latin antiquity, most notably associated with the views of the physician Galen writing in the second century C.E.⁴ The second did have some relations with the Galenic framework but it was formally distinct, involving analogical inference from the nature of foods to their likely effects on the human body. Both were culturally pervasive and consequential over long periods of time – from antiquity to at least the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; both were widely distributed in expert and lay culture and were used in all sorts of cultural and social exercises – making sense, explaining, moralizing, saying what people were like and recommending what they ought to be like. All enterprises that

³ V. H. Lindlahr, *You Are What You Eat: How to Win and Keep Health through Diet* (New York, 1940). The book is said to have sold in the millions, and Lindlahr had a radio show from the 1930s in which the phrase apparently also figured.

⁴ A sound introduction to the culture of dietetics is H. Mikkeli, *Hygiene in the Early Modern Medical Tradition* (Annals of the Finnish Academy of Sciences and Letters, Humaniora, cccv, Helsinki, 1999).

commented on what people were like, how they came to be that way, and how they might be changed or secured in their identities made use of these vocabularies, and some were massively shaped by them.

I will sketch the vocabulary, first, of Galenic dietetics and, then, of forms of analogical reasoning about the qualities and powers of foods. In the Galenic framework, there were four elements out of which all things were made – earth, air, water and fire – and each element had associated with it a pair of the four qualities of hot, cold, moist and dry. ‘All things’ included stuff you could eat and drink. People were part of nature too, comprised of elements and qualities, and the four humours that described where they stood on the map of qualities – blood (hot and moist), yellow bile or choler (hot and dry), phlegm (cold and moist) and black bile or melancholy (cold and dry) – also described dispositions (complexions or temperaments) – whether you were a sanguinary, phlegmatic, choleric or melancholic kind of person.⁵ So your fundamental emotional and cognitive make-up was at the distal end of a causal chain at whose proximal end was what you ate and drank. So far as dietetic medicine was concerned, the trick was maintaining qualitative and humoral balance (which was health) or, when ill (that is, when the humours and qualities were imbalanced), restoring the body to its normal equilibrium, largely through diet. The temperaments were a way of describing both the state of your humours and of your character; so too were the qualities. Note that each of the cosmological qualities was (and is) also an adjectival mode of describing the characters of people – who can be hot-tempered, cold in manner, possessing a dry wit, and, though wet is a little harder, the tory ‘wets’ disdained by Margaret Thatcher were preceded by the seventeenth-century notion of the more lax Quakers as ‘wets’ (alternatively, ‘gays’), lacking in fervour.⁶

Dietetic advice therefore focused on attending to the qualities of different things in individuals’ diet and advising them how, given their natural or innate constitution, they might achieve this balancing or rebalancing.⁷ If you were naturally melancholic, your diet should normally tend towards the cold and dry, but, if those qualities were becoming extreme, then you should adjust your diet towards foods that were warming and moistening.⁸ Over time, your diet, and indeed the sum of your transactions with the environment, could either secure or remake your innate nature, and this was a major reason why all medical counsel reckoned it important that you not make any abrupt changes in your diet or way of life. Sir John Harington’s rendition of the advice of the medieval medical school of Salerno put it in English rhyme for ready memorizing and retrieval:

If to an use you have your selfe betaken,
Of any dyet, make no sudden change,

⁵ N. Arikha, *Passions and Tempers: a History of the Humours* (New York, 2007).

⁶ E. Partridge, *The Routledge Dictionary of Historical Slang* (6th edn., 2006), p. 5847.

⁷ In Galenic medicine, food and drink counted as one of the ‘six things non-natural’ influencing bodily states. The non-naturals included patterns of sleep, exercise, evacuation, exposure to airs, and the passions of the soul (or emotions). All of the non-naturals were thought of as matters potentially under volitional control and, accordingly, behaviours about which one could offer rational advice. Although diet was only one of these non-naturals, it was marked out as a domain of recurrent and pervasive choice, and, possibly for that reason, it was the most important feature of traditional medical counsel.

⁸ S. Shapin, ‘How to eat like a gentleman: dietetics and ethics in early modern England’, in *Right Living: an Anglo-American Tradition of Self-Help Medicine and Hygiene*, ed. C. E. Rosenberg (Baltimore, Md., 2003), pp. 21–58.

A custom is not easily forsaken,
 Yea though it better were, yet seems it strange,
 Long use is as a second nature taken,
 With nature custome walks in equall range.⁹

This was one of very many endorsements of the old adage that ‘custom is a second nature’.¹⁰ Montaigne said ‘I believe nothing with more certainty than this: that I cannot be hurt by the use of things that I have been long accustomed to’.¹¹ Custom is, as a medical man said in the sixteenth century, ‘of such force in mans body both in sicknesse and in health, that it countervailth nature it selfe’.¹² What you were used to *was* you; and early modern theories of the self were environmental histories. The nature that you consumed and your nature moulded themselves over time to each other’s contours, and the only people in early modern society who could and should adopt an insouciant disregard to settled habit were those who travelled and who had to adapt themselves to a changing alimentary environment – people like traders, soldiers, diplomats and, most consequentially, European colonists.

The physiological role of custom explained dietary tradition and commended sticking with tradition. Dietary innovation, like dietary exoticism, put at risk the body accustomed to its usual and proper fare – the stuff that came off the land where the body itself lived and that was prepared as it was traditionally prepared. The exotic might indeed have magical powers, but those powers could harm as well as nourish or cure, and the history of European attitudes towards spices, foreign drinks and the foods involved in the ‘Columbian exchange’ is one of conflicted attitudes towards the edible exotic.¹³ There was nothing absolutely new about this in the early modern period – the Greeks and Romans were skilled in both the celebration and the condemnation of dietary exoticism and innovation. Elites have always ransacked the known globe for their tables and employed cooks as creative artists, and the condemnation of modern depravity has always mobilized the normative aspect of the notion of what is natural. Luxury, sophistication, the elaborate, the novel – all were widely criticized as artificial, not natural. If you want natural people, they must be fed on natural foods; honest people on honest fare. That is not a sentiment unfamiliar to us, but in past dietary cultures there were substantive causal reasons for appreciating the force of this precept, to do with the conditions of digestibility of the simple and the familiar contrasted to the elaborate and exotic, to do with the qualities of bodies and the qualities of aliment.

You *could* plausibly say that the Galenic scheme was itself at least partly analogical: if you knew nothing of Galenic medicine and I just asked you to describe the qualities of melons or of spices, you would probably guess right – melons are cold and moist, spices dry and hot. But you did not have to do analogical inference yourself to know that a cantaloupe is moist and pepper is hot: you could read about the qualities

⁹ John Harington, trans., *The English Mans Doctor. or, The School of Salerne* (1624), p. 16.

¹⁰ Some attribute the saying to Aristotle, some to Ovid, Plutarch or Augustine. Certainly, by the Renaissance, it was a commonplace (see D. R. Kelley, “‘Second nature’: the idea of custom in European law, society, and culture”, in *The Transmission of Culture in Early Modern Europe*, ed. A. Grafton and A. Blair (Philadelphia, Pa., 1990), pp. 131–72).

¹¹ Michel Eyquem de Montaigne, ‘Of experience’, in Michel Eyquem de Montaigne, *The Essayes of Michael Lord of Montaigne*, trans. J. Florio (1st pub. 1580–8; 3 vols., 1910), iii. 322–86, at p. 340.

¹² Thomas Cogan, *The Haven of Health* (1st pub. 1581; 1636), p. 200.

¹³ A. Cooper, *Inventing the Indigenous: Local Knowledge and Natural History in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2007); A. W. Crosby, Jr., *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (1st pub. 1973; Westport, Conn., 2003); E. C. Spary, *Eating the Enlightenment: Food and the Sciences in Paris, 1670–1760* (Chicago, Ill., 2012), chs. 2–3.

of foods in any of the hundreds of dietary books that were so pervasive in the Renaissance and early modern period.¹⁴ But there were forms of reasoning from aliment to self that were richer and more nuanced in their analogical approach. And they were not just analogical in a symbolic sense; the terms in the analogy were understood to be related through substantive causality.

So, for example, the so-called doctrine of signatures in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Paracelsian medicine reasoned from the shape of a plant or plant part to the human organ that it would affect.¹⁵ A stomach-shaped seed pod said ‘Take me for an upset tummy’. And that was because God had signed his remedies so that we could work out what was good for what. But analogical reasoning from the observable qualities of an item of aliment to its effects on the individual ranged more widely. Wines that were lighter in texture might be more ‘opening’ and those that were darker and richer might make better blood or cause obstructions.¹⁶

In practical action, both Galenic and analogical schemes were maps people used to manoeuvre around the edible environment and to give an account of what different people were like. The four-quality vocabulary of the Galenic framework allowed people, for instance, to choose wines, gauging their degree of heat (since all wines were moist) with respect to their temperament and stage of life. It was understood that children were in general of a hotter constitution than adults and adults hotter than the aged, and that makes sense of Dr. Johnson’s famous formula: ‘Claret for boys, – port for men, – brandy for heroes’.¹⁷ The qualities of your aliment should follow the changing qualities of your body. The degrees of wine heat followed in general from the heat of the regions where the grapes were grown. Wine, like spices, had been a global trade good forever, and, because it had become, so to speak, partly naturalized in non-wine-producing regions, the question of what wines suited Englishmen followed thinking about your stage of life, as Johnson indicated, but also your innate temperament, and your momentary state of health. Hot Madeira might not agree with a too-hot nature but was just what you needed if you tended to phlegm, while light Rhenish wine suited those living a sedentary life. In the seventeenth-century philosophical exchanges between Anne Conway and the Cambridge Platonist Henry More each recognized the other as having a hot constitution, prone to both high thoughts and frenzy (phrenesis, brain fever). More advised his friend not only on how she might think but what she should eat: ‘Too much small beere and fruit’ damped the body’s heat – which would be a good thing in her case – while wine and roasted meats stoked its fire (a bad one).¹⁸

In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Petruchio attempts to tame the shrewish Katherine through dietary management, and indeed the whole play centres on the environmental

¹⁴ K. Albala, *Eating Right in the Renaissance* (Berkeley, Calif., 2002).

¹⁵ W. Pagel, *Paracelsus: an Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance* (2nd rev. edn., New York, 1982); M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: an Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1st pub. 1966; New York, 1994), pp. 25–45.

¹⁶ For treatment of analogical reasoning in relation to the qualities of foods, see S. Shapin, ‘The tastes of wine: towards a cultural history’, *Rivista di Estetica*, new ser., li (2012), 49–94; S. Shapin, *Changing Tastes: How Foods Tasted in the Early Modern Period and How they Taste Now* (The Hans Rausing Lecture 2011, *Salvia Småskrifter*, xiv, Uppsala, 2011).

¹⁷ James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.* (new edn., Edinburgh, 1873), p. 448.

¹⁸ Anne, Viscountess Conway, *The Conway Letters: the Correspondence of Anne, Viscountess Conway, Henry More, and their Friends 1642–84*, ed. M. Hope Nicolson, rev. S. Hutton (Oxford, 1992), pp. 63, 75, 164; see also S. Shapin, ‘The philosopher and the chicken: on the dietetics of disembodied knowledge’, in *Science Incarnate: Historical Embodiments of Natural Knowledge*, ed. C. Lawrence and S. Shapin (Chicago, Ill., 1998), pp. 21–50.

shaping of character. Kate's problem is her choleric nature, and that nature has to be remade, so far as possible, by denying her the hot and dry and encouraging the cold and moist.¹⁹ Petruchio gets his new bride home and proceeds to damp her fire by starving her body of fuel: 'She eat no meat to-day, nor none shall eat'. His servants bring in some overdone mutton. Kate thinks it is all right, but she cannot have it:

I tell thee, Kate, 'twas burnt and dried away;
And I expressly am forbid to touch it,
For it engenders choler, planteth anger;
And better 'twere that both of us did fast,
Since, of ourselves, ourselves are choleric,
Than feed it with such over-roasted flesh.

(Act IV, scene 1)

Like Henry More and Anne Conway, they know each other constitutionally, and that constitutional knowledge lets Petruchio re-make Kate into the wife he wants. 'What say you to a neat's foot?', Petruchio's servant Grumio – acting under instruction – asks her (Act IV, scene 3). Yes, please, she says. But that too is just a tease: 'I fear it is too choleric a meat./How say you to a fat tripe finely broil'd?' Kate takes the bait again: 'I like it well: good Grumio, fetch it me'. Grumio again refuses: 'I cannot tell; I fear 'tis choleric. What say you to a piece of beef and mustard?' Kate, on the verge of starving, says that this is 'A dish that I do love to feed upon'. But Grumio denies her; the qualities are all wrong – 'The mustard is too hot a little'.

The language of Galenic dietetics also figured in collective identity: what foods suited the English, the Scots, the Welsh, the French and the Spanish? In England, what suited people from the west country and what suited Essex man? This was the sort of vocabulary used in Montesquieu's 1752 *Spirit of the Laws* to give an account of differing ways of life. The Muslims of Arabia did not drink wine. They lived in a hot climate and their blood lost water through perspiration. Water could reconstitute the lost moisture while spirituous drinks would further congeal the blood. In cold climates, the opposite obtained, and this is why northern people took to strong drink. It was not a matter of Islam but of the nature of indigenous people. Montesquieu claimed that the Arabs drank water and shunned wine before Mohammed, and so too did the Carthaginians, as their climate was much the same as Arabia's. The Scandinavians are drunks and the Arabs abstain – that is who they are at a constitutional level:

It is very natural that where wine is contrary to the climate, and consequently to health, the excess of it should be more severely punished than in countries where intoxication produces very few bad effects to the person, fewer to the society, and where it does not make people frantic and wild, but only stupid and heavy. Hence those laws which inflicted a double punishment for crimes committed in drunkenness were applicable only to a personal, and not to a national, ebriety. A German drinks through custom, and a Spaniard by choice.²⁰

Local aliment and local natures were in a causal loop. In many Mediterranean countries, Robert Burton said, 'they live most on roots, raw herbs, camel's milk, and it agrees well with them; which to a stranger will cause much grievance'. In Wales

¹⁹ Albala, p. 3.

²⁰ Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws*, trans. T. Nugent (2 vols., 1748; rev. edn., New York, 1900), i. 228–9.

they live most on white meats; in Holland on fish, roots, butter; and so at this day in Greece . . . they had much rather feed on fish than flesh. With us, . . . we feed on flesh most part, . . . as all northern countries do; and it would be very offensive to us to live after their diet, or they to live after ours. We drink beer, they wine; they use oil, we butter; we in the north are great eaters, they most sparing in those hotter countries; and yet they and we following our own customs are well pleased.

The causal link between constitution and aliment could go down to the county level. Cider and perry are common beverages in Worcestershire and Gloucestershire, and they are ‘cold and windy’ drinks, yet, as Burton observed, ‘in some shires of England, [and] Normandy in France . . . , ’tis their common drink, and they are no whit offended with it’.²¹ A late sixteenth-century English writer from Norfolk – a future vice-chancellor of Cambridge University – described the characteristic and appropriate diets for people from Yorkshire, Lancashire, Essex, Kent, Middlesex and Wales: ‘For the *Northeren-man, White-meates, Beefe, Mutton, Venison: for the Southerne man, Fruites, Hearbes, Fowle, Fish, Spice, and Sauce*’. Essex man ate veal; and Welshmen, of course, leeks and cheese.²² Montaigne, always a great supporter of custom over claims to rational expertise, wrote in the late sixteenth century that ‘*It is in the hands of custome to give our life what forme it pleaseth: in that it can do all in all. It is the drinke of Circes, diversifieth our nature as she thinks good . . . A Spaniard can not well brooke to feede after our fashion, nor we endure to drinke as the Swizzers*’.²³ Montaigne noted that people had been found in the New World ‘to whom our usuall flesh and other meats were mortall and venomous’.²⁴

A few English dietary writers disapproved of wine for Englishmen, but they made exceptions for those whose stomachs were disordered, as an aid to digestion. Canary wine or sack was commended as a powerful cordial, but some warned against the routine use of all rich and sweet wines as ‘being not at all agreeable to our Northern Constitutions’, heating and disordering the blood, making ‘*Men too Effeminate and Women too Salacious*’, setting ‘the *Gate of Venus open*’.²⁵ The ascetically-inclined late eighteenth-century physician William Smith advised that if ‘the stomach be weak and cold, the constitution languid, weak, cold, and relaxed, and the blood poor and watery, then a glass or two of wine will be of service; but people in health require no wine; it ought only to be used as spices are’. It suited the natures of those who lived where vines naturally grew – indeed, that was part of the Divine plan – but was in no way necessary for any normally healthy person living in England’s cold and wet climate: ‘Wine was never designed for common use. In warm countries it is very necessary, nor can health be preserved without it. For the heat of the weather exhausts the strength, weakens the inside, and hurts digestion; therefore we see providence has provided for their wants by giving plenty of grapes, which are the produce of warm climates only’.²⁶

European colonists were anxious about the possible effects of exposure to an exotic environment, and especially to an exotic diet, on their own constitutions. What would happen to them in the East or West Indies if they lived and ate as the natives did? Would their constitutions change, and, if so, in what ways? Who would they and their

²¹ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1st pub. 1621; 3 vols., New York, 1880), i. 305–6.

²² Henry Butts, *Dyets Dry Dinner consisting of Eight Severall Courses* (1599), sig. A2v.

²³ Montaigne, ‘Of experience’, p. 340.

²⁴ Montaigne, ‘Of custom’, in *Essayes*, i. 105–23, at p. 106.

²⁵ Thomas Tryon, *The Good House-wife Made a Doctor* (1692), pp. 170–1, 174.

²⁶ William Smith, *A Sure Guide in Sickness and Health, in the Choice of Food, and Use of Medicine* (1776), pp. 81–2.

descendants then be? If the natives were what they were through the long-term action of climate and food, would European colonists go constitutionally native? Much about traditional ways of reasoning strongly suggested that this was possible, even likely. On Hispaniola, Christopher Columbus and his men ate some of what the 'Indians' gave them, but were suspicious of other local foods: 'They eat many such things as would not only make any Spaniard vomit but would poison him if he tried them'. Some, indeed, found that Indian foods 'disagreed with them very badly, since they were not used to them'.²⁷ In the early North American colonies, the English were wary about the suitability for their constitutions of maize, potatoes and other native crops. Joyce Chaplin notes that colonists closely monitored the suitability of local aliment, even gauging such things through the acceptability of English foods to the Native American constitution, and paying close attention to their own bodily changes over time.²⁸ In the East Indies, the early seventeenth-century botanist Jacobus Bontius insisted that the wholesomeness or noxiousness of foods had to be referred to the local, not the European, environmental context: Dutch aquatic fowl, for example, were accounted unwholesome because they fed on slime and weeds, but the opposite was the case for their East Indian equivalents, since they lived in free-running rivers and fed on better fare. The well-being of European colonists depended upon knowing the local qualities of local foods and drinks, in relation to local environmental conditions.²⁹ Latin American colonial concerns about the relationship between food and constitution have now been documented in great detail by Rebecca Earle. The right foods – those to which the colonists were accustomed, notably wheat bread and wine – would, it was thought, protect the colonial body from the physiological risks of the New World environment, while eating local foodstuffs would transform it into the flawed native body. Native foods were responsible for native humours and temperaments. You are indeed what you eat, and the colonial enterprise was understood to depend upon maintaining the constitutional difference between colonists and colonized.³⁰

In their native land, Englishmen famously ate beef.³¹ So consider the roast beef of Olde England as an instance of causal analogical reasoning from the qualities of

²⁷ Christopher Columbus, *The Four Voyages*, ed. and trans. J. M. Cohen (Harmondsworth, 1969), pp. 81 (for 'vomiting'), 166 (for 'disagreeing with them'), though Columbus did note that Europeans could, over time, adapt to new foods; see also N. Wey-Gómez, *The Tropics of Empire: why Columbus Sailed South to the Indies* (Cambridge, Mass., 2008), pp. 411–16, 420–3.

²⁸ J. E. Chaplin, *Subject Matter: Technology, Science, and the Body on the Anglo-American Frontier, 1500–1676* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001), pp. 149–51, 211; also A. Carroll, *Three Squares: the Invention of the American Meal* (New York, 2013), pp. 24–7.

²⁹ Jacobus Bontius, *An Account of the Diseases, Natural History, and Medicines of the East Indies*, trans. Anon. (comp. 1631; 1st pub. 1642; 1769), pp. 120, 125.

³⁰ R. Earle, *The Body of the Conquistador: Food, Race and the Colonial Experience in Spanish America, 1492–1700* (Cambridge, 2012). Mark Harrison's accounts of the British in India focus much more on climate than on diet, yet he points to advice that the British might, in certain circumstances, take local foods (M. Harrison, *Climates and Constitutions: Health, Race, Environment and British Imperialism in India 1600–1850* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 50–2, 80–3; M. Harrison, *Medicine in an Age of Commerce and Empire: Britain and its Tropical Colonies, 1660–1830* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 38, 77, 109, 122; also E. M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: the Physical Experience of the Raj, c.1800–1947* (Oxford, 2001)).

³¹ B. Rogers, *Beef and Liberty: Roast Beef, John Bull and the English Nation* (New York, 2004); R. Porter, *English Society in the 18th Century* (rev. edn., 1991), pp. 11, 20–1, 64–7, 103, 153, 216; R. Porter, 'Consumption: disease of the consumer society?', in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. J. Brewer and R. Porter (1993), pp. 58–84; R. Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason: the Modern Foundations of Body and Soul* (New York, 2004), pp. 234–7; M. Spierling, 'Food, phagophobia, and English national identity', in *Food, Drink, and Identity in Europe*, ed. T. M. Wilson (Amsterdam, 1994), pp. 31–48. 'Beef-eaters' as a nickname for the yeoman warders seems to date from the 1660s, and, while its precise origin is unclear, the link between beef and brave stolidity is evident.

aliment to the qualities of people. The historical frames for understanding why they are beef-eaters, how beef-eating accounts for what they are like as a race, run across the cultural spectrum. English beefiness is partly intelligible from within the Galenic system. Some writers said that beef is a cold meat, suiting the cold English nature, and so explaining why the hot-tempered Italians had notably little taste for it. But there were other vocabularies used to understand the relationship between beef and English identity, in both its normal and pathological states. And one such vocabulary was causally analogical. In the mid seventeenth century, the Czech reformer Comenius moved between Galenic and analogical reasoning on the subject, repeating ancient wisdom that ‘he that feeds on dry meat, is dry of complexion; he that feeds on moist, is flegmatick, &c. . . . because, for the most part a man retains the qualities of those living creatures on whose flesh he feeds, as he that feeds on beefe is strong; he that feeds on venison, is nimble, &c.’³²

Beef partly defined Englishness and the generous and unadorned presence of beef on the English table was routinely contrasted with elaborate and effete foreign fare. Foreigners remarked not just on the English obsession with beef, but also on their disdain for continental cuisine. An Italian diplomat in the late sixteenth century remembered ‘a speech of Sir Roger Williams to an idle Spaniard, boasting of his country citrons, oranges, olives, and such like: Why (saith he) in England wee have good surloines of beefe, and daintie capons to eat with your sauce, with all meat worthy the name of sustenance; but you have sauce and no sustenance’.³³ And there are some indications that in England beef was more associated with country than with city modes of life. In an early seventeenth-century dialogue between a ‘North-Country-man’ and a ‘Citizen’, the northerner said that city fare was typified by stuffed capons while ‘our Beefe and Bacon feeds us strong in the Countrey’, and it was understood that country people and those who did hard labour had stronger stomachs, able to handle beef and other ‘gross’ meats.³⁴

How much beef did Englishmen really eat in the early modern period? Historians disagree on matters of quantity but not on the cultural significance attached to beef-eating, certainly by the early eighteenth century.³⁵ At least by that point, beef was normal fare for Englishmen – for those who could afford meat, it seems to have been the preferred form – so one account of why Englishmen ate beef was just that this is what English people did, in quantities, and even to a lesser extent among the lower orders.³⁶ The normal gave you the normative. In the fifteen-eighties, a dietary writer

³² Johann Amos Comenius, *Natural Philosophie Reformed by Divine Light, or, A Synopsis of Physicks by J. A. Comenius . . .* (1651), p. 166.

³³ Giovanni Botero, *Relations of the Most Famous Kingdomes and Common-wealths thoroughout the World . . .* (1st pub. 1597; 2nd edn., 1630), p. 87; Samuel Clarke, *A Mirrour or Looking-Glasse Both for Saints, and Sinners* (1654), p. 329; see also J.-L. Flandrin, ‘Dietary choices and culinary technique, 1500–1800’, in *Food: a Culinary History*, ed. J.-L. Flandrin and M. Montanari (New York, 2000), pp. 403–17, at pp. 412–16.

³⁴ Thomas Dekker, *The Cold Yeare 1614 . . . Written Dialogue-wise, in a Plaine Familiar Talk between a London Shop-keeper and a North-Country-man* (1615), sig. A3v; see also M. Schoenfeldt, ‘Fables of the belly in early modern England’, in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. D. Hillman and C. Mazzio (New York, 1997), pp. 243–61, at pp. 251–2. The capon-beef contrast was common in early modern England, and it may have carried a sexual as well as an analogical load.

³⁵ E.g., J. Thirsk, *Food in Early Modern England: Phases, Fads, Fashions 1500–1760* (2007), pp. 45–6; S. Mennell, *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 40–61, 102–3; Spierling, pp. 32–5.

³⁶ Thirsk, pp. 237–40.

noted that ‘biefe of all flesh is most usuall among English men’; it is ‘plentifull . . . throughout this land’,³⁷ and its presence on the plate defines hospitality and generosity; it is, so to speak, the fatted calf. (In the Restoration, Pepys’s *Diary* records his consumption of a fair amount of beef, more as his wealth increased, but it is clear that it was for special occasions, and specially to be remarked on – ‘a fine piece of rost beef’, ‘a most brave chine of beef’, ‘some good ribbs of beef roasted’, ‘a fine collation of collar of beef’, ‘a rare piece of roast beef’.³⁸) Cattle flourished in England; England specialized in raising cattle suited for the table; and, as England suited the nature of the beast, so the beast’s flesh suited the nature of Englishmen: ‘how well [beef] doth agree with the nature of English men, the common consent of all our nation doth sufficiently prove. Yea that it bringeth more strong nourishment than other meates, may plainly be perceived, by the difference of strength in those that commonly feede of biefe, and them that are fedde with other fine meates’.³⁹

Beef-eating not only agreed with English natures; it helped to make English natures. As custom is a second nature, and as habitual transactions with the environment could remake your natural constitution, routine eating of beef transmitted into English human natures the natures of the beasts themselves. And here it was judged important that Englishmen should eat English beef, nothing imported, as their virtues would be different. (Physiological qualities merged into assessment of commercial quality, and that is one reason why the characteristics of beef from other lands were so closely monitored.) Cattle – think now of oxen and bulls rather than cows and heifers – were strong and obstinate – ‘stubborn as an ox’. Bull beef was indeed eaten, and its effects were recorded by seventeenth-century proverb-collectors – ‘He lookes so big as if he had eaten bull-beefe’ – while some early seventeenth-century physicians evidently believed that bull-blood was poison.⁴⁰ The link between the valued stolidity of English character and eating not just beef but English beef was put into poetry as well as prose during the Restoration:

Only do not fear, to eat
As our English Ladies do;
For a fond scruple or two:
English Beefe
Is the chiefe
And he that shall inherit
Of a Body
Must be hoddy,
And must have an English Spirit.⁴¹

In *Henry IV, Part I* (Act II, scene 2), Poins asks after ‘the martlemas’ – that is, Sir John Falstaff – and in *Part II* (Act III, scene 3), Prince Hal addresses Falstaff as ‘my sweet beef’. Both gesture, by way of beefiness, at the abundance of Falstaff’s flesh as well as the stolidity, valour and carnality of his character. The feast of Martlemas (or Martinmas), on 11 November, was the traditional end-of-autumn time for the

³⁷ Cogan, p. 129.

³⁸ *The Diary of Samuel Pepys: Companion*, ed. W. Matthews and R. Latham (2000), pp. 143–9.

³⁹ Cogan, pp. 128–9.

⁴⁰ John Clarke, *Panoemiologia Anglo-Latina* (1639), p. 33; Eleazar Duncon, *The Copy of a Letter Written by E. D. Doctour of Physicke to a Gentleman, by Whom it was Published* (1606), p. 6; see also Henry Edmundson, *The Fellow-Traveller through City and Countrey* (1658), p. [7].

⁴¹ Edmund Cooper, *On the Recovery of Our Most Gracious Queen Katharine from Her Late Grievous and Deplorable Fit of Sicknesse: a Vision* (1664), p. 7. ‘Hoddy’ meant healthy, in good condition and state of mind.

slaughter of beasts, when they were at their fattest and sweetest and before salting or smoking, hence the common expression ‘Martlemas beef’. Falstaff is a great eater of beef, and it is a diet that is understood to appeal to those who delight in their food and to help to make them brave as well as hedonistic.⁴² It was common for dietary texts at the time to identify rich food and strong drink as causes of licentiousness; Erasmus’s *Adages* included ‘Wythout meate and drynke the lust of the body is colde’ and ‘The beste way to tame carnal lust, is to kepe abstinence of meates and drynkes’;⁴³ and a figure in a Restoration comedy proclaimed that ‘Beef ’tis makes us lusty’.⁴⁴ In 1638, Henry Peacham’s caustic *The Truth of Our Times* told the story of a mother overjoyed to see her foppish and spoiled son turn to eating beef, ‘which she protested hee never did before in his life, and now she verily believed hee would prove a souldier’.⁴⁵ In *Henry V* (Act III, scene 7), on the eve of Agincourt, the French forces were discussing the state of mind and likely qualities of their foe. The discussion proceeded by way of diet. If the English had any sense, they would run away, so puny were their forces. True, England ‘breeds very valiant creatures; their mastiffs are of unmatched courage’. Yes, indeed, a French general agrees – brave, but too stupid to know when they are overmatched, ‘leaving their wits with their wives’. They take ‘great meals of beef and iron and steel’, which they eat like wolves and which make them ‘fight like devils’. But not to worry: ‘these English are shrewdly out of beef’, and that means that ‘to-morrow they will have only stomachs to eat and none to fight’. An army, as Napoleon said, marches on its stomach, and Henry’s army’s stomachs were not just empty but empty of their fighting fare.⁴⁶ Daniel Defoe’s account of *The True-Born Englishman* agreed that he was beefily bold beyond other races:

Eager to fight, and lavish of their Blood;
 And equally of *Fear and Forecast* void.
 . . .
 The Climate makes them Terrible and Bold;
 And *English Beef* their Courage does uphold.⁴⁷

In a chivalric culture, it was good to be brave, fierce, stolid and violent. But causal idioms relating aliment to human nature could also be used to oppose chivalric virtues and to suggest a dietary remedy. In the late seventeenth century, the English pacifist writer Thomas Tryon reckoned meat-eating, and specifically the eating of bloody meat, to be a cause of a violent society. It was not, as some modern vegetarian writers have thought, that killing animals, or eating animals slaughtered on your behalf, made you insensitive to violence – though that might indeed happen. Rather, it was that the qualities of the beast were carried in the blood and transferred to human beings through the blood. ‘Blood . . . doth not only contain the Spirits, but the very Humour, Dispositions and Inclinations of the Creature’, and so, by eating bloody meat, you become bestial and bloody-minded. Different forms of aliment had the power, Tryon

⁴² See J. B. Fisher, ‘Digesting Falstaff: food and nation in Shakespeare’s *Henry IV* plays’, *Early English Studies*, ii (2009), 1–23.

⁴³ [Desiderius Erasmus], *Proverbes or Adagies* (1539), fo. xxxvi.

⁴⁴ T[homas] D[uffet], *Psyche debauch’d, a Comedy* (1678), p. 8.

⁴⁵ Henry Peacham, *The Truth of Our Times* (1638), pp. 92–3.

⁴⁶ Into the 1670s, those praising English military valour felt it necessary to say that this did *not* depend upon adequate supplies of beef: ‘’Tis a base and malicious scandal to say, That his Valour *ebbs* and *flows* with the condition of his *Snapsack*, or that he can never fight well unless *Beef* and *Bag-pudding* be his *Seconds*’ (*The Character of a True English Souldier. Written by a Gentleman of the New-rais’d Troops* (1678)).

⁴⁷ [Daniel Defoe], *The True-Born Englishman: a Satyr* (1700), p. 26.

said, of awakening their ‘similes’ in the human body. Fruits and vegetables are ‘of a clean Simple Nature and Operation, which being well prepared and temperately eaten, have onely power to waken their Similes in the Body and Senses’. By contrast, animals – some sorts more than others – ‘are endued with all kind of Bestial Passions, as Anger, Revenge, Covetousness, Love and Hate, which dispositions and Passions of the Flesh, but especially the Blood, doth retain after such Animals are Killed’. That brutalizing effect might obtain if one was just exposed to the material effluvia from abattoirs, from which places ‘fiery wrathful Spirits do evaporate themselves into the Air, being continually breathed into the [bodies]’ of people congregating near such places. This was why butchers were ‘more fierce and cruel, sooner moved to wrath than others’.⁴⁸ During the English civil wars, it was observed ‘that one Foot-Regiment of Butchers, behaved themselves more stoutly than any other’, though they had never before killed anything but beasts.⁴⁹

So criticism as well as celebration of national virtues could proceed by way of diet, and Tryon’s views just turned upside down those that praised the beef-eating heroes of Agincourt. That sensibility persisted into the Enlightenment, and, again, the French agreed that it was bloody beef-eating that made the English what they were, that is, ‘rosbifs’. It was Rousseau’s opinion that this bloody diet made people ‘cruel and ferocious’ – ‘English barbarism is known’⁵⁰ – and it was also an opinion expressed in La Mettrie’s *L’Homme Machine*: ‘Raw meat makes animals fierce, and it would have the same effect on man. This is so true that the English who eat meat red and bloody, and not as well done as ours, seem to share more or less in the savagery due to this kind of food’.⁵¹ Even the Scots, who reckoned that they too were pretty fierce, agreed, as, for example, the opinion of the physician William Buchan, discerning a causal link between the violence of the English nature and the beefiness of their diet: ‘There is no doubt but this induces a ferocity of temper unknown to men whose food is chiefly taken from the vegetable kingdom’.⁵² (Sadly, it seems that the notion of ‘having a beef with’ someone or something is an American usage, from the late nineteenth century.)

English beef-eating was also part of causal stories about characteristic English pathologies. Beef, and especially beef from older animals, made ‘ill juice’ and ‘grosse bloude’, engendering melancholy, according to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century physicians and humanists.⁵³ (Veal was widely judged innocuous or wholesome.⁵⁴) Everybody knew this, lay and expert. The Salernitan Verses, perhaps the most widely circulated form of popular dietary advice, listed beef as among the foods ‘that breed ill blood, and Melancholy,/If sicke you be, to feed on them were folly’.⁵⁵ Everybody also understood why there might be this causal connection between beef and

⁴⁸ Thomas Tryon, *Healths Grand Preservative: or The Womens Best Doctor . . .* (1682), pp. 15–19.

⁴⁹ Charles Blount, *Great is Diana of the Ephesians, or, The Original of Idolatry together with the Politick Institution of the Gentiles Sacrifices* (1680), p. 44, quoted in T. Stuart, *The Bloodless Revolution: a Cultural History of Vegetarianism from 1600 to Modern Times* (New York, 2006), p. 125.

⁵⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or, On Education*, ed. and trans. C. Kelly and A. Bloom (1st pub. 1762; Lebanon, N.H., 2009), p. 297.

⁵¹ Julien Offray de La Mettrie, *Man a Machine* (1st pub. 1748; Chicago, Ill., 1912), p. 94.

⁵² William Buchan, *Domestic Medicine* (1st pub. 1769; 16th edn., 1798), p. 650.

⁵³ Thomas Elyot, *The Castel of Helth* (1541), pp. 8–15; William Bullein, *Bulleins Bulwarke of Defence against all Sicknesse* (1579), p. 74; John Archer, *Every Man His Own Doctor* (1671), pp. 27–8; [John Floyer], *The Preternatural State of Animal Humours* (1696), p. 163; Butts, sig. Ir; Peacham, pp. 34–6; and see also Albala, pp. 68, 230–1.

⁵⁴ Andrew Boorde, *The First Boke of the Introduction of Knowledge . . . A Compendyous Regyment or a Dyetary of Helth*, ed. F. J. Furnivall (1st pub. 1547; 1870), pp. 271–2; Harington, p. 8; Archer, p. 28.

⁵⁵ Harington, p. 3.

melancholy. Henry Fielding's 1731 patriotic ballad 'The Roast Beef of Old England' celebrated the mental benefits of beef – 'When mighty Roast Beef was the Englishman's food,/It ennobled our brains and enriched our blood' – but there were serious doubts about the matter. The famous English Malady described by the Scot George Cheyne in the early eighteenth century was a mental and moral condition partly caused by the poor digestibility of red meat.⁵⁶ Beef was not recommended to the city-dwelling sedentary and it was understood that country people and those who did physical labour had stronger stomachs, better able to handle it.⁵⁷ Beef-eating, and especially the eating of old animals, might cause melancholy through its excess of coldness or it might do so through difficulty in digestion.⁵⁸ Things that were hard to digest might call animal spirits away from their mental tasks and enlist them to power digestion; or the fumes and vapours that were the signs of poor digestion might rise up from the stomach, literally clouding judgment and breeding dark and brooding thoughts. That makes sense of another Shakespearian digression on food and the self. This is in *Twelfth Night* (Act I, scene 3) when Sir Andrew Aguecheek explains to Sir Toby Belch that 'I have no more wit than a Christian or an ordinary man has: but I am a great eater of beef and I believe that does harm to my wit'.⁵⁹ The idea that beef-eating made you stupid was common: it is found, for example, in Diogenes Laertius's life of Diogenes the Cynic: the philosopher had suggested that athletes were not very sharp, and, 'Being asked why the Gamesters were men of no Sense, he said, because they were built up of Beef and Bacon'.⁶⁰ And in an exchange of insults in Dryden's play *Troilus and Cressida*, Thersites calls Ajax 'beef-witted'.⁶¹ That is to say, the beef-eater is precisely John Bull, described by Washington Irving as '[A] plain, downright, matter-of-fact fellow, with much less of poetry about him than rich prose. There is little of romance in his nature, but a vast deal of a strong natural feeling. He excels in humor [where humour tended to mean quirkiness] more than in wit; . . . melancholy rather than morose'.⁶²

If the English ate less beef, they might become healthier but also less English. Indeed, the English liked (like?) to contrast their mental stolidity and solidity to the empty flash and dash of, say, the ragout-eating French or the oily Italians⁶³ – lack of wit is not necessarily to be regretted, not in the late sixteenth century nor later, when the

⁵⁶ George Cheyne, *The English Malady: or, a Treatise of Nervous Diseases of All Kinds* (1733), esp. pp. 168–70; see also S. Shapin, 'Trusting George Cheyne: scientific expertise, common sense, and moral authority in early 18th-century dietic medicine', *Bull. History of Medicine*, lxxvii (2003), 263–97.

⁵⁷ Bullein, p. 74; Antoine Le Grand, *An Entire Body of Philosophy* (1694), p. 236.

⁵⁸ E.g., Moses Charras, *The Royal Pharmacopœia; Galenical and Chymical* (1678), p. 54.

⁵⁹ R. Appelbaum, *Aguecheek's Beef, Belch's Hiccup, and other Gastronomic Interjections: Literature, Culture, and Food among the Early Moderns* (Chicago, Ill., 2006), ch. 1.

⁶⁰ Diogenes Laertius, *The Lives, Opinions, and Remarkable Sayings of the Most Famous Ancient Philosophers* (1688), p. 420; [John Bulteel], *The Apophthegms of the Ancients; taken out of Plutarch, Diogenes Laertius . . . and Others* (1683), p. 315.

⁶¹ John Dryden, *Troilus and Cressida* (1679), p. 22.

⁶² W. Irving, 'John Bull', in *The Sketch Book*, in *The Works of Washington Irving* (10 vols., New York, 1890), ii. 431–47, at p. 433.

⁶³ James Howard, *The English Mounseieur. A Comedy* (1674), pp. 4, 9, 20; James Howell, *A German Diet, or, The Ballance of Europe* (1653), p. 54; see also L. Dacome, "'Useless and pernicious matter': corpulence in 18th-century England', in *Cultures of the Abdomen: Diet, Digestion and Fat in the Modern World*, ed. C. E. Forth and A. Carden-Coyne (2005), pp. 185–204, at pp. 192–3; S. Volk-Birke, 'Questions of taste: the critic as connoisseur and the hungry reader', in *The Pleasures and Horrors of Eating: The Cultural History of Eating in Anglophone Literature*, ed. M. Gymnich and N. Lennartz (Göttingen, 2010), pp. 165–85, at pp. 168–70.

tory party, following a remark by John Stuart Mill, liked to celebrate itself as the ‘stupid party’, and when ‘clever’ can mean lacking in sound judgement, and ‘too clever by half’ can mean Jewish.

The story resumes closer to present times: during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the vocabularies of both Galenic dietetics and analogical reasoning about the qualities of aliment lost their grip on medical and physiological expertise. In their place, nutritional science supplied a new language: the constituents of foods were no longer the qualities of heat and cold, moist and dry, nor of the virtues and powers of the plants and animals eaten – they were carbohydrates, fats and protein; vitamins; minerals; and that power attached to chemical constituents, the calorie. This is what is *in* what you eat, and this is what makes you what you are and what powers your physiological functions.

What are some broad consequences of these changes in vocabulary for understandings of who we are as natural and cultural beings, how we come to be this way, and how we come to know about both our bodies and our food? First, the change from qualities to constituents marks a shift in the conditions of knowledge. In the schemes of both Galenic dietetics and analogical reasoning, the qualities of things eaten could be adequately known through their sensed properties. The temperamental effects of beef, transferred from beast’s blood to its human eater, could be known by the temperamental characteristics of the animal; the moistness of cucumbers through the perceived wateriness of the vegetable; the heat of pepper through the heat it produced in the mouth. Taste, and the individual experience of digestion, were powerful probes into the qualities of things. When early moderns said that certain foods either agreed, or disagreed, with them, they knew that taste on the palate and digestibility were signs that the qualities of the food matched the qualities of their bodies. The old Latin tag was ‘*Quod sapit nutrit*’ – if it tastes good, it’s good for you. True, there was frequent disagreement about the properties of particular foods, and, true also, some forms of food did not speak clearly to the senses about their qualities, but the mode of reasoning was understood as legitimate. And while there was expertise in such things, you could read off qualities without reaching for external expertise. After all, the ancient saying was ‘Every man his own doctor’, and no one knows better than you where the shoe pinches – or what ‘agrees with’ you.⁶⁴

Contrast that situation with *our* predicament: we now know that foods are made up of fats, carbohydrates, proteins, etc., that taste is not a reliable guide to nutritiousness, and that eating venison might make you fat but cannot make you fast. The analogical mode survives, but we tend to find its users a bit weird. Among the many eccentricities of the French composer Erik Satie was his diet confined to white foods – eggs, sugar, shredded bones, the fat of dead animals, coconuts, chicken cooked in white water, rice, cheese (white varieties) and certain kinds of fish (without their skin). Satie thought that white foods got him into the mood for musical compositions that were unimpassioned and lucid.⁶⁵ We seem, on the whole, to be satisfied with modern nutritional science, but the conditions of having that knowledge are that we are now wholly dependent upon finding reliable external expertise and then trusting it. We are

⁶⁴ On expertise, lay knowledge and medical authority, see Shapin, ‘Trusting George Cheyne’; Shapin, ‘How to eat like a gentleman’; S. Shapin, ‘Descartes the doctor: rationalism and its therapies’, *British Jour. for the Hist. of Science*, xxxiii (2000), 131–54; S. Shapin, ‘Expertise, common sense, and the Atkins diet’, in *Public Science in Liberal Democracy*, ed. P. W. B. Phillips (Toronto, 2007), pp. 174–93.

⁶⁵ E. Satie, ‘Memoirs of an amnesiac’, in *The Writings of Erik Satie*, ed. and trans. N. Wilkins (1980), pp. 57–66.

not now our own doctors or our own nutritionists. And one support for the ‘nutrition facts’ label is that it represents the joined authority of both science and the state.⁶⁶ It would, however, be incomplete to say that our knowledge of our bodies and our food has been delegated to external experts, since that new expert vocabulary has become significantly vernacularized. This is how we now speak of who we are: we watch our calories and our cholesterol; we are on low-sodium or high-fibre diets. That is who we are, even though we have no sensory access to the properties of the constituents on the ‘nutrition facts’ label. We do not know the saturated fat or potassium content of our foods in the way that we once knew that a food was hot and moist. The modern ‘you’ in ‘You are what you eat’ is therefore partly made up of technical expertise and state authority. We have got that expertise in our bones and in our bellies.

Second, modern dietary vocabulary has resulted in a reconfigured relationship between the environment and the ‘you’ in the old adage. Recall that the world of qualities gave people a language in which the edible environment was causally bound to both bodily and mental aspects of the self. Recall also that the names of the qualities gave you names for human character, and, while we now can find in coldness and dryness only metaphors for temperamental aspects of the self, past cultures knew them to be causal and substantive too. There are things that you put in your mouth – both legal and illegal – that are said to affect the mind, but we now tend to call those things not foods but drugs.⁶⁷ Early modern edibles were food for thought, and, in this literal sense, modern ones no longer are. The philosophically celebrated mind-body dualism is often blamed on Descartes in the seventeenth century, but you can plausibly argue that it only became vernacularized, and a common feature of lay culture, through changes in the vocabulary of food that were put in place maybe as late as the early twentieth century.

Finally, in the modern dietary constitution, what has become of the traditional association between food and regional and national identity? It is a truism to say that our diet has become significantly globalized, and one cultural consequence of that is a hollowing out of the ancient sentiment that custom is a second nature. We eat everything, from everywhere, at any time of year, and, although some of us may worry about that on grounds of taste, and whatever nutritional value might come from freshness, there is really no medical or physiological sense left which causally relates localism to our constitution. We are all soldiers and diplomats now; we travel and our food travels. And if custom is still a second nature, then our nature is cosmopolitan. Our stomachs are citizens of the world. I once asked my students what they thought was the iconic modern American dish and I got the answer, facetiously intended but really quite profound, that it was sushi pizza.

‘You are what you eat’ remains a sensible thing to say in the early twenty-first century – anyway, a lot of people still say it – but its sense has changed in all sorts of ways. In the scientific or medical idiom, it is, as I have indicated, about constituents not qualities, and, in that sense, its capacity for self-making has been radically restricted: carbohydrates are not ‘you’ in the same way that heat or coldness are ‘you’. So one

⁶⁶ X. Frohlich, ‘Accounting for taste: regulating food labeling in the “affluent society”, 1945–95’ (unpublished Massachusetts Institute of Technology Ph.D. thesis, 2011).

⁶⁷ For the historical transition of exotic aliments from drugs to food, see, e.g., S. W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: the Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York, 1986), ch. 3; J. Shaw and E. Welch, *Making and Marketing Medicine in Renaissance Florence* (Amsterdam, 2011), pp. 18–19, 191–7, 209–10, and, of course, much material on coffee, tea and chocolate.

story about what has happened to the relationship between food and identity has got a familiar form. It is a story about secularization, about disenchantment, objectification, about scientizing the moral. There is much that is true about this story, but there is another story about food and identity, and this one points in the opposite direction.

This other story would draw attention to a vast *expansion* in the possibilities that diet has recently acquired for identity-making. New institutions and new actors are now involved that were not present in the early modern period. These include business, politics and the planet. The branding of foods and the concentration of food production, distribution and retailing into large commercial corporations are relatively new things, as is the extent of state regulation of the food supply in the cause of nutritiousness.⁶⁸ Nor in the early modern period did anyone seriously entertain the possibility that how food was produced and what was consumed, individually or collectively, could have a significant effect on the integrity of the planet.

The involvement of business and the state means, on the one hand, that modern food choices are bound up with the increasingly concentrated enterprises concerned with producing and marketing food and with the authority of national and international government in regulating the food industry and in instructing food choice. On the other hand, the same state of affairs opens up a new idiom in which food choices can count as moral and political comment. And, of course, this is exactly what is intended by some contemporary movements dedicated to effecting change in how food is produced, marketed and consumed. The increasingly influential Slow Food Movement, for example, insists that eating is an agricultural act, that the relations between the eaters and producers of food are political, and that persistence in unsustainable patterns of producing and eating puts the planet at risk.⁶⁹ You should eat locally not because it agrees with your temperament but because it is the ‘right thing to do’, because to eat that way is to be a moral person, to take a moral stance, to constitute a ‘good society’. The moral charge of the old adage has not disappeared in modernity; it has just experienced a massive change of idiom.

⁶⁸ I stress ‘extent’ because, of course, the state had long regulated aspects of the trade in food and drink and of their authenticity and purity. Yet a crucial change in the relations between government and dietary expertise was associated with the introduction of the nutritional calorie at the end of the 19th century and with its rapid integration into state policy (see, e.g. N. Cullather, ‘The foreign policy of the calorie’, *Amer. Hist. Rev.*, cxii (2007), 337–64; N. Cullather, *The Hungry World: America’s Cold War Battle against Poverty in Asia* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010), esp. ch. 1).

⁶⁹ C. Petrini, *Slow Food Nation: Why our Food Should be Good, Clean, and Fair*, trans. C. Furlan and J. Hunt (New York, 2007).