

“The Body is as an Instrument to the Soul”: Christian
Asceticism in Early Modern Medicine, 1550-1800

by

Rachel S. Tretter
Class of 2012

A thesis submitted to the
faculty of Wesleyan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts
with Departmental Honors in History

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Acknowledgements

Through research and writing, and more research and revising, there have been many ups and downs over the past year. My thesis would not have been the same were it not for the support of my family, advisor, and friends. I would like to sincerely thank my parents and sister, Ali, for putting up with my constant talk of early modern eating habits, for their considerate silence in response to my irritability, anxiety, and days spent holed up in my room. Their unconditional support and encouragement in all my academic endeavors and aspirations provided me with the courage to tackle this large project. They always have my back, and I appreciate that more than I can express in words. I extend thanks to my grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins as well, who have always been there for me and supported me throughout my time at Wesleyan.

I would also like to Magda Teter, my advisor and History Professor, who took the time out of her busy schedule to read and critique my many revisions. Her patience, guidance, and expertise helped me strengthen my arguments and solidify my conclusions. Tackling such a large topic is not an easy task. Were it

not for Professor Teter reeling me back in, my thesis would be a long series of historical tangents. Additionally, I would like to congratulate her for having recently received a research grant from the prestigious Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation to pursue her work on Jews and Christians in pre-modern Poland.

My poor housemates! I apologize for taking over the living room with piles of books, notes, redbulls, and coffee. 7 Fountain has been encouraging and accommodating from the start. Thank you Gianfranco Galluzzo, my late night work-buddy and longtime friend, I couldn't have gotten through this without you. Thank you Alison Singer for dance parties and home made banana bread—you make success look so easy. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank Diana Giggans-Hill for her friendship, pep talks, Weshop runs, and making sure I never fell asleep in the pantry.

Finally, I would like to sincerely thank all of my friends for their support and understanding - especially Charlotte Robertson, Amani Sampson, Abby Spector, Ally Cuervo, Tony Reis, Paul Schaffel, Bill Walen, Katherine Mullins, and Audrée Anid. I am incredibly lucky to have them in my life. Finally, I would like to thank and congratulate my fellow thesis writers. We did it. Our sleepless nights, weekends in, and showers forgone have all been worth it. It's been a long year, but we all deserve to be incredibly proud. Congratulations.

Introduction

Over the past several decades, the steep increase in rates of disordered eating¹ and obesity² in Europe and North America has attracted considerable scholarly interest from historians.³ In the eighties, when looking for precedents that might explain the prevalence of such bodily extremes in Western societies, studies on the history of obesity tended to concentrate on the eighteenth or, more

¹ According the World Health Organization's International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, 10th Revision (ICD-10), the diagnostic term "eating disorder" is used to describe two common and clear-cut syndromes: anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. The ICD-10 recognizes that there are variations of these two syndromes that do not adhere perfectly to diagnostic criteria, simply grouping them under the heading of Eating Disorders Not Otherwise Specified (EDNOS). "Who | International Classification of Diseases (Icd)," In *WHO*. (World Health Organization, 2010), <http://www.who.int/classifications/icd/en>.

² Obesity is defined in the ICD-10 as "excessively high accumulation of body fat or adipose tissue in relation to lean body mass (BMI greater than 30)." "Who | International Classification of Diseases (Icd)."

³ For a summary of the historiography of medical and religious interpretations of extreme fasting, see Tillman Habermas and Allan Beveridge, "Historical Continuities and Discontinuities between Religious and Medical Interpretations of Extreme Fasting," *History of Psychiatry* 3, no. 12 (1992): 431. For obesity see Kathleen Lebesco and Jana Evans Braziel, "Editors' Introduction," in *Bodies out of Bounds : Fatness and Transgression*, ed. Jana Evans Braziel and Kathleen LeBesco (Ewing, NJ, USA: University of California Press, 2001).

commonly, the nineteenth century onwards, “when the modern ideal of the slender, thin body took center stage, when a small belly began to be viewed in negative terms rather than as a sign of virility, and when dieting became fashionable.”⁴ Academic discussions of extreme food renunciation, on the other hand, were centered around examples from medieval history, as the “obsessive...sacrificial, ritualizing, ascetic, penitential,...and dogmatic” behavior of twentieth-century anorexics and bulimics were reminiscent of the extreme religious fasts of Christian monks, nuns, mystics and martyrs.⁵ While most authors agreed that there were superficial similarities between the two groups, they differed on the extent to which these parallels persisted. Those who approached their modern and pre-modern subjects from a psychoanalytic lens, such as Rudolph Bell, Linda Carroll, Ginette Raimbault, and Caroline Eliacheff, found almost perfect continuity, based not on shared religious attitudes but rather on

⁴ Michael Stolberg, "'Abhorreas Pinguedinem': Fat and Obesity in Early Modern Medicine (C. 1500-1750)," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* xxx(2011): 1.

⁵ Though the majority of discussions of historic both and present-day cases of food renunciation have tended to focus on girls and women, a detailed discussion of food habits on the basis of gender is beyond the scope of this paper. For more the relationship between gender and fasting Teresa M. Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh: Fasting and Sexuality in Early Christianity* (Fortress Press, 1998). Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast : The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). Sigal Gooldin, "Fasting Women, Living Skeletons and Hunger Artists: Spectacles of Body and Miracles at the Turn of a Century," *Body & Society* 9, no. 2 (2003); W. Vandereycken and R. Van Deth, *From Fasting Saints to Anorexic Girls: The History of Self-Starvation* (New York University Press, 1994).

Freudian struggles concerning sexuality and power.⁶

A number of scholars, among them Caroline Walker Bynum, Joan Jacobs Brumberg, Walter Vandereycken and Ron van Deth, challenged this comparison, justifiably taking issue with the anachronistic application of modern medical terminology, such as *anorexia nervosa*, to the analysis pre-modern subjects.⁷ Bynum, expressing an opinion held by many of her peers, believed that Western society's use of *body* and *food* as symbols had become "narrow and negative."⁸ Those who adhered to restrictive diets in the twentieth century did not share pre-modern peoples' view of the body as a signifier of spiritual "generativity and suffering" but instead sought to cultivate "physical attractiveness by food abstinence, which they called *dieting*."⁹

At the time Bynum was writing, clinical and academic discussions of eating disorders were often in fact "narrow and awkward."¹⁰ In psychology, Freudian and biomedical interpretations of eating disorders dominated courses of

⁶ Rudolph M. Bell, *Holy Anorexia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 14-17. Linda L. Carroll, "Holy Anorexia Revisited: The Reputation of Fasting in the Case of Maria Janis," *Psychohistory Review* 26, no. 2 (1998); Ginette Raimbault and Caroline Eliacheff, *Les Indomptables: Figures De L'anorexie* (O. Jacob, 1989).

⁷ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*; Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Fasting Girls : The History of Anorexia Nervosa* (New York, N.Y.: New American Library, 1989); W. Vandereycken and R. Van Deth, *From Fasting Saints to Anorexic Girls*.

⁸ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*: 299.

⁹ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*: 298..

¹⁰ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*: 300.

treatment, with little regard to the personal beliefs of patients.¹¹ In academia, despite the growing popularity of revisionist approaches to the concept of “secularization,” scholars of the history of eating disorders tended to promote the belief that a profound epistemological shift had taken place during the period from 1550 to 1800, during which religious beliefs ceased to exert significant influence on peoples’ everyday eating behaviors.¹² According to Joan Brumberg, the change from perceiving fasting as an expression of spirituality to a disease that must be cured reflected “a much larger transformation in society, conveniently labeled ‘secularization’ by historians...a declining preference for religious explanations of the universe, of one's own actions, and of health or ill health.”¹³

Within the last twenty years, those in the social sciences have started to reassess the extent of secularization and its influence on the relationship between religion, spirituality, and attitudes towards food.¹⁴ Psychologists and sociologists

¹¹ Mary Michelle Lelwica, *Starving for Salvation: The Spiritual Dimensions of Eating Problems among American Girls and Women* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 4.

¹² Tillman Habermas and Allan Beveridge, "Historical Continuities," 431.

¹³ Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Fasting Girls*: 101.

¹⁴ The terms ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’ are often used interchangeably, but they have slightly different meanings. ‘Religion’ generally refers to a communal search for spiritual meanings, undertaken within a coherent system of rituals and traditions. Spirituality may be used to describe any "search for significance in ways related to the sacred" – from organized religion to individualized beliefs systems that do not adhere to any particular dogma or community standards. For more on ‘religious’ and ‘spiritual’ interpretations of eating disorders and dieting see Juleen K. Buser and Mark S. Woodford, "Eating Disorders and Religious/Spiritual Beliefs," *Professional Counseling Digest*, no. 35 (2010): 1. Mary Michelle Lelwica, "Losing Their Way to Salvation: Women, Weight Loss and the Myth of Culture Lite," in *Religion and Popular Culture in America*, ed. Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey H. Mahan (University of California Press, 2005);

studying people with eating disorders found that the majority of patients were heavily influenced by spiritual, if not overtly religious, convictions.¹⁵ Moreover, the prevalence of such bodily extremes suggested a tendency shared by people living in industrialized Western societies to attribute significant spiritual meaning to food and the act of eating and its expression in the body.¹⁶

Today, the conflation of medical and spiritual reasons for regulating one's food intake is most apparent in the pervasiveness of Christian terminology in 'secular' health-based rhetoric.¹⁷

The international company "Weight Watchers," for example, advertises its diet programs as employing "the latest nutritional research" and cutting-edge

Lelwica, *Starving for Salvation*; Philip S. Richards, Randy K. Hardman, and Michael E. Berrett, *Spiritual Approaches in the Treatment of Women with Eating Disorders* (American Psychological Association, 2007).

¹⁵ Richards, *Spiritual Approaches in the Treatment of Women with Eating Disorders*: 24-29.

¹⁶ Although reports of cases of disordered eating are on the rise in non-Western nations, the prevalence of *anorexia nervosa* and *bulimia nervosa* among Western societies is unparalleled. For comparative approaches to the study of eating disorders and attitudes towards fasting in Western and Non-Western societies see Pamela K. Keel and Kelly L. Klump, "Are Eating Disorders Culture-Bound Syndromes? Implications for Conceptualizing Their Etiology," *Psychological Bulletin* 129, no. 5 (2003); Soo-Yeun Lee, "Reconsidering the Status of Anorexia Nervosa as a Western Culture-Bound Syndrome," *Social Science & Medicine* 42, no. 1 (1996); Maria Makino, Koji Tsuboi, and Lorraine Dennerstein, "Prevalence of Eating Disorders: A Comparison of Western and Non-Western Countries," *Medscape General Medicine* 6, no. 3 (2004).

¹⁷ For more on Christian terminology in advertising, see R. M. Griffith, "'Don't Eat That': The Erotics of Abstinence in American Christianity," *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* 1, no. 4 (2001); J. Griffin and E. M. Berry, "A Modern Day Holy Anorexia? Religious Language in Advertising and Anorexia Nervosa in the West," *European journal of clinical nutrition* 57, no. 1 (2003).

scientific techniques to help customers reach their weight loss goals.¹⁸ The company does not have any religious affiliation, and while dieters may discuss their experiences with spirituality and food within Weight-Watchers forums, the diet regimens are formulated entirely on medical logic. Despite promoting a non-denominational, science-based approach to weight loss, customers often conceive their Weight-Watchers diets as being spiritual endeavors in the pursuit of traditional Christian values such as self-discipline. Customer testimonials often share striking similarities with tales of sin and redemption found in Scripture and other Christian devotional literature. In the section of the company's website titled "Success Stories," Kim, who lost 211.8 pounds by following Weight-Watcher's *POINTS* Weight-Loss System, enthusiastically relates the trials and tribulations of her weight loss saga:

Why did Weight Watchers meetings work for me this time? All I can say is: My time had come. One day, on the brink of desperation, I looked for divine help, and within two days I found the motivation to return to meetings, this time for good. With faith and the support of...my meetings buddy, I was able to persevere through tough times, and turn bad habits into good ones... I don't know who invented the *POINTS* Weight-Loss System, but it's incredible! ... After a while, it became part of me... And today? I can hardly count the number of ways my life has improved. There's the concrete:...I can feel my hip bones!... And the profound:...my hope is that my story will inspire people who are suffering as much as I used to."¹⁹

¹⁸ "Weightwatchers.Com - Official Site - Healthy, Effective Weight Loss," WeightWatchers.com, Inc., <http://www.weightwatchers.com/index.aspx>.

¹⁹ Kim, "One of Our Biggest Losers!," WeightWatchers.com, inc., <http://www.weightwatchers.com/success/art/index.aspx?SuccessStoryID=3301&sc=17>.

Clearly, fasting with the intent of demonstrating one's superiority or of emulating a paradigm of physical beauty is contrary to Christ's condemnation of "hypocritical fasting."²⁰ Often, the original intent of religious doctrines becomes distorted in the reality of practice; behaviors not bearing any overtly religious character may still be enacted within a religious frame of reference.²¹ Though there are many words and phrases employed today whose meanings are completely removed from their original context, anthropological and psychological evidence suggests that the common use of Christian moral terminology in 'secular' discourses on food and health is an accurate reflection of the continued influence of Christian ethics on modern perceptions of food and the body, and not simply the use of empty metaphors, completely interchangeable with objective evaluative terminology.²²

For example, William Hoverd and Chris Sibley of Victoria University of

²⁰ "Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven... And when you fast, don't make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting." Matt 6: 1-16. All biblical citations are from Publishers Tyndale House, *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Tyndale House Publishers, 2004) unless indicated otherwise.

²¹ Brad S. Gregory, "The Other Confessional History: On Secular Bias in the Study of Religion," *History and Theory* 45, no. 4 (2006): 2.

²² See Joseph B. Tamney, "Fasting and Modernization," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (1980); K. Hughes, H. Walls, and C. Huff, "Sacredness and Anorexia Nervosa: An Analysis of Moral Language in Pro-Ana Blogs and Poetry," (2011); William J. Hoverd and Chris G. Sibley, "Immoral Bodies: The Implicit Association between Moral Discourse and the Body," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 46, no. 3 (2007); William J. Hoverd, "Gluttony & Sloth: The Moral Politics of Obesity Discourse," (2011); Hoverd, "Deadly Sin: Gluttony, Sloth and Health Policy," (Brill Press, 2009); J. Griffin and E. M. Berry, "A Modern Day Holy Anorexia? Religious Language in Advertising and Anorexia Nervosa in the West."

Wellington conducted a study in 2005 to test the hypothesis that “people implicitly evaluate the condition of the body using moral discourse” and to determine whether or not the “use of such rhetoric reflected the cognitive appraisal of obesity as *immoral*,” rather than “as simply *negative* in a standard sense (e.g., unhealthy).”²³

Hoverd’s findings suggested that people automatically associated general Christian moral terminology (e.g., the deadly sins) with perceptions of the body and health behaviors, such as overeating (gluttony), lack of exercise (sloth), and obesity.²⁴ Obesity then, seems to be view not just as an illness but as a societal sin, caused by a moral failing on the part of the individual to be “good” to their bodies and to participate fully in a society characterized by economic consumption.²⁵

These findings also have implications for attitudes towards another bodily extreme: emaciation. Prevailing twenty-first century ideals of beauty, along with the “self-correcting disciplines that these ideals inspire (e.g. dieting and exercise),” have become the most prominent “icons and rituals by means of which a vast number of people organize and manage their daily hopes and fears” due in large part to their “resonance with certain paradigms and values of traditional Christianity” - namely, those relating to ascetic and purity systems of the body.²⁶ Consumer-media culture has appropriated religious ascetic themes to create a “salvation myth of thinness,” or “diet culture,” that perpetuates and propagates

²³ William J. Hoverd and Chris G. Sibley, "Immoral Bodies," 391.

²⁴ Hoverd, "Immoral Bodies," 402.

²⁵ Hoverd, "Immoral Bodies," 402.

²⁶ Mary Michelle Leiwica, *Starving for Salvation*: 189-90.

cultural associations between physical appearance and moral superiority.²⁷ Practices that “create...a taut and trim physique” also “produce a sense of purpose, an embodied sense that links an individual’s experience to a wider social order.”²⁸ The seemingly banal focus of diet and exercise rhetoric, such as cutting back on or burning calories, “masks the ritualizing function that weight-loss strategies implicitly serve.”²⁹ That is not to say that ‘secular’ ideologies and practices pertaining to diet have simply replaced traditional ‘religion’ as “the most comprehensive pictures for understanding life’s ultimate significance.”³⁰ Rather, modern discourses on nutrition and physiology implicitly, and occasionally overtly, incorporate Christian ascetic ideals, perpetuating religious manners of conceiving the relationship between food, the body, and morality.

From a historical perspective, one might examine the ways in which the interdependent, ever-changing forces of religion and medicine shaped attitudes towards diet and morality throughout different historical periods in the West. Neither the theological nor the natural philosophical sources addressing these topics were representative of a fixed body of knowledge. Rather, both were

²⁷ Lelwica, *Starving for Salvation*: 8.

²⁸ Michelle Mary Lelwica, "Losing Their Way to Salvation: Women, Weight Loss, and the Salvation Myth of Culture Lite," in *Religion and Popular Culture in America*, ed. Bruce D. Forbes and Jeffrey H. Mahan (University of California Press, 2005), 182.

²⁹ Lelwica, "Losing Their Way to Salvation: Women, Weight Loss, and the Salvation Myth of Culture Lite," 78.

³⁰ Lelwica, "Losing Their Way to Salvation: Women, Weight Loss, and the Salvation Myth of Culture Lite," 37.

continually changing and had permeable and elastic boundaries.³¹ Christian theories regarding food, the body and pleasure may be traced back to ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman philosophical traditions, both of which perceived food as affecting health of the body as well as the soul.

By the early Middle Ages, unstable food resources and the Catholic Church's codification of fasting rituals meant that the ascetic ideals espoused in Hellenistic works had little influence on the daily lives of most citizens. However, the profusion of devotional literature and miracle stories centered on food motifs produced during the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries reveals that the moral symbolism of food remained a central aspect of Christian piety.³² Ascetic fasting also continued to be practiced within the monastic movement, members of which often tried to emulate the extreme fasts described in Scripture.³³

In the sixteenth century, even as Protestant reformers, among them Martin Luther (1483 – 1546), Ulrich Zwingli (1484 –1531), and John Calvin (1509 – 1564), launched attacks against the sacramental practices of the Catholic Church, fasting maintained a reputation as being a virtuous act, if not one that could ensure

³¹ Margaret J. Osler, "Mixing Metaphors: Science and Religion or Natural Philosophy and Theology in Early Modern Europe," *History of science* 36, no. 1 (1998): 103.

³² For more on food motifs in devotional literature of the Middle Ages see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*.

³³ For more on fasting and medieval monasticism see H. Chadwick, "The Ascetic Ideal in the History of the Church," *Studies in Church History* 22(1985); Clifford H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages* (Longman, 1989).

salvation. Rather than putting an end to the spiritual significance of fasting, the Protestant sects that emerged during this period facilitated the spread of “ascetic denial of desire out of the monastic cell and into the secular family,” thereby breaking “the distinction between the elite and the mass by transforming elite practices [such as monastic forms of fasting] into everyday routines of self-control.”³⁴ Meanwhile, the Catholic Church continued to promote fasting as both a means of self-discipline and a penitential rite, and tales of miraculous fasts continued to attract the interest and admiration of people living in both Protestant and Catholic regions.

Throughout these debates over the proper reasons for and expressions of asceticism, both Catholics and Protestants turned to fields of inquiry, beyond those of traditional theology, to help them formulate fasting regimens that would facilitate spiritual growth and to legitimize their claims regarding the perfectibility of man’s body and soul.

The body of study that emerged over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, characterized by both empirical methods of analyzing the physical world and acceptance of religious or occult explanations for earthly phenomena, was known to contemporary peoples as Natural Philosophy. Those who studied natural philosophy often did so with the intent of discovering the ways in which manipulation of the physical universe and the human body could contribute to the moral perfection of man. Even in the eighteenth and nineteenth

³⁴ Bryan S. Turner, *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory* (Oxford, UK ; New York, NY, USA: Blackwell, 1984), 16.

centuries, as many medical practitioners, particularly those in France, rejected traditional Christianity and other forms of organized religion, they maintained Judeo-Christian ethical standards regarding what qualified as sinful or admirable behavior around food.

Discussions of fasting by medical and religious authorities from antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the early modern period illustrate the ways in which both 'scientific,' or naturalistic, and theological methodologies were applied to the physiological process of eating to inform popular attitudes towards food since the inception of the Christian religion. Although such texts, produced predominantly by educated, male authors, may not have reflected the reality of practice for the majority of the population, these sources reveal the thoughts and ideas to which contemporary peoples would have exposed.³⁵

Thus, the medical theories concerning the physical and emotional effects of physiological process of eating on the human body that during the early modern period, and which contributed to the development of the modern science of nutrition in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, did not completely replace Christian spiritual conceptions of the importance of a moderate diet. Rather, those engaged in the study of the natural world throughout this period elaborated upon and aided in the popularization and dissemination of the long-standing Christian belief in the body's potential as a tool for spiritual discipline. The research of early modern physicians concerning the effects of the physiological processes of

³⁵ Gabrielle M. Spiegel, "History, Historicism, and the Social Logic of the Text in the Middle Ages," *Speculum* 65, no. 1 (1990): 75.

ingestion, digestion and excretion on physical and emotional health served dual religious and medical functions by developing quantitative standards that individuals could then use measure their ‘spiritual’ discipline.³⁶

³⁶ John Coveney, *Food, Morals and Meaning : The Pleasure and Anxiety of Eating* (Florence, KY, USA: Routledge, 2000), xiii.

Chapter I: The Ascetic Impulse in Christian Thought

The vocabulary of food and eating - hunger, appetite, indulgence and satisfaction - has been indispensable to the rhetoric of spirituality within almost all of the Christian traditions.³⁷ While these terms could be used in a positive context to evoke and reconstruct physical pleasure as spiritual pleasure, inspiring devotion, the desire to satisfy physical urges could also lead to deviance and sin. The craving for food was particularly problematic, because, unlike the desire for sex or fortune, food was necessary for survival.³⁸ The predominant ethical question around food then, was how to maintain one's health so as to be a capable servant of God, without falling prey to the temptation to exceed necessity.

Despite the multiplicity of food behaviors developed by Christian thinkers to address the question of moral food conduct, asceticism, broadly defined as severe self-discipline and abstention from all forms of indulgence, emerged as

³⁷ Margaret R. Miles, "Religion and Food: The Case of Eating Disorders," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63, no. 3 (1995): 550.

³⁸ John Coveney, *Food, Morals and Meaning : The Pleasure and Anxiety of Eating*: 34.

predominant means by which believers could resist urges to transgress the bounds of natural necessity and, in doing so, devote their powers to the pursuit of holy subjects.³⁹ Many scholars, in their analysis of Christian attitudes towards food, have interpreted this Christian emphasis on ‘subjugation of the flesh’ as a rejection or denigration of the physical body.⁴⁰ Yet, while the perfection of the incorporeal soul remained the ultimate goal for Christians, the enthusiasm for asceticism with the Christian tradition should not be unequivocally interpreted as disdain or hatred for the human body.

Instead, asceticism both chastised and dignified the body, casting it at once as a possible impediment to salvation and as an invaluable tool for obtaining self-discipline and spiritual clarity.⁴¹ Although the fulfillment of the natural demands of the body had the potential to lead to deviant or sinful behavior, the body itself, understood by Christian authors to be part of God’s perfect creation, was not necessarily the source of corruption.⁴² To address the controversies surrounding the moral purpose of the body, key figures in the development of Western

³⁹ The term ‘ascetic’ is derived from the medieval Latin *asceticus* or Greek *askētikos*, from *askētēs* ‘monk’, from *askein* ‘to exercise.’ “Ascetic, A.,” in *OED Online*, ed. Judy Pearsall (Oxford University Press, 2012), <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/ascetic>.

⁴⁰ For more on interpretations of asceticism as either a rejection of an affirmation physicality in Christian thought see Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism* (University of Chicago Press, 1992). Alec W. Mchoul and Wendy Grace, *A Foucault Primer: Discourse, Power and the Subject* (UCL Press, 1995). M. C. Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁴¹ Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism*: xiv.

⁴² Carlos Steel, “Does Evil Have a Cause? Augustine’s Perplexity and Thomas’s Answer,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 48, no. 2 (1994): 251.

Christian doctrines, among them Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE), Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274 CE), and Martin Luther (1484-1546), turned to both scripture and contemporary medical theories. In doing so, they hoped to determine which urges were natural to the body, and therefore an extension of God's will, and which were not.⁴³ These authors promulgated the idea that, by subsisting off of no more than what nature required for good health, believers could cultivate will power and direct their energies towards spiritual fulfillment.

Early Christian Attitudes towards Food and the Body

Abstaining from food for spiritual purposes was a nearly universal practice among ancient cultures. In pre-industrial societies, where resources were limited, men and women frequently responded to the rhythm of plenty and scarcity, harvest and famine, by deciding to control it through voluntary fasting. Fasts of varying severity were undertaken as appeals to divine mercy, as purification processes in preparation for encountering the divine, and in hopes of inspiring dreams and visions, often connected with fertility and physiological processes.⁴⁴

⁴³ S. M. E. Keenan, "Augustine and the Medical Profession," in *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* (1936), 185.

⁴⁴ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*: 34.

The earliest Christians derived many of their food related practices from the Jewish tradition.⁴⁵ During the first few centuries of the Church's development, Christians initially adopted the synagogue tradition of worshipping on set holy days. Throughout the period from the first to sixth century CE, the growth and expansion of Christianity and the emerging discourses of heresiology exerted considerable pressures upon both Christian and Jewish cultural formation and acted as catalysts for those communities to redefine and reinforce their parameters.⁴⁶

In addition to the profound influence of Jewish temple worship on early Christian liturgy, Jewish canonical texts formed the backbone of Christian doctrine. Numerous food-related passages within the Hebrew Bible, particularly Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the supernatural fasting of Moses on Sinai, and the injunction of personal affliction on the Day of Atonement, as well as the elaborate feasts of Purim and Passover, were elaborated upon by the Church Fathers and were essential in the development of medieval and early modern attitudes towards food, the body and morality.⁴⁷ Patristic authors, such as Abbot Nilus (c. 430), turned to these biblical accounts of gluttony

⁴⁵ David Lambert, "Fasting as a Penitential Rite: A Biblical Phenomenon?," *The Harvard Theological Review* 96, no. 4 (2003): 478. For more on the influence of Jewish food rituals on early Christian thought, see James A. Montgomery, "Ascetic Strains in Early Judaism," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 51, no. 3 (1932); David Lambert, "Fasting as a Penitential Rite: A Biblical Phenomenon?."

⁴⁶ Joshua Levinson, "Bodies and Bo(a)Rders: Emerging Fictions of Identity in Late Antiquity," *The Harvard Theological Review* 93, no. 4 (2000): 344.

⁴⁷ For more on specific passages within the Hebrew Bible and rabbinic literature that influenced early Christian conceptions of asceticism, see James A. Montgomery, "Ascetic Strains in Early Judaism."

and restraint, sharing the Jewish notion that “it was the desire for food that spawned disobedience.”⁴⁸

The ways in which early Christian authors sought to confront the problem of “disobedience” markedly differed from the Jewish approach.⁴⁹ Jewish concerns with food centered on issues of purity and contamination; threats to one’s body or soul came not from the immoral pleasures of the act of eating, but from the cleanliness or purity of the food consumed. Many of the Jewish prohibitions against certain foods had been formulated with the physical health of believers in mind. Prohibitions on consuming carrion eaters and pigs, which carried dangerous parasites, and rules for processing meat, such as *glatt* (the requirement that lungs be checked to be free of adhesions), would have aided in the prevention and transmission of disease.⁵⁰ In Jewish discussions of diet and spirituality during antiquity, avoidance of particular foods often fused with traditional fasting (i.e., not eating) into a single concept.⁵¹ The limitations as to what was permissible to eat were not intended to punish or humiliate the flesh, but rather to serve as symbolic sacrifices, constant reminders of one’s obligations to God, and to guard

⁴⁸ Abbot Nilus quoted in Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*: 32.

⁴⁹ Margaret R. Miles, "Religion and Food," 550.

⁵⁰ John Barton and John Muddiman, *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 99.

⁵¹ Ancient Jewish rabbis often referred to the discussions of pure and impure foods found in the Torah (particularly passages found in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy) as demonstrating the need for dietary restrictions. The details and proper applications put forth in these initial pronouncements continued to be elaborated upon and codified in the Mishnah, the Talmud, and other halakhic literature, eventually forming the basis for Kosher laws. For more on the development of Jewish dietary laws see David C. Kraemer, *Jewish Eating and Identity through the Ages* (Routledge, 2007).

the Jewish people against external impurities.⁵² Pollution not only came from food, but from other people, who presumably did not follow the same laws of cleanliness as the Jews.

The discussion of kosher laws found within the *Letter of Aristeas*, a Hellenistic work written during 2nd century BCE, reflects ancient Jewish communities' concerns with ethnic, cultural, corporeal and spiritual purity. The letter describes how Eleazar, the High Priest of the Jews, established "rules of purity, affecting alike what we eat, or drink, or touch, or hear, or see" for "the sake of righteousness to aid the quest for virtue and the perfecting of character" and for "righteous relationships between man and man."⁵³

Many early Christians continued to observe Jewish dietary laws and celebrated many of their fellowship meals, a central ritual of early Christianity, on

⁵² Those who engaged in food abstinence that went beyond the moderate demands of the *kashrut* laws, such as adherents of the Nazarite sect of Judaism, were harshly criticized by Jewish religious leaders and scorned by the rest of the community. Citing such verses as Lev. 11:44 ("For I am the Lord your God. You must consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy."), ancient Jewish authors argued that to punish the body unnecessarily (i.e. in the absence of any wrongdoing or mourning) through fasting or abstinence was to offend God. Furthermore, they believed that God "did not create the [material] world for desolation; he formed it for human habitation," and therefore "man in the life to come will have to account for every enjoyment offered him that was refused without sufficient cause." Yer. Kid. iv. For more on Jewish attitudes towards asceticism during antiquity and the Middle Ages, see J. Rosenblum, *Food and Identity in Early Rabbinic Judaism* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁵³ Robert H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament, Volume Two: Pseudepigrapha* (Apocryphile Press, 2004), 107-10.

festival days inherited from Judaism.⁵⁴ Seeking to distinguish the Christian community clearly from surrounding cultures, while preserving a sense of unity among believers, church leaders de-emphasized the relevance of food itself, concentrating instead on the moral implications of the act of eating.⁵⁵

Early Christian authors interpreted the discussions of proper conduct around found in the works of the Apostle Paul in such a way that restraint and abstinence were seen as virtuous, if not necessary endeavors. Although Paul had declared that “the kingdom of God and its righteousness was much larger than the matter of eating or drinking,” he devoted multiple sections of his works to the discussion of food.⁵⁶ The main tenets of his policies towards food, as summarized by historian Herbert Musurillo, were “the principle of individual adaptation of means to ends: those who eat must not despise those who do not;...the principle of moderation in food;...the principle that all of God's creatures are good;...the principle that all suffering in the apostolate has a value insofar as it is united to the Body of Christ;... [and] the principle that fasting is a valuable as a means of self-control to ward oneself against temptation,” as Jesus had used fasting to resist the

⁵⁴ N. H. Young, "An Analysis of Romans 14: 5-6 Via the New Perspective on Paul," *International Journal of New Perspectives in Christianity* 1, no. 1 (2009): 62.

⁵⁵ These ceremonies based on giving or sharing of food were taken to be central to the ethics of early Christianity. For an overview of the importance of the meal as a central motif in Jesus' ministry and academic discussions of Christian table-fellowship, see John Coveney, *Food, Morals and Meaning : The Pleasure and Anxiety of Eating*: 39-43; N. H. Young, "An Analysis of Romans 14: 5-6 Via the New Perspective on Paul."

⁵⁶ Rom. 5:17

temptations of the Devil, redeeming humanity before God by demonstrating complete submission to His will.⁵⁷

Citing texts in which Christ and the Apostles dismissed dietary laws as superfluous, Patristic authors such as Origen Adamantius (185– 254 CE) insisted “food...does not enter the heart but the belly, and leaves the body at the privy” and thus food “can never make a person unclean.”⁵⁸ Food may be “unclean” only in an allegorical sense, as when it “is served out of avarice, is obtained by immoral profits, or consumed merely for pleasure's sake; when we make a god of our bellies, and appetite, not reason, rules the soul.”⁵⁹

Food as (Spiritual) Medicine: Church Fathers and Greco-Roman Philosophies

Origen’s emphasis on the conflict between appetite and reason as a source of immorality is representative of the influence of Greco-Roman philosophies upon the Church Fathers’ interpretations of scriptural discussions of food.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Herbert Musurillo, "The Problem of Ascetical Fasting in the Greek Patristic Writers," *Traditio* 12(1956): 47.

⁵⁸ Mark 17: 19.

⁵⁹ Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, quoted in Herbert Musurillo, "The Problem of Ascetical Fasting in the Greek Patristic Writers," 38.

⁶⁰ The Church Fathers were influential theologians from antiquity whose scholarly works contributed to the development of fundamental doctrines of the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, and Anglican Churches, as well several other Reformed and dissident Christian groups. The works of Clement of Alexandria (150–215 CE), Tertullian (160 – 225 CE), Origen (185–254 CE), Basil

According to many classical authors, overindulging one's appetite, whether it be in sexual acts or food, was considered to be ugly and 'improper.' The natural demands of the body were potentially dangerous in that they could induce tendencies towards excess, thereby compromising one's reason.⁶¹

To ensure the supremacy of reason over natural appetites, these authors established a range of practices, known as dietetics, pertaining to the maintenance of physical health and the cultivation of will power.⁶² The activities covered by the dietetics were exercise, food, drink, sleep, and sexual relations. Central to all was the importance of moderation, especially in regard to pleasure, or the satisfaction of appetite. Not only did the development of the capacity for self-control through ascetic exercises guard one against the dangers of overindulgence, but the practice of restraint was thought to increase one's capacity for reason, or truth. Proper concern for food and the health of the body for the ancient Greeks was, then, a way to natural reason (logos) and spiritual enlightenment.⁶³

The works of Plato (5th - 4th century BCE), one of the most important philosophers of Greek antiquity, are imbued with the fundamental principle that a

of Cesarea (329–279 CE), and John Chrysostom (347–407 CE), and Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430 CE) were particularly influential in the formation of Catholic and Protestant policies on fasting. For more on their individual contributions to fasting practices, see Kent D. Berghuis, *Christian Fasting: A Theological Approach* (S.I.: Biblical Studies Press, 2007). Teresa M. Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh: Fasting and Sexuality in Early Christianity*.

⁶¹ John Coveney, *Food, Morals and Meaning : The Pleasure and Anxiety of Eating*: 35.

⁶² Greek *diaita* 'a way of life.' "Diet, N.," in *OED Online*, ed. Judy Pearsall (Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁶³ Coveney, *Food, Morals and Meaning : The Pleasure and Anxiety of Eating*: 33.

moderate diet was a means of obtaining spiritual perfection.⁶⁴ Although primarily a philosopher, Plato's interests extended to the natural sciences, astronomy, and mathematics, as well as anatomy, physiology, biology, medicine, optics, and chemistry.⁶⁵ From the time of Plato on, medical schools and their theories strongly influenced the study of philosophy to such an extent that was nearly impossible to study either philosophy or medicine without a knowledge of the other.⁶⁶

In his account of the constitution of the physical world, *Timaeus*, Plato sought to demonstrate how the physical world and the human beings existing therein had been created by the divine Demiurge aiming "at the best."⁶⁷ According to Plato, the mechanisms of the body and bodily needs were essential in the pursuit of *logos*, as they instructed the individual on the distinctions between "the necessary," that which humans were forced to accept by nature, and "the good," or

⁶⁴ P.K. Skiadis and J.G. Lascaratos, "Dietetics in Ancient Greek Philosophy: Plato's Concepts of Healthy Diet," *European journal of clinical nutrition* 55(2001): 532.

⁶⁵ Carlos Steel, "The Moral Purpose of the Human Body" a Reading of "Timaeus" 69-72," *Phronesis* 46, no. 2 (2001): 105.

⁶⁶ In keeping with the classical conception of physical and spiritual health as closely intertwined, the physician and philosopher, Galen (129 CE- 216 CE) proposed that medical practitioners should be well-versed in both mystical and physiological matters. Galen's works drew heavily from the Hippocratic corpus and the philosophical doctrines of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. Galen's voluminous works on anatomy. Physiology and philosophy were permeated by his belief in a "life force," or "spirit," found within each individual, and the idea that all structures in the body had been formed by a higher power for a known and intelligible end. His works were to have significant influence on European medical thought throughout the Middle Ages and well into the seventeenth century. S. M. E. Keenan, "Augustine and the Medical Profession," 189.

⁶⁷ Carlos Steel, "The Moral Purpose of the Human Body" a Reading of "Timaeus" 69-72," 105.

what individuals desired to achieve.⁶⁸ The bodily processes involved in ingestion and digestion, particularly the stomach, were central to his discussion. He viewed the stomach as "a manger for the wild beast in us," the appetitive soul, which was by its very nature insatiable.⁶⁹

Although Plato made a study of all the vital organs inside the human body, he used his biological knowledge not for the preservation of life, but to demonstrate how the gods had equipped humans with such a body and organs that they could live moral, intelligent lives notwithstanding the permanent threat of being overtaken by the passions, which were necessarily involved in having a mortal body.⁷⁰

Other influential Greco-Roman theories regarding the moral purpose of the human body circulating during the first centuries of the Church, such as Manichaeism, maintained that sin resided in the physical matter of the natural world and therefore man's physical being would always stand in the way of spiritual perfection. While Christian thinkers also grappled with the demands of the body as impediments to spirituality, the view of the human body as being inherently corrupt was problematic for Christian thinkers, as they understood God, who was believed to be incapable of conceiving anything imperfect, to have created the human body. Furthermore, Christ had walked on earth in the flesh,

⁶⁸ Steel, "The Moral Purpose of the Human Body" a Reading of "Timaeus" 69-72," 111-12.

⁶⁹ Plato, *Timaeus*, quoted in Steel, "The Moral Purpose of the Human Body" a Reading of "Timaeus" 69-72."

⁷⁰ Steel, "The Moral Purpose of the Human Body" a Reading of "Timaeus" 69-72," 119.

yet his physicality had not prevented from encountering the divine.

Among the early Christian authors who confronted the moral purpose of the human body, Augustine of Hippo's reflections upon the question of material sources of evil were adopted and elaborated upon in the greatest numbers by Catholic and Protestant authors.⁷¹ Rather than wholly adopting the dualistic Manichean idea that the flesh, being material, was inherently corrupt, Augustine fused the Platonists' conception of the "bodily senses" as aids in the search for "incorporeal truths" with the Christian belief that the source of evil could not be found in the natural world to conclude man may could use his physicality to obtain a closer relationship with the divine.⁷² The structure of the human body is, Augustine declares, a manifestation of the goodness and providence of God. Thus he writes in the *City of God*:

"Are not the organs of sense and the rest of the members so placed, and the appearance, form, and stature of the body as a whole, so fashioned, as to indicate that they were designed for the service of a rational soul? There is such symmetry in its various parts that it is difficult to decide whether there is greater regard given to utility or to beauty. Certainly no part of the body has been created for the sake of utility which does not also contribute in some way to its beauty, although there are obviously some things which serve no useful purpose, but are solely for beauty."⁷³

⁷¹ Herbert Musurillo, "The Problem of Ascetical Fasting in the Greek Patristic Writers," 3.

⁷² Saint Augustine, *The Confessions* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers,, 2005), 137.

⁷³ Augustine, *City of God*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 2, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: St Augustine's City of God and Christian Doctrine (The Christian literature co., 1899), 503.

Having determined that the physical body was not the source of evil, Augustine still grappled with the "law in [man's] members that wars against the law of his mind, and brings him into captivity under the law of sin, which is in his members."⁷⁴ He was particularly troubled by the biblical verse "do not follow your lusts and refrain yourself from your pleasures" as the act of eating, to maintain one's health and ability to serve god, was unavoidably pleasurable.⁷⁵ While health should be the fundamental "reason for our eating and drinking," a "perilous delight" often took "precedence" over the curative benefits of food, causing people to hide behind the "pretense of necessity" while succumbing to the lusts of the flesh.⁷⁶ Because, according to Augustine, "it is often a matter of doubt whether it is the needful care of the body that still calls for food or whether it is the sensual snare of desire still wanting to be served," those seeking an enlightened state would have to perpetually struggle to maintain the balance "between dangerous pleasure and healthful exercise."⁷⁷

To avoid these pitfalls, Augustine proposed that the individual should acquaint himself with that which is "sufficient for the moderation" of his own health and hold "the bridle of the throat...in the mean between slackness and tightness" by regarding food as medicine.⁷⁸ Thus, knowledge of the human body through the study of medicine and the natural world was crucial to Augustine's

⁷⁴ Augustine, *The Confessions*: 137.

⁷⁵ Augustine, *The Confessions*: 215.

⁷⁶ Augustine, *The Confessions*: 215.

⁷⁷ Augustine, *The Confessions*: 215.

⁷⁸ Augustine, *The Confessions*: 217.

piety. Like the natural sensation of the hunger, the study of earthly subjects could either aid or obstruct man in his pursuit of perfection.

Through the writings of prominent Church figures, a series of doctrines developed that expressed major concern about the effects of food on the soul while various official church pronouncements gradually formalized rituals around food.⁷⁹ John Chrysostom (347-401 CE), for example, in his *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans*, emphasized the importance of Church fasts, on the basis that “the body is not evil, since it may be made an arm of righteousness...we have need of a purpose of mind to handle them as should be, so that we may both obey our Commander.”⁸⁰ Always present however, was the threat that natural urges, when not properly regulated, could lead to deviance.

The Middle Ages: Symbolic Acts of Abstinence

⁷⁹ Important councils regarding food conduct during the Patristic era include the Council of Nicea (325 CE) and the Council of Gangra (325-81 CE), which condemned the practices of a bishop Eustathius and his followers, who promoted (among other things) “fasting on the Lord’s Day, despising the sacredness of that free day, but disdain[ing] and eating on the fasts appointed in the Church; and certain of them abhor the eating of flesh.” For more see Kent D. Berghuis, *Christian Fasting*: 119-20.

⁸⁰ John Chrysostom, "Homily Xi: Epistle to the Romans," in *Saint Chrysostom's Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff (Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 411.

By the twelfth century CE, the Roman Catholic Church had emerged as a powerful political entity that dominated social discourses on food and the body. Though Christians no longer experienced the same pressures to define palpably the borders of their community as they had when they were a minority in the ancient Mediterranean world, food and the body, the most regular and most visible sign of one's faith or apostasy, remained central to religious discourse.

In the early Middle Ages, the ascetic ideals espoused in Hellenistic works had little influence on population at large. A gradual development in the sacramental approach to fasting was to see fasting as a possible application of the sacrament of penance, thereby associating fasting more closely with the forgiveness of sins.⁸¹ Ascetic fasting also continued to be practiced, within monastic movements, as the scriptural examples of fasting inspired imitation.

The earliest Christian documents already examined show that fasting was quickly becoming part of regular Christian experience. Some of the ascetics became heroic figures, and “where the monk’s austerities could not be imitated, they could be admired.”⁸² The medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 CE), instrumental to systematizing theology in the Roman Catholic Church, defended the need for Church-mandated, as opposed to voluntary fasts, on the grounds that fasting “is not binding under precept in the abstract, but in the concrete to each one who needs its remedy. And since for the most part we need

⁸¹ Daniel Callam, "Fasting, Christian," in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. Joseph R. Strayer (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1985), 5: 18.

⁸² Kent D. Berghuis, *Christian Fasting*: 125.

it...the Church is rightly pragmatic in appointing some common fasts to be kept by all. Not, however, by turning a work of supererogation into one of obligation, but by giving a determinate shape to a common duty.”⁸³ Rather than involving total abstinence from food, the term “fasting,” was applied to refraining from “all manner of lusts, since any act ceases to be virtuous, as we have pointed out, when it goes with any vice.”⁸⁴

In the treatments of fasting found in his *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas praises fasting a weapon against temptation. He describes how Jesus had fasted, embracing the pains of hunger, to demonstrate that man was capable of withstanding the temptations of the Devil. Citing John Chrysostom, Aquinas concluded that that “in fasting [Christ] went no further than Moses and Elijah, lest his assumption of our flesh might seem incredible.”⁸⁵ According to Aquinas, Christ’s humanity was essential to his triumph over evil, as “the devil was to be

⁸³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. Thomas Gilby, vol. 43 (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 91.

⁸⁴ Fasting was in theory required on three days a week (Wednesday, Friday and Saturday), on the vigils for major saints days, for three days at each of the Quarter Days, and for the whole of Lent except Sundays. Strict fasting consisted essentially of eating only once in twenty-four hours, after Vespers, and as far as possible then eating only bread and water. For all but the most ascetic, fish was permitted, as were vegetables, but wine as well as meat and any other animal product were excluded. As time passed, the Church made more and more exceptions, such as permitting eggs to be eaten on fast days – and made the requirements less stringent, but the rules were still in principle in force in Catholic countries in the late eighteenth century. For more on the Catholic Church’s policies on fasting during the middle ages see Stephen Mennell, *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present* (University of Illinois Press, 1996).

⁸⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae (St)*, trans. Samuel Parsons and Albert Pinheiro, vol. 53 (New York: Blackfriars, McGraw-Hill, 1971), 79-81.

conquered, not by God, but by the flesh,” or the natural human body.⁸⁶ Thus, for Aquinas, knowledge of the workings of the natural world was thought to aid in interpretation of scripture the performance of spiritual obligations. Through the enterprise of scholastic theology, he sought to determine the moral and spiritual meanings of nature.⁸⁷

For Aquinas and many of his contemporaries, the complexities of the relationship between the material world and the divine were embedded in and engendered not only by the scriptural miracles, but by contemporary examples of seemingly miraculous bodily feats enacted by members of monastic religious orders.⁸⁸ Asceticism in general, and wondrous fasts in particular were the prime indicators of sanctity. It was crucial these narratives that asceticism be successfully seen as a deliberate choice on the part of the faster. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380), a saint of the Dominican order, has become the most commonly referenced example of women who engaged in extreme fasting during the Middle Ages. Importantly, Catherine was said to have fashioned herself

⁸⁶ Aquinas, *St 53*, 53: 79-81.

⁸⁷ For more on Aquinas' theories regarding natural philosophy and the moral purpose of the human body, see J. F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Catholic University of America Press, 2000); Patrick Quinn, "Aquinas's Concept of the Body and out of Body Situations," *The Heythrop Journal* 34, no. 4 (1993).

⁸⁸ Lorraine Daston, "Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 1 (1991): 97.

according to the *vitae* of pious young girls such as the legendary ascetic, Euphrosyne. Her own hagiography would later be used in the same way.⁸⁹

By the age of twenty-five, Catherine refused all food except for the host.⁹⁰ When confronted with a young woman who refused food even when her life was at risk, medieval people questioned whether such behavior was the work of God or the Devil, often condemning holy women to death for witchcraft or heresy.⁹¹

In response to a religious authority who questioned the motives of her fasting, Catherine insisted that her inability to eat was an “infirmity,” not a choice.⁹² However, Catherine’s confessor, Raymond of Capua, portrayed Catherine’s fasting as proof of her supernatural holiness, insisting that “her whole life was a miracle,” reinforcing a view of self-starvation “as part of a wider pattern of heroic, ascetic masochism amply justified in the literature of radical Christian religiosity.”⁹³

Historians, such as Stephen Mennell, have cautioned against believing that “the church had an enormous influence over what was actually eaten, since for most people, the uncertainty of food availability was of major importance.”⁹⁴ While the myth of Gargantuan celebrations in medieval Europe may portray an

⁸⁹ Gordon Tait, "'Anorexia Nervosa': Asceticism, Differentiation, Government," *Journal of Sociology* 29, no. 2 (1993): 7.

⁹⁰ Rudolph M. Bell, *Holy Anorexia*: 25.

⁹¹ Bell, *Holy Anorexia*: 21.

⁹² Saint Catherine Of Siena, ed. *Letter to a Certain Religious Person in Florence*, vol. 1, The Letters of Catherine of Siena (Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2008), 79.

⁹³ Rudolph M. Bell, *Holy Anorexia*: 21.

⁹⁴ S. Mennell, "On the Civilizing of Appetite," *Theory, Culture & Society* 4, no. 2 (1987): 383.

image of occasional plenty, the insecurity of food was always a problem at that time. Famine was an ever-present threat, greatest in certain specific areas of Europe. With few sources of food, crop failures were common.⁹⁵ The possibility of overeating and of giving away food to the unfortunate was a mark of privilege or aristocratic status, described by medieval people as ‘magnanimity’ or ‘largesse.’⁹⁶

Not only was abstinence from food an integral aspect of devotion, but bread and wine, in form of the eucharist, were the central Christian ritual was portrayed in medieval Christian poetry, devotional literature, and theology the most direct way of encountering God.⁹⁷ Already hundreds of years before the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 defined the doctrine of transubstantiation, according to which communion bread was turned into the body and blood of Christ upon the priest’s consecration, most Christians thought that they literally ate Christ's body and blood in the sacrament.⁹⁸ Although controversies surrounding the nature of the communion of “bread and wine” that had existed since antiquity persisted during the Middle ages, no other period in the history of

⁹⁵ John Coveney, *Food, Morals and Meaning : The Pleasure and Anxiety of Eating*: 45.

⁹⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum, "Fast, Feast, and Flesh: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women," *Representations*, no. 11 (1985): 1.

⁹⁷ Bynum, "Fast, Feast, and Flesh: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women," 2.

⁹⁸ Magda Teter, *Sinners on Trial: Jews and Sacrilege after the Reformation* (Harvard University Press, 2011), 25.

Christian spirituality has placed so positive a value on Christ's humanity and physicality.⁹⁹

Even if the majority of early modern people were unable to follow fasting rituals exactly as they were written, the Church's construction of the ethical conduct around food still played an important role in developing Christian perceptions of the relationship between food, the body and morality. For medieval Christians, hunger meant human vulnerability and thus "abstinence was seen less as self-control, than as a symbolic tribute" that "mirrored and recapitulated in physical discomfort Christ's suffering on the cross" and the soul's unquenchable thirst for mystical union.¹⁰⁰

Reformation Era

Although late medieval Christians across Europe had "observed a common core of religious practices as best they could," when contrasting the piety around them with biblical precedents and models, Protestant reformers of the sixteenth century, among them Martin Luther, Jean Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli, decried

⁹⁹ Heretical movements, such as the Aligensians (Or Cathers), rejected the notion of Christ's physical presence in the eucharist, infuriating Church officials with their argument that "the host... passes through the body and comes to a vile end, which...could not happen if God were in it." Bernard Gui quoted in Teter, *Sinners on Trial: Jews and Sacrilege after the Reformation*: 27.

¹⁰⁰ Caroline Walker Bynum, "Fast, Feast, and Flesh: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women," 33.

Catholic practices, such as privately endowed masses or compulsory fasting or veneration of the saints, as idolatrous and heretical.¹⁰¹ For example, Beginning with his criticism of fasting regulations in 1522, Ulrich Zwingli denounced compulsory forms of piety as human inventions that led to idolatry. Zwingli criticized the use of fasting for attention, weight loss, saving money, or as a good work in itself, but defended its merits when “done simply for the purpose of hearing of the voice and bidding of the Spirit.”¹⁰² These Reformers objected to the rituals associated with late medieval piety not necessarily because superstition and magic were present, but because the church had failed to uphold Christ as the exclusive object of veneration.

Responding to the controversies surrounding the sacrament of penance, Luther argued that it was exclusively through faith and hope in the Word of God, that a person could obtain salvation. This was the essence of Luther's doctrine of “justification by faith alone.”¹⁰³ No human work of any sort -- even worship, contemplation, meditation, charity, and other supposed meritorious conduct -- could make a person just and righteous before God. The source of true

¹⁰¹ Scott Hendrix, "Rerooting the Faith: The Reformation as Re-Christianization," *Church History* 69, no. 3 (2000): 565.

¹⁰² Ulrich Zwingli, *Commentary on True and False Religion*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson and Clarence Nevin Heller (Durham, N. C.: Labyrinth, 1981), 104.

¹⁰³ Scott Hendrix, "Rerooting the Faith: The Reformation as Re-Christianization," 556.

righteousness could not be anything emanating from within a person, like fasting or almsgiving, but rather must come from outside, from Christ.¹⁰⁴

Luther's desire to replace a misguided religious piety with a new way of being Christian, but that did not mean that the new piety was less religious or more worldly. Luther never says that Christians belong to the world to the same degree that they belong to the spiritual kingdom. Instead, he says that true Christians, who strive to live by the Sermon on the Mount, belong to the spiritual kingdom without having to withdraw from the world. Believers should consider their daily life and calling holy in God's eyes, and they should exercise that calling in Christian faith and in love directed toward others.¹⁰⁵

While Luther despised fasting with the intent of seeking merit before God, atoning for sin, or of reconciling God as an imposed act of penance, he believed that it could be of spiritual value in training the body and ordering the community during every day life. For example, in his treatise, *On the Freedom of a Christian*, he defends the spiritual importance of attentiveness towards one's diet:

I have said, inwardly, and according to the spirit, a man is amply enough justified by faith...still he remains in this mortal life upon earth, in which it is necessary that he should rule his own body and have intercourse with men. Here then works begin; here he must not take his ease; here he must give heed to exercise his body by fastings, watchings, labor, and other regular discipline, so that it may be subdued to the spirit, and obey and conform itself to the inner man and faith, and

¹⁰⁴ Kent D. Berghuis, *Christian Fasting: A Theological Approach* (S.l.: Biblical Studies Press, 2007), 134.

¹⁰⁵ Scott Hendrix, "Rerooting the Faith: The Reformation as Re-Christianization," 568-69.

not rebel against them nor hinder them, as is its nature to do if it is not kept under.¹⁰⁶

In addition, moderation and abstinence kept the body free of “wantonness and concupiscence.” According to Luther, “It is the part of a Christian to take care of his own body for the very purpose that by its soundness and well-being, he may be able to labor, and to acquire and preserve property...and we may be children of God, thoughtful and busy one for another, bearing one another’s burdens, and so fulfilling the law of Christ.”¹⁰⁷

John Calvin also upheld the view that “the life of the godly ought to be tempered with frugality and sobriety” in such a way that “throughout its course, a sort of perpetual fasting may appear.”¹⁰⁸ As he discussed in *Institutes* 3.7.1-5, the body ought to be brought into submission to the will through the process of self-denial. Unlike Luther, however, Calvin portrayed fasting not only as the general mark of sobriety and frugality that should constantly be a Christian’s experience, but as a form of divine chastisement and an appeal to God’s mercy. Calvin stressed the need for communal fasting, consisting of definite times and complete abstention from all foods. During times of crisis, such as famine, disease, or war, Calvin believed that pastors should encourage the faithful to fasting, heartfelt

¹⁰⁶ Martin Luther, "On the Freedom of a Christian," in *First Principles of the Reformation*, ed. Henry Wace and C.A. Buchheim (London: John Murray, 1883).

¹⁰⁷ Medicine, Luther preached, had been created by God to provide believers “with intelligence to guard and take care of the body so that we can live in good health.” Luther quoted in *Medicine and Society*: 256.

¹⁰⁸ Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. Henry Beveridge, trans. Henry Beveridge, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 611.

prayer, and "other acts of humility, repentance, and faith."¹⁰⁹ Calvin did not view this form of fasting as superstitious or heretical, as "Christ...whose pattern we ought to express in our life," did not say that fasting should be "abolished, but appointed [fasting] for times of calamity and joins it with mourning."¹¹⁰

As Protestant reformers distanced themselves from the ritualized, symbolic abstinence preached by the Catholic Church to a lifestyle of asceticism based on direct interpretation of the Bible, The Catholic theologians involved in the Counter-Reformation also renewed emphasis on Scripture, but in the defense of medieval expressions of piety. The *Spiritual Exercises*, by Ignatius of Loyola (1491- 1556), contain a forceful reassertion of late medieval piety; among other things, they uphold prayer to the saints and the veneration of their relics, pilgrimages, indulgences for jubilees and crusades, and precepts of fasting and abstinence.¹¹¹

Although, by the sixteenth century, the occurrence of extreme fasting among holy women had dwindled significantly, examples of marathon fasting for religious purposes could still be found in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in both Catholic and Protestant countries, indicating that fasting as a form of mystical pious devotion remained prevalent. Young female fasters, described in vernacular folk literature as "miraculous maids," were "extolled...as proof of

¹⁰⁹ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2: 611.

¹¹⁰ Calvin quoted in Raymond A. Mentzer, "Fasting, Piety, and Political Anxiety among French Reformed Protestants," *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture* 76, no. 02 (2007): 232.

¹¹¹ Ignatius Of Loyola, *Ignatius of Loyola: The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, ed. George E. Ganss (Paulist Press, 1991), 211-12.

divine providence” for their inexplicable ability to survive without “signs of eating.”¹¹²

highly publicized, positively portrayed examples of fasts became the new icons of morality against which members of society measured their own eating habits as shown by the case of Martha Taylor, a young Derbyshire woman whose spectacular fast and spiritual conversation between late 1667 and mid-1669 attracted the attention of a remarkable range of gentry, divines, physicians, philosophers and pilgrims.¹¹³

In his *Discourse upon prodigious abstinence on account of the extended fast of Martha Taylor*, John Reynolds, a renowned English physician and devout Protestant, demonstrated how religious debates regarding the veracity of fasting miracles contributed to the linkage of science and religion as spiritual endeavors. The Talyor case first came to Reynold’s attention after he encountered two religious pamphlets, published in 1668 and 1669, which told the story of Martha’s abstinence from food and “proclaimed her a ‘wonder of the world’ and a miracle which God intended as a an exhortation to sinners.”¹¹⁴

John Reynolds held an opinion shared by the majority of his contemporaries, that “it is human fidelity to disbelieve all such reports, because some are false; so it is superstitious charity to believe all, because some are true.”

¹¹² Brumberg, *Fasting Girls*, 96.

¹¹³ Simon Schaffer, "Piety, Physic and Prodigious Abstinence," in *Religio Medici: Medicine and Religion in Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. Ole Peter Grell and Andrew Cunningham (Scolar Press, 1996), 183-87.

¹¹⁴ Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Fasting Girls*: 51.

¹¹⁵ While Reynolds and other physicians accepted the veracity of the examples of extended fasts presented in the Bible, as well as those undertaken by medieval saints, they were suspicious that “such a favour [miraculous abstinence] should be shewn to persons no known sanctity.”¹¹⁶ Wary of ‘explaining away’ divine acts, learned physicians argued that their skepticism towards prolonged abstinence only applied to those who wasted away. The truly miraculous abstinent combined fasting with perfect health: exempted from the weakness of the flesh for some time,” wrote Montpellier physician, Laurent Joubert, “their condition was thus other than that of humankind.”¹¹⁷

Reynolds noted that Martha Taylor “had only recently learned to read that Bible and that she made no explicit preternatural claims despite the fact that many religious persons who came to her bedside tried to influence her with tales of ‘sacred mysteries.’”¹¹⁸ Furthermore, not only did Martha lack any “pretensions to revelation,” but “our blessed Savior and his *prodromi* [followers] procured not the least detriment to their health” while Martha Taylor grew emaciated and ill.¹¹⁹

In Italy, the slow revision of the concepts of the miraculous and saintliness, and the demystification of prolonged fasting proceeded in close cooperation with

¹¹⁵ W. Vandereycken and R. Van Deth, *From Fasting Saints to Anorexic Girls*: 100.

¹¹⁶ John Reynolds, "A Discourse on Prodigious Abstinence," in *The Harleian Miscellany: A Collection of Scarce, Curious and Entertaining Pamphlets and Tracts ... Selected from the Library of Edward Harley*, ed. Thomas Park William Oldys (London: White, 1809), 43-58.

¹¹⁷ Simon Schaffer, "Piety, Physic and Prodigious Abstinence," 172.

¹¹⁸ Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Fasting Girls*: 51.

¹¹⁹ John Reynolds, "A Discourse," 43-58.

medical science.¹²⁰ As Protestantism in the late 17th and 18th centuries experienced waves of revivalism, in the forms of Pietism in Germany (a mystical and inner-directed religious movement within Lutheranism) and Methodism in England, the role of prodigious extreme fasting saw a revival. Protestant sects who based their doctrines on Calvin's reformation theology, such as the Puritans, Quakers, and French reformed Protestants adopted communal fasts with zeal. In Restoration England, ascetic fasting came to be associated with dissenters and Protestant martyrs.¹²¹ Just as saints has served as tropes or discursive tools during the medieval era, highly publicized, positively portrayed examples of fasts became the new icons of morality against which members of society measured their own eating habits.

¹²⁰ Tillman Habermas and Allan Beveridge, "Historical Continuities." 432.

¹²¹ Raymond A. Mentzer, "Fasting, Piety, and Political Anxiety among French Reformed Protestants," 121.

Chapter II: Medicine as a Moral Endeavor, 1550 - 1800

The medical theories concerning the physical and emotional effects of food on the human body that emerged during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries and which contributed to the development of the modern science of nutrition in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries did not completely replace Christian spiritual conceptions of the importance of a moderate diet. Rather, they elaborated upon and aided in the popularization and dissemination of Christian ascetic ideals by establishing ‘objective’ standards, such as body weight, by which individuals could gauge their spiritual discipline.

The increased availability of medical tracts and manuals, a result of technological advances in printing during the sixteenth century, aided in the transmission of theories of health and religion between learned and lay populations. In 1567, regarding the proliferation of medical treatises intended for popular audiences, the Bolognese physician, Leonardo Fioravanti wryly remarked, now that “the majority of people, both men and women, know how to read ...

maybe the day will come when we shall all be Doctors of some sort."¹²² Although Fioravanti exaggerated the extent of literacy, his remark reflected the fact that "advice manuals" were a significant source of information for the middle and upper class individuals, who were anxious to learn how to obtain physical well-being while living in accordance with the dictates of an educated Christian culture. Poor or illiterate members of society learned of the contents of the manuals either by hearing them read aloud, as many of the recipes and cures within became common knowledge, or through their own encounters with medical practitioners. The Italian Platonist Marsilio Ficino, the Belgian Jesuit Leonardus Lessius, the French poet Du Four de la Crespelière, the Italian physician Castor Durante, and the English Puritan William Vaughan are just a few of the names associated with popular health manuals during the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries.¹²³

As early modern peoples began to understand better the connections between diet and its effects on weight, fitness, and emotional and physical health, and as technological advances in agriculture and the influx of new foods from the Western hemisphere in the eighteenth-century presented Europeans with an unprecedented range of dietary choices, there was "a drive away from the individual focus of earlier medical counsel toward the view that food choices

¹²² Rudolph M. Bell, *How to Do It: Guides to Good Living for Renaissance Italians* (University of Chicago Press, 2000), 281-82.

¹²³ For more on popular health manuals produced during the early modern Robert Appelbaum, *Aguecheek's Beef, Belch's Hiccup, and Other Gastronomic Interjections : Literature, Culture, and Food among the Early Moderns* (Chicago, IL, USA: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Rudolph M. Bell, *How to Do It*. see

could not remain a matter of individual desires or tastes but, instead, must conform to general standards of healthy eating.”¹²⁴

The influx of food options inspired increasingly sophisticated modes of preparing food which seemed to celebrate the pleasures of appetite and the gratification of the senses. To counter these hedonistic trends and their threats to physical and spiritual health, physicians reinvigorated the debates regarding natural versus unnatural appetite that had plagued Christian theologians since antiquity.

Through these debates and the increased standardization of the nutritional value of foods, the symbolic power of physical appearance as a reflection of one’s spiritual sensibilities gained significance, so much so that by the 1760s it was fashionable to draw attention to one’s constitutional weakness, in the form of a slender appearance, and one’s inability to digest any but the most delicate foods.

Despite these changes in science, medicine, and access to foods, the majority of early modern peoples continued to conceive their dietary habits in both spiritual and scientific terms. Common to all the varied medical theories that emerged during the early modern period was the belief that the health of the body was intimately related to the health of the soul, and food was instrumental in influencing both. Detailed discussions of the most appropriate eating behaviors and optimal foods for particular bodies in medical literature from the sixteenth and

¹²⁴ Elizabeth A. Williams, "Sciences of Appetite in the Enlightenment, 1750-1800," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, no. 0: 1.

seventeenth centuries indicates that the prevailing view was that individuals possessed some control over their appetites and, by extension their spirituality.¹²⁵

Early modern medical theories regarding the relationship between food and physical and mental health incorporated the ethos of asceticism that early Christian communities had adopted as a defining aspect of their culture, which was then codified and praised as one of the purest expressions of piety in medieval society and ultimately reintroduced as a daily practice as part of a virtuous lifestyle by Protestant reformers, resulting in the preservation of traditional Christian values regarding food choice while other aspects of organized religion lost much of their influence on public thought.

Legacies of Classical Medical Philosophy

During the Middle Ages, Greek works available to medieval scholars, while extremely influential, reflected only a small portion of ancient medical knowledge, and the scholastic approach to the study of medical texts taught in universities was not conducive to the formulation of new theories based on available information. In the closing decades of the fifteenth century and the opening years of the sixteenth century, the fuller knowledge of Greek medicine,

¹²⁵ Purnis Jan, "The Stomach and Early Modern Emotion," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 79, no. 2 (2010): 16.

coupled with the general willingness to challenge established religious and scientific doctrines, served as starting points for the famous medical contributions that modern scholars have cited as the precursors to the twentieth-century science of nutrition: the development of anatomy, the expansion of botanical and natural historical knowledge, the extensive discussions of the signs, transmission, and nature of disease, and the beginning of cumulative advances in physiology.¹²⁶

Of the ancient Greek texts studied by early modern physicians, the works of the physician and philosopher Galen (129 CE- 216 CE) had the greatest influence on the development of contemporary perceptions of the relationship between food, the body, and the soul. Galen's works drew heavily from the Hippocratic corpus and the philosophical doctrines of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. In keeping with the classical conception of physical and spiritual health as closely intertwined, Galen proposed that medical practitioners should be well-versed in both mystical and physiological matters; his belief that the "best doctor is also a philosopher" was enthusiastically embraced by medical practitioners in the early modern world.¹²⁷ As during antiquity, there was little distinction between professions devoted to the care of the soul versus the care of the body; the field of medicine was in many ways unspecialized until the end of the seventeenth century, and even afterwards the distinctions were often superficial.

¹²⁶ Nancy G. Siraisi, *History, Medicine, and the Traditions of Renaissance Learning*, Cultures of Knowledge in the Early Modern World (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 4-5.

¹²⁷ Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 69.

As discussed in the previous chapter, ancient Greeks believed that spiritual fulfillment resulted from moderation and self-mastery over one's daily practices, such as eating and drinking, which were part of a more general "art of existence," or an appreciation of living.¹²⁸ For the early Greeks, the natural demands of the body were potentially dangerous in that they could induce hubris thereby putting moderation and self-control at risk. A health regimen was predicated on observing the rules of nature, for every abuse of nature brought with it bodily pains and illness.¹²⁹ Immorality and vice, often the results of excessive indulgence, were thought to cause disease, both collectively (in terms of epidemic outbreaks) and individually. However, when managed properly through dietetics, the body could be transformed into a tool that would maximize the potential of the intellectual soul, the ultimate source of satisfaction. Thus, in antiquity, medicine and diet were not merely intended to treat illness after it had appeared, but to serve as disciplines informing the rational structure of everyday life. Diet was raised from mere eating for the sustenance of the body to a higher philosophical plane that bolstered its importance within medicine as a whole.¹³⁰

Although the predominant forms of learned medicine taught during the Middle Ages and early modern era accepted as their bases Galen's humoral system of human anatomy, they were not exact expressions of his theories.

¹²⁸ John Coveney, *Food, Morals and Meaning : The Pleasure and Anxiety of Eating*: 50-51.

¹²⁹ Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society*: 9-11.

¹³⁰ Mark Grant, "Introduction," in *Galen on Food and Diet*, ed. Mark Grant (Florence, KY, USA: Routledge, 2000), 7.

Rather, natural philosophers used his models as starting points, often rejecting aspects of his corpus in favor of their own observations the natural world or because they found Galen's 'pagan' beliefs to be incompatible with their personal religious views. Renowned Dutch physician and clergyman Levinus Lemnius exemplified the sixteenth-century Galenists' efforts to reconcile natural philosophy as found in classical sources with Christian doctrine, particularly in the realm dietetics, in his widely published work *The Miracles of Nature* (1559). In *Miracles* Lemnius contends:

Since man is made of Soul and body, we must with all providence take care for the safety of them both. The Soul is the principal part in man, and the body is the house of the Soul. We use most the command of the Soul, and the service of the body, therefore we must not be slothfull in the consideration of them both...how much more need have we to look to our bodies: vices where of will affect the Soul also by consent, and law of company, and they converge together in all things...Wherefore we must take some care of our body, upon whose props, as Pliny saith, the Soul Stands... for the body being in a sound condition can better serve the Soul, and hinders not, use of the mind when it is employed in contemplation of high things.¹³¹

¹³¹ Lemnius Lemnius and John Streater, *The Secret Miracles of Nature: In Four Books. Learnedly and Moderately Treating of Generation, and the Parts Thereof; the Soul, and Its Immortality; of Plants and Living Creatures; of Diseases, Their Symptoms and Cures, and Many Other Rarities Not Treated of by Any Author Extant; Whereof See More in the Table of Contents. Whereunto Is Added One Book Containing Philosophical and Prudential Rules How Man Shall Become Excellent in All Conditions, Whether High or Low, and Lead His Life with Health of Body and Mind. Fit for the Use of Those That Practise Physick, and All Others That Desire to Search into the Hidden Secrets of Nature, for Increase of Knowledge* (Jo. Streater, and are to be sold by Humphrey Moseley at the Prince's Arms in S. Paul's Church-Yard, John Sweeting at the Angel in Popes-Head-Alley, John Clark at Mercers-Chappel, and George Sawbridge at the Bible on Ludgate-Hill., 1658), 332-33.

Despite variations in interpretation of Galen's works, most adherents of Galenism believed that health depended upon the balance of the four humors – black bile, yellow (or red) bile, blood, and phlegm. The best means of preserving one's health was to maintain the balance of the bodily humors by practicing moderation in all things, particularly in the use of the six “non-naturals”: air, sleeping and waking, food and drink, rest and exercise, excretion and retention, and passions, or emotions.¹ Of the non-naturals, food and drink were the most crucial to health and well being, as immoderation in this area was most likely to lead to imbalance in others. According to the Galenic model of human anatomy, the stomach and digestion played an important role in determining an individual's emotional and physical experience, as the improper concoction of humours in the stomach, caused by ingesting inappropriate foods or by excessive fasting or gorging, lead to the production of harmful vapors and tainted ‘spirits.’¹³²

Challenges to Medical (and Religious) Orthodoxy

By the seventeenth century, several influential developments in anatomy,

¹³² ‘Spirits,’ seventeenth-century physician Robert Burton explained in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, were ‘the instrument of the soul, to perform his actions...a common tie or medium betwixt the body and the soul, as some will have it...a fourth soul of itself.’ R. Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy: What It Is, with All the Kinds, Causes, Symptoms, Prognostics, and Several Cures of It, in Three Partitions, with Their Several Sections, Members, and Subsections, Philosophically, Medically, Historically Opened and Cut Up* (W. Tegg, 1838), 94.

such as Vesalius' unprecedentedly exhaustive dissections of humans and William Harvey's discovery of the circulatory system, had caused natural philosophers to reassess Galen's theories. These systems of medical explanation and practice that arose in the seventeenth century and that contested Galenic physiology became known iatro-chemistry and iatro-mechanics.¹³³ Like any dominant and deeply embedded corpus, the overthrow of Galenism was neither a singular nor swift occurrence, but the result of a long and gradual process that took place over a numbers of centuries.¹³⁴ Although the new medical theorists rejected often Galenist teleology and physiology, many of these scientists still conceived of their studies on the effects of food on the body within a Christian messianic context.¹³⁵

A notable challenge to the medical authority of the Middle Ages appeared in the works of the German-Swiss natural philosopher, Paracelsus (1493 -1541), who was instrumental in the continued linkage of medicine and Christian morality in Western thought. Paracelsianism took root in many different countries where manuscripts, translations, digests, popularizations, practical textbooks, and speculative works inspired by Paracelsus were collected and diffused.¹³⁶

In addition to serving as one of the leading vehicles for the reform of science and medicine, Paracelsianism was also congenial to a long line of

¹³³ Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society*: 49.

¹³⁴ R. K. Jones, "The Development of Medical Sects," *Journal of Religion and Health* 22, no. 4 (1983): 310.

¹³⁵ Steven Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution*, Science.Culture (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 67.

¹³⁶ Charles Webster, "Paracelsus, Paracelsianism, and the Secularization of the Worldview," *Science in Context* 15, no. 01 (2002): 11-12.

religious reformers, although Paracelsus himself did not identify with any of the Protestant sects.¹³⁷ Paracelsus resented the “destructive obfuscations of organized religion, the institutional corruption of the Church, or wider economic evils associated with the temporal authority of the Church,” which he believed had ceased to be a reliable vehicle for conveying the essential message of Christianity.¹³⁸ As a trenchant critic of scholasticism, rival to the medical humanists, and proponent of a new approach to biomedical science embodying experimentalism, Paracelsus’s perception of the world was divided into macrocosm and microcosm was based on the pneumatic principle of Stoic and Neoplatonic metaphysics, that is, on the concept of a uniform, planned universe, a universal sympathy that united all creation and in turn lent each part its existential meaning. He is often cited as one of the founders of iatrochemistry due to his focus on the processes of effervescence, fermentation, and putrefaction as the bases of all physiology.¹³⁹

Paracelsus’ theories regarding the application of mechanics to human physiology were adopted and elaborated upon by the iatromechanists. Iatromechanic physicians worked under the assumption that the body processes

¹³⁷ According to historian Charles Webster, “Paracelsianism was still in vogue when Puritanism was at its height and the Puritan Revolution was a notable phase in the publication of Paracelsian translations. This association attracted the observation that Paracelsians of the English Revolution were predominantly Puritan in their associations.” Webster, “Paracelsus, Paracelsianism, and the Secularization of the Worldview.”

¹³⁸ Webster, “Paracelsus, Paracelsianism, and the Secularization of the Worldview,” 13.

¹³⁹ Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society*: 79.

obeyed the same laws of physics as did the larger terrestrial and celestial bodies, and sought to determine the nature of the relationship between the soul, which was viewed as incorporeal, immortal and infinite, and the body, which was corporeal, mortal, and measurable.

Static Medicine: Establishing “Objective Temperance”

The advances made by Paracelsus in iatrochemistry and iatromechanic laid the way for the Paduan physician Sanctorius Santorio’s (1561-1636) experiments on the physiological process of “insensible perspiration,” roughly equivalent to the modern concept of metabolism (the sum of all the chemical and physical changes that take place with the body and enable its continued growth and functioning).¹⁴⁰

Sanctorius devised a chair-balance to weigh himself in hopes of determining the exact mathematical relationship between food intake and excretion. By regularly and diligently weighing himself over the course of thirty years, his ingesta and excreta in the morning and in the evening, and before and after activities that affected the production of bodily evacuations, Sanctorious established a connection between the pursuit of well being and the monitoring of bodily discharges (especially insensible perspiration) by means of weighing and

¹⁴⁰ Lindemann, *Medicine and Society*: 82.

the control of food ingestion. He concluded that the degree of perspiration induced also depended on the type of food itself.¹⁴¹ He published his findings in a treatise called *De Medicina Statica Aphorismis*, leading to the use of the term ‘static medicine’ to describe his method of experimentation, which drew from humoral medicine as well as iatromedicine.¹⁴² In the humoral tradition, proper evacuation was instrumental to humoral balance, and thus bodily discharges were central to the pursuit of health. Unlike the humoralists, however, Santorionius’ relied on quantitative methods of analysis.¹⁴³

Over the course of the next century, a number of practitioners replicated Santorionius’ experiments. Some felt that since Santorionius had not published any official experimental reports, it was important to examine his results and conclusions. Since the amount of perspiration produced by the body was affected by environmental factors such as differences in climate and gender, some also attempted to replicate the experiments in different situations.¹⁴⁴ Thus, while Santorionius’ weighing practices were elaborated within the tradition of humoral medicine, they remained relevant as iatromechanism came into ascendance during the eighteenth century played a significant role in establishing modern dietetics’ reliance on quantitative measurement and on “objective temperance,” as opposed

¹⁴¹ Lucia Dacome, "Balancing Acts: Picturing Perspiration in the Long Eighteenth Century," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* (2011): 3.

¹⁴² Dacome, "Balancing Acts: Picturing Perspiration in the Long Eighteenth Century," 2.

¹⁴³ R. K. Jones, "The Development of Medical Sects," 310.

¹⁴⁴ Lucia Dacome, "Balancing Acts: Picturing Perspiration in the Long Eighteenth Century," 2.

to subjective experience.¹⁴⁵ The nature of these experiments required a compulsion towards self-observation, a tendency that would eventually become inscribed in modern practices of weight watching and nutrition.

By the mid-eighteenth century, static medicine had come to provide an authoritative language of dietetics, with the majority trained practitioners offering dietary guidance based on increasingly standardized designations for the healthfulness and digestibility of foodstuffs.¹⁴⁶ However, despite medical professionals' increasing reliance on weight as an object standard, the majority of common people had not yet developed the same reliance on weight as a reliable indicator of health. Until the nineteenth century, there was no notion of a 'normal' or 'ideal' weight, applicable to all people of a certain height, age, sex and race.¹⁴⁷

Prior to the standardization of weighing practices and eighteenth-century advances in physiology and anatomy, what went on inside the body was nearly impossible to discern. Instead, they relied on signs inscribed on the bodily exterior: on the skin, on the limbs, especially in the face. Character traits, whether bad or good, also appeared on the face, allowing laypeople and physicians to deduce the body's inner state from the external signs that also revealed a person's hidden intentions.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Hub Zwart, "A Short History of Food Ethics," *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 12, no. 2 (2000): 120.

¹⁴⁶ Lucia Dacome, "Balancing Acts: Picturing Perspiration in the Long Eighteenth Century," 2.

¹⁴⁷ Michael Stolberg, "'Abhorreas Pinguinem': Fat and Obesity in Early Modern Medicine (C. 1500-1750)," 7.

¹⁴⁸ Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society*: 16.

Obesity was principally defined in terms of visual appearance, the sheer bodily bulk, not weight. Obesity was associated with impurity, decay and putrefaction. According to the French physician Jean Fernel (1497–1555), “crude, raw humours which resulted from the insufficient concoction of the excessive food by the over-burdened weakened innate heat, and the ‘undesirable load of useless and pernicious matter [the fat itself] accumulating and stagnating in the vessels and cavities of the body, were particularly prone to corruption and putrefaction.”¹⁴⁹

Though Sanctorious himself did not have a particularly religious agenda, religious and scientific authorities from the early modern period often adopted his experimental approach to diet to advance their own. In 1668, the French physician and naturalist Denis Dodart (1634–1707), who eventually became a member of the French Academy of Sciences in 1673, used the Sanctorean weighing system to determine the impact of Lenten dieting on the body. Dodart, who had Jansenist sympathies, hoped to advance the Jansenists’ calls for more rigorous observances of Catholic principles by demonstrating that the strict observance of religious fasts did not pose a threat to health, which was a common concern among seventeenth century Catholics in France and Italy.¹⁵⁰

In 1637, Paolo Zacchia (1584-1659), physician to Pope Innocent X and author of the famous *Quæstiones medico-legales* had addressed these anxieties by

¹⁴⁹ Jean Fernel quoted in Michael Stolberg, "'Abhorreas Pinguedinem': Fat and Obesity in Early Modern Medicine (C. 1500-1750)," 2.

¹⁵⁰ Lucia Dacome, "Balancing Acts: Picturing Perspiration in the Long Eighteenth Century," 6.

publishing in Italian a text aimed at directing readers from all walks of life towards a healthy 'vitto quaresimale' ('Lenten fare'). Dodart's own experiments indicated that Lenten dieting did not substantially affect the health of believers, and in fact, Lenten fasts' reliance on fruits, vegetables, seeds and roots offered a healthier option than meat consumption.¹⁵¹ Well into the eighteenth century, patients often consulted their physicians about the implications of Lenten dietary restrictions. Many sought advice about the possibility that these could be pursued by the sick without further harm to their health; some asked for dispensation.

"A man cannot be a perfect physician of any one save of himself alone": Individual Imperatives for Self-Regulation

The preoccupation with Christian ethics that dominated academic discourses on diet and natural philosophy could also be found in lay sources of knowledge regarding proper conduct around food, as demonstrated by the redemptive themes and didactic tone of one of the most popular dietary manuals of the early modern period: Luigi Cornaro's *Discorsi della vita sobria* (Discourses on the Sober Life). Cornaro, a minor noble from Padua first published his autobiography, *Trattato de la Vita Sobria* in 1558 which, with later essays, became the *Discorsi*.

¹⁵¹ Dacome, "Balancing Acts: Picturing Perspiration in the Long Eighteenth Century," 6.

The *Vita Sobria* was centered on his own dramatic life story, recounting how, between 35 and 40, he suffered a mid-life crisis in which his health so deteriorated that death seemed imminent. In a leap of faith, he adopted a strict hygienic regimen, the rather insistent central theme of which was diet, struggled to physical recovery and ultimately became rich and famous. However, the incentives he offers for following his counsel are not entirely material; to his material motives he added a religious sanction, "Live, live, that you may become better servants of God!"¹⁵² Not only would a restricted diet keep the "humors of the body pure and mild...preventing fumes from arising from the stomach to the head," but "the brain of him who lives in this manner is, as a result, constantly in a clear condition, permitting him to...rise above the low and mean considerations of this world to the high and beautiful contemplation of things divine."¹⁵³

Cornaro had not received any formal medical training; he gained his credibility by virtue of his longevity and good health (he lived to the old age of 98) and legitimized his argument for temperance on the grounds that "Galen, great as a physician...chose it as the best medicine."¹⁵⁴ According to humoral models of medicine, each person possessed an individualized constitution that was more than the sum of bodily parts, humors, spirits and habits together – Cures were

¹⁵² Luigi Cornaro et al., *The Art of Living Long*, trans. William F. Butler, Classics in Longevity and Aging Series (New York, NY: Springer Pub. Co, 2005; reprint, 1903 English Translation), 43.

¹⁵³ Cornaro, *The Art of Living Long*: 19.

¹⁵⁴ Hieronimo Gualdo, "Preface" Cornaro, *The Art of Living Long*: xxxviii.

highly individualized.¹⁵⁵ Though Cornaro held on to many of Galen's anatomical and philosophical principles, he preferred diligent observation of the effects of food on his being to determine what regimen suited him best, as opposed of the classical author's reliance on a complex knowledge of humors, temperaments, and animistic qualities.¹⁵⁶ Cornaro urged readers to, "by dint of experimenting, acquire a perfect knowledge of his own constitution and of its most hidden qualities, and find out what food and what drink, and what quantities of each, will agree with his stomach," as it was "impossible to have equally accurate knowledge of these things in another person; since it is only with difficulty that we may discover them in ourselves."¹⁵⁷ These nutritional rules required close observation and painstaking restraint, but had the benefit of making the individual his own best physician. Though Cornaro was a devout Catholic, his message that good health and fulfillment were accessible to anyone with the willpower to follow a strict regimen suited Luther's concept of a "priesthood of all believers," in which individuals had the capacity, and therefore a responsibility, to improve themselves, both physically and spiritually.¹⁵⁸

Like the trained physicians of the age, Cornaro believed that the "realm of Nature," was merely an extension of God's will and therefore, "to live in

¹⁵⁵ Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society*: 15.

¹⁵⁶ Luigi Cornaro et al., *The Art of Living Long*: 46.

¹⁵⁷ Cornaro, *The Art of Living Long*: 15.

¹⁵⁸ While Martin Luther did not use the exact phrase "priesthood of all believers," he adduces a general priesthood in Christendom in his 1520 *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* in order to dismiss the medieval view that Christians in the present life were to be divided into two classes: "spiritual" and "temporal."

accordance with the simplicity of Nature, which teaches us to be satisfied with little, was to follow the ways of holy self-control and divine reason.”¹⁵⁹ Cornaro’s *Discorsi*, printed in multiple languages and published twelve times between 1558 and 1724, became a classic of hygiene and autobiography, and remain central to popular discussions of nutrition and morality well into the nineteenth century.¹⁶⁰

The individual most crucial to the spread of Cornaro’s messages about the physical and spiritual benefits importance of moderation, was Leonardus Lessius, the Flemish Jesuit, who translated *Trattato de la vita sobria* into Latin, publishing it in 1613.¹⁶¹ In 1634, the English translation of this text, *Hygiasticon; or, The Right Course of Preserving Life and Health unto Extream Old Age*, by George Herbert introduced the wider reading public of seventeenth-century England to Cornaro’s ideas.¹⁶²

Historian Sara Pennel’s analysis of the dietary regimen of Thomas Turner (1729–93), a schoolteacher-cum-shopkeeper of the small village of in East Sussex,

¹⁵⁹ Luigi Cornaro et al., *The Art of Living Long*: 7.

¹⁶⁰ Gerald Gruman, "The Art of Living Long," in *The Art of Living Long* (New York, NY: Springer Pub. Co, 2005), xxii.

¹⁶¹ Robert Appelbaum, *Aguecheek's Beef, Belch's Hiccup, and Other Gastronomic Interjections : Literature, Culture, and Food among the Early Moderns*: 40.

¹⁶² Appelbaum writes, “The regimens were popular. In England alone, some 153 medical titles were published by 1605, 33 percent of them regimens of health and related explanatory texts. The early vogue for regimens in English began in 1528 with the publication of Thomas Paynel’s English commentary on the centuries-old Regimen sanitatis Salerni, along with three original texts, Thomas Moulton’s *This Is the Myroure or Glasse of Helthe* (ca. 1531), *Elyot’s Castel of Helthe* (1539), and *Boorde’s Dyetary of Helth* (1640)... These texts would be joined in print by a slew of new regimens written in England, Italy, and elsewhere.” Appelbaum, *Aguecheek's Beef, Belch's Hiccup, and Other Gastronomic Interjections : Literature, Culture, and Food among the Early Moderns*: 40.

revealed that, in the eighteenth century, early modern people started to adopt “a more quantified appreciation of food intake.”¹⁶³ Turner’s diary is one of the earliest examples of a “meticulously kept document of alimentary self-surveillance for the specified purposes of self-government.”¹⁶⁴ Yet, Turner still conceived his diet in terms of the six non-naturals crucial to health preservation in humoral medicine. However, he also discussed the digestive importance of ‘acids’ and ‘light’ evening diet and regular abstinence from meat, “suggesting at least some concern with the importance of not only the quality of ingested food but also its quantity,” indicating his exposure to the work (or at least distillations) of Dodart, van Helmont and Boerhaave.¹⁶⁵

Equally influential in determining Turner’s attitudes towards food choice was his identification with the Anglican Church. During Turner’s lifetime, the Anglican Church still regularly required its congregations to fast collectively in

¹⁶³ Sara Pennell, “A Matter of So Great Importance to My Health”: Alimentary Knowledge in Practice,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* (2011).

¹⁶⁴ Pennell, “A Matter of So Great Importance to My Health”: Alimentary Knowledge in Practice,” 3.

¹⁶⁵ According to Pennell, “The diary mentions him owning or reading (and commenting on) a range of medical works, from *Medical Essays and Observations Revised and Published by a Society in Edinburgh* (5 vols.: Edinburgh, 1733–44), William Cheselden’s *The Anatomy of the Human Body* (London, 1713 & subsequent editions), and *Medulla Medicinae Universae* (London, 1747). As importantly, he and his wife regularly read a wide range of works of practical knowledge, from *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* (in print 1747–1814), Benjamin Martin’s *The General Magazine of Arts and Sciences* (14 vols. between 1755–65), and of course, that staple of eighteenth-century English (and colonial) information dissemination, *The Gentleman’s Magazine*.” Pennell, “A Matter of So Great Importance to My Health”: Alimentary Knowledge in Practice,” 3.

acts of public humiliation. Fasting that was still conceived as embracing actual, rather than simply symbolic, abstinence, as indicated by Turner's records food abstinence on days mandated by the Church.¹⁶⁶

Finally, Turner's food-diary is likewise significant in detailing the changes in food practices brought about technological advances in agriculture and the influx of 'luxurious' foods from the Western hemisphere, such as coffee and sugar, during the eighteenth century.¹⁶⁷ Although Turner's diary as a whole, and the regimen in particular, suggested little participation in this increasingly globalized world of comestibles and ingestibles, he was likely exposed to the British physician George Cheyne's criticisms of the rich and exotic lifestyle now afforded by wealth accumulated from the expansion of trade and commerce through their inclusion in John Wesley's popular work, *Primitive Physick* (London, 1747).¹⁶⁸

George Cheyne's most celebrated work was *The English Malady*, in which he wrote about the melancholy of English society, especially among the classes that could afford a life of luxury and leisure. The new foods available through colonialization were strong and spicy and were, according to Cheyne, wreaking havoc on English digestion and by association the delicate emotional constitutions

¹⁶⁶ Pennel, "'A Matter of So Great Importance to My Health': Alimentary Knowledge in Practice," 5.

¹⁶⁷ Pennel, "'A Matter of So Great Importance to My Health': Alimentary Knowledge in Practice," 3.

¹⁶⁸ John Coveney, *Food, Morals and Meaning : The Pleasure and Anxiety of Eating*: 67.

of the upper classes.¹⁶⁹

Appetite and Enlightenment

The intensified social anxiety over the threats to moral and physical health posed by these enticements and new physiological models regarding the sources of individual temperaments and the human capacity for passion, judgment, and reason, lead to a transition from the individual focus of earlier medical counsel toward the view that food choices could not remain a matter of individual desires or tastes but, instead, must conform to general standards of healthy eating.¹⁷⁰ Even in the *Encyclopédie*, often taken as the primary medium of the eighteenth century's propaganda on behalf of pleasure, an anonymous author expressed an opinion held by many that the "penchant of the soul for an object... is [in fact] a great evil."¹⁷¹

In the realm of medicine, physiologists sought to explain the difference between feelings distinguished in common parlance as 'appetite' and 'hunger.' This they ordinarily did by defining both appetite and hunger as 'sensations' but

¹⁶⁹ Coveney, *Food, Morals and Meaning : The Pleasure and Anxiety of Eating*.66.

¹⁷⁰ Elizabeth A. Williams, "Sciences of Appetite in the Enlightenment, 1750-1800," 1.

¹⁷¹ Anne C. Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: JHU Press, 1998), 7.

then referring appetite to pleasure and hunger to pain.¹⁷² Physiologists generally spoke of appetite in a language of pleasure.¹⁷³ Allied to taste and desire, appetite was seen as instrumental in the quest for reason and virtue, but was also implicated in the epidemic nervous maladies that seemed to be overtaking the elite population of France and of Europe in general. Chief among the illnesses that sensibility seemed to trigger were melancholia, hypochondria, and the vapors-maladies held to afflict not just the mind but the body as well.¹⁷⁴ In this nosological enterprise appetite took on new importance: no longer strictly a sign, it was now presented as a phenomenon subject to specific, identifiable diseases. When seeking to explain the origin of these differing sensations and their material and moral implications, physiologists during the second half of the eighteenth century tended to rely predominantly on either a mechanist or a vitalist approach without necessarily realizing that these methods of physiological investigation had originally been developed within a theological context.

The mechanist approach may be traced back to the work of the French mathematician and philosopher, René Descartes (1596-1650). In his *Traité de l'homme*, Descartes distinguished between the soul, which he viewed as incorporeal, immortal and infinite and the body, which was corporeal, mortal, and

¹⁷² In France, this increased focus on the complexities of the human drive to eat was apparent in the shifting lexicon physiologists drew on to characterize it: 'besoin,' 'désir,' 'fonction naturelle,' 'goût,' 'pente de l'âme,' 'sensation,' 'sensibilité' or 'sentiment intérieur.' For more see Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology*.

¹⁷³ Elizabeth A. Williams, "Sciences of Appetite in the Enlightenment, 1750-1800," 6.

¹⁷⁴ Anne C. Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology*: 90.

measurable.¹⁷⁵ His perception of nature, and by extension the human body, as a giant clock set in motion by the Creator, seemed to negate the purposefulness that Galen and Aristotle, and also Harvey and imputed to nature.¹⁷⁶ However, Descartes and his followers did not completely the idea of ascribing moral significance to the human body; in his *Discourse*, Descartes set out a “provisional moral code” as part of what guided his search for truth. He aimed “to try to master myself rather than fortune, and change my desires rather than the order of the world.”¹⁷⁷ As Descartes wrote, “it is very clear that the best path to follow when we philosophize will be to start from the knowledge of God himself and try to deduce an explanation of the things created by him. This is the way to acquire the most perfect scientific knowledge, that is, knowledge of effects through their causes,” a mentality reminiscent of the Stoic moral program found in Galen’s works.¹⁷⁸

Vitalism during the eighteenth century, on the other hand, was derived largely from the work of Swiss physician and devout Calvinist Albrecht Von Haller (1708 – 1777). Haller, along with most of his countrymen, continued to cling to many of the traditional sanctions for the study of science, two of them indicated in Bacon's assertion that the furthest end of natural knowledge was "the

¹⁷⁵ Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society*: 83.

¹⁷⁶ Lindemann, *Medicine and Society*: 83.

¹⁷⁷ Descartes quoted in P. Harrison, "Original Sin and the Problem of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63, no. 2 (2002): 253.

¹⁷⁸ Descartes quoted in Harrison, "Original Sin," 246-47.

glory of the Creator and the relief of man's estate.¹⁷⁹ For Haller, the work of science could contribute to religious thought by supplying irrefutable proofs of God's existence. Variations on the argument from design found particular favor with Haller, as they did with most men of the Enlightenment, from deists to orthodox believers.¹⁸⁰

Although on some questions the stark contrasts that divided mechanists and vitalists gave way as the eighteenth century progressed, divisions in respect to appetite and hunger and the larger study of ingestion and digestion remained strong. While mechanists sought specific structures and identifiable stimuli to explain these phenomena, vitalists referred all phases of digestion—of which appetite and hunger were the first—to the work of an over-arching ‘principle of life’ or to a specific ‘digestive’ or ‘assimilative’ force.”¹⁸¹

Though the concept of appetite, broadly defined as ‘want of [desire for] food’, had been present in medical discourse going back to the Galenic-Hippocratic tradition, namely as a prognostic sign, the greater accessibility of once luxurious foods and drinks and the increasingly sophisticated modes of preparing food provoked debates questioning the nature of appetite in the fields of physiology, empiricist philosophy, and sociomoral theory. At the heart of these debates was not only whether appetite was bodily or mental but also the

¹⁷⁹ Otto Sonntag, "The Motivations of the Scientist: The Self-Image of Albrecht Von Haller," *Isis* 65, no. 3 (1974): 336.

¹⁸⁰ Sonntag, "The Motivations of the Scientist," 338.

¹⁸¹ Elizabeth A. Williams, "Sciences of Appetite in the Enlightenment, 1750-1800," 6.

therapeutic and moral question of whether appetite was under the control of reason, judgment, and will or, instead, a corporal phenomenon functioning largely outside the reach of mental operations.¹⁸²

The Montpellier physician François Boissier de Sauvages presented appetite, along with imagination and judgment, as components of reason and thus classified ills of appetite not with bodily disorders but with those that ‘trouble the reason.’ In his construction, then, these maladies included ills connected to the desire for food and drink but also others associated with desires unrelated to ingestion. Thus some of Sauvages’s troubles of appetite, such as ‘canine hunger’ and ‘bulimia,’ correspond roughly to modern eating disorders, while others were connected to love of one’s homeland, the desire for security, and the sexual appetite.¹⁸³ Most doctors sought to cure the rising occurrences deviant appetites and nervous disorders by instructing the educated public in the basic principles of proper moral and physical hygiene, so that patients might apply those principles to their own sensible constitutions and thus make themselves more fit to fulfill their civil and domestic duties.¹⁸⁴

Charles Vandermonde, a Paris physician inspired by Buffon’s natural history and by a vision of the perfectibility of the human race, argued that the principles of generation and inheritance could be used to counter a natural

¹⁸² Elizabeth A. Williams, "Sciences of Appetite in the Enlightenment, 1750-1800," 2.

¹⁸³ Williams, "Sciences of Appetite in the Enlightenment, 1750-1800," 2.

¹⁸⁴ Anne C. Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology*: 91.

tendency to degeneration.¹⁸⁵ With the guidance of enlightened physicians, parents could take control of posterity by, in effect, designing their progeny. Vandermonde grounded his project explicitly in a theory of organic matter's sensibility and a materialist theory of mind. People could learn to cultivate sensibility by training the senses, which in turn trained the mind. Thus, while care of the body leads to health and physical strength, it can also, via the cultivation of sensibility, strengthen the mind.

For physicians concerned about natural tendencies toward degeneration, and the equal and opposite potential for limitless improvement, the question of diet. Thus, even the 'secular' medical programs, spearheaded by physicians in Paris in the closing decades of the eighteenth century, which "taught doctors to think in terms of local lesions, to use techniques of careful, systematic physical diagnosis, to correlate whenever possible the signs and symptoms observed during the patients life with the changes in his body discoverable at post-mortem examination, and to make use of the large medical experience available through hospitals in more accurate disease descriptions and more careful therapeutic evaluations," at least in part influenced by Christian ascetic ideology. Furthermore

¹⁸⁵ According to Williams, "The nature of appetite was equally crucial to Buffon's delineation of human nature. Human beings also took in senseimpressions that they experienced as agreeable or disagreeable, but the sensory impressions of greatest moment to human activity derived from the more 'elevated' senses of sight, hearing, and especially touch. The distinction Buffon drew between the sensory powers of human and animal was far from being his prime consideration in differentiating human and animal appetite. Man's more complicated and variable appetite differed from the animal primarily because—as with all human actions—its functioning was determined not only by the sensory apparatus but also by the operations of the 'soul.'

they continued to be and directed towards moral formation that coincided with Christian ascetic ideals. The human mind was to be shaped and disciplined morally, purged of distorting influences, and by these means made fit for the formulation of ideas or the reception of sense perceptions.

Into the Nineteenth Century

As demonstrated by the associations between Cheyne and Wesley, both the Anglican Church and independent religious movements in England often turned to the works of medical professionals concerning diet to support their claims for temperance and austerity.

In Germany, most authors engaging in discussions of medical philosophy maintained a belief in God, although not all remained orthodox Christians.¹⁸⁶ German iatro-chemical physician, Christoph Wilhelm Hufeland (1762 – 1836), published several treatises such as *Makrobiotik oder Die Kunst das menschliche Leben zu verlängern* and *The Art of Prolonging Life*, “designed [not] merely for physicians, but for the public in general”¹⁸⁷ to not only “render the life of man more healthful and longer; but also, by exciting his exertions for that purpose, to

¹⁸⁶ Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society*: 86.

¹⁸⁷ Christoph Wilhelm Hufeland, *The Art of Prolonging Life*, trans. Erasmus Wilson (Ticknor, Reed and Fields, 1854), x-xi.

make him better and more virtuous.”¹⁸⁸ The former work, first published in 1797, was so successful that a second edition was released that that same year, and eight official editions (as well as various pirated editions) appearing during his lifetime, along with several translations. His theories were founded on the belief that “the physical man cannot be separated from his higher moral object” and that “physical and moral health are as nearly related as the body and the soul” as “they flow from the same sources.”¹⁸⁹ According to Hufeland, the human body was powered by a life force (*Lebenskraft*) that could be weakened or destroyed, as well as strengthened, by external influences, the most important of which were proper diet and moral living. Contemporary with Hufeland were the endeavors of the romantic poet-scientist Novalis, who attempted to fashion a "magic idealism" combining Christianity, biomedicine and the literary imagination to gain control over the "poetry of life." "Magic idealism" was to have fruitful interactions with empirical and experimental science, especially in organic and medical chemistry.

Physicians from a range of nationalities and schools of medical thought remained fascinated by tales from history, travel literature, religious texts and the medical tradition regarding extraordinary examples of eating behaviors. Such cases often involved people “who starved themselves, first denying and eventually destroying the appetite, especially women who gained notoriety when they

¹⁸⁸ Hufeland, *The Art of Prolonging Life*: xi-xii.

¹⁸⁹ Hufeland, *The Art of Prolonging Life*: xi.

survived long periods without eating, but also men who denied appetite from some motive of ambition or honor.¹⁹⁰

Robert Willan's 1790 medical case study, *A Remarkable Case of Abstinence*, reflects physicians' continued fascination with seemingly miraculous feats of asceticism despite increased tendencies to "pathologize" eating behaviors. Moreover, Willan's attention to the patient's religious convictions as a motivation behind his self-starvation reflects that the subjects of medical inquiry continued to perceive food in spiritual terms, even if medical professionals dismissed their beliefs as superstitious or misguided.¹⁹¹ In his *Case*, Willan described a young man, "of a studious and melancholic turn of mind," who, under the influence of "some mistaken notions in religion," renounced his worldly belongings and business and undertook "a severe course of abstinence" lasting sixty days.¹⁹² During this period, he took only sips of water mixed with minimal amounts of orange juice and "flattered himself that his support was preternatural; and indulged his imagination with the prospect of some great event, which he expected would follow this extraordinary abstinence." He had also "with great diligence put together parallel passages, and traced particular subjects thought the whole scriptures, noting their application in different instances, and adding

¹⁹⁰ Elizabeth A. Williams, "Sciences of Appetite in the Enlightenment, 1750-1800," 9.

¹⁹¹ Raymond A. Mentzer, "Fasting, Piety, and Political Anxiety among French Reformed Protestants," *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture* 76, no. 02 (2007): 334.

¹⁹² Robert Willan, "A Remarkable Case of Abstinence" in *Medical Communications*, ed. Society for Promoting Medical Knowledge (London: Joseph Johnson, 1790).

observations of his own.” A clergyman, who had been called by the patient’s concerned friends to persuade the patient to cease his deadly regimen, remarked that this subject’s biblical commentaries “had proceeded regularly at first, with some ingenuity and judgment; but...afterwards...became obscure, and seemed...lost in endless confusion.”¹⁹³ The clergyman failed to convince the patient of the “fallacy of his visionary ideas,” leading his friends to seek the help of a physician. Ultimately, Willan succeeded in convincing him to adopt a more healthful diet, but noted that he “found him labouring under great imbecility of mind” and believed that he was susceptible to relapse.¹⁹⁴

Even though doctors increasingly avoided the inclusion of explicit religious discourse in their diagnoses, the common expression of spiritual motivations for food-renunciation among patients revealed that perceptions of food conduct as being both “good” or “bad” in a quantitative, nutritional sense and in a Christian moral sense persisted.

The number different disorders of appetite, described in the latter half of the nineteenth century, attests to the increase in food refusal (mostly by women) at this time and the greater care given by physicians to describe syndromes in detail. The careful delineation of signs and symptoms exemplified by Leseque and by Gull are often cited as the first complete medical descriptions of the modern disease of *anorexia nervosa*, although recent scholarship has revealed an earlier

¹⁹³ Willan, "A Remarkable Case," 114-17.

¹⁹⁴ Willan, "A Remarkable Case," 114-17.

comprehensive medical account by the French psychiatrist Marce in 1859.¹⁹⁵

While the French clinical approach to self-starvation cases was influential in developing ‘secular’ attitudes towards eating disorders among medical professionals, many of the scientists engaged in the broader study of nutrition continued to promote overtly Christian programs. Much of the early work in human physiology, which formed the basis of nutritional science, was undertaken at German universities, where religious sentiments remained strong. These institutions were also considered to be training grounds for others from England and America.¹⁹⁶

Among the Americans who studied the nutritional experiments of the German scientists, Wilbur Atwater (1844-1907), a professor at Wesleyan University during the mid-nineteenth century, is often regarded as the father of modern nutrition through his work on human metabolism.¹⁹⁷ Regarding the purpose of his work, Atwater explained, “the true Anti-poverty Society is the Society of ‘Toil, Thrift and Temperance’. One of the articles of its constitution demands that the principles of intelligent economy shall be learned by patient study and followed in daily life. Of the many worthy ways in which the charity we shall call Christian is being exercised, none seems to me more worthy of appellation than the movement in industrial education of which teaching the

¹⁹⁵ Jules R. Bemporad, "Self-Starvation through the Ages: Reflections on the Pre-History of Anorexia Nervosa," *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 19, no. 3 (1996): 411.

¹⁹⁶ John Coveney, *Food, Morals and Meaning : The Pleasure and Anxiety of Eating*: 72.

¹⁹⁷ Coveney, *Food, Morals and Meaning : The Pleasure and Anxiety of Eating*: 73.

daughters of working-people how to do housework and how to select food and cook it forms a part,” Reflecting the extent to which Christian morality and the science of nutrition had become intertwined.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ Atwater quoted in Coveney, *Food, Morals and Meaning : The Pleasure and Anxiety of Eating*: 75.

Conclusion

By introducing the concept of an ‘ideal diet’ based on quantitative statistics, the developing science of nutrition provided an additional lens through which early modern people could conceptualize the Christian problematization of the relationship between food, the body, and the soul. Within Christian traditions, a healthy, pure body, uncorrupted by excess and functioning as nature had intended, was both an outward manifestation of one’s interior, spiritual fortitude and a vehicle through which one could appreciate the glory of God’s divine creation. Since antiquity, Christian thinkers have embraced the study of medicine and the natural world as contributing to the pursuit of divine truths and the spiritual perfectibility of man.

The ways in which early Christians applied Greco-Roman medical philosophies in their interpretations of the Hebrew Bible established asceticism as a central aspect of Christian identity. During the Middle Ages, abstinence for spiritual purposes continued to be lauded as admirable and was common practice among monastic movements. For the majority of medieval peoples, however, the uncertainty of food supplies prevented them from engaging in the type sustained,

voluntary, regimented fasts expounded in the works of the Church Fathers. Consequently, the dietary practices of laypeople and even the lesser clergy were much-attenuated versions of the ideals of fasting and abstinence put forward by canon lawyers and theologians. As an alternative to an ascetic lifestyle, common people expressed their devotion through symbolic acts of abstinence, such as abstaining from meat on Fridays. During the Middle Ages, the proliferation of both popular tales and official Church documents concerning the miraculous extended fasts of mystic saints revealed that the spiritual power associated with food renunciation and self-denial had great influence over popular attitudes towards fasting.

While the Catholic Church continued to promote fasting as a form of penance and devotion throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Protestant reformers' message that "the life of the godly ought to be tempered with frugality and sobriety lead to an increased emphasis on the body as an arena for spiritual self-fashioning in the context of everyday life."¹⁹⁹

Throughout all of these periods, medical and religious authorities often worked together to advance their personal beliefs or those of the religious movements with which they were affiliated. Theological and scientific works promoted moderation, often bordering on austerity, towards food and drink as the most effective means by which to attain physical and emotional health, although

¹⁹⁹ Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2: 611.

the exact standards of what qualified as an ascetic regimen varied according to contemporary medical thought.

Over the course of sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the advances in physiology, anatomy, chemistry, and mechanics that established causal connections between diet, weight, health and physical appearance, coupled with the persisting Christian conception of a fit body as a tool of righteousness, lead to the nineteenth and twentieth-century perception of bodyweight as a connecting term between physical ideals and spiritual superiority.

Therefore, the lack of overt religious belief among the vast number of individuals engaged in weight loss regimens today should not be interpreted as indicative of the ‘secularization’ of attitudes towards food and the body. Food renunciation, even when undertaken primarily for cosmetic or health reasons, is a spiritual practice, as even the most conscious atheist may entertain notions about the potential for self-discipline and greater moral virtue achieved in controlling food intake, implicitly associating fatness with sin and inferiority, and thinness with strength and purity.

Although pre-modern lifestyles and religious convictions seem inapplicable to present-day popular culture’s fixation with weight-watching and physical appearance, modern dietary practices may be perceived as both scientific and spiritual, or ethically conscientious, behaviors that reflect the Christian moral programs of early medical attempts to understand the emotional and physical effects of diet. Accordingly, the continued presence of a Christian ascetic

mentality in Western society ensures that the body can still participate in symbolization and bear values similar to those found in pre-modern religious contexts.

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