

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: PURITY AND VEGETARIANISM

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Sociology has tended to neglect areas like food, regarding them as trivial, of little sociological interest, belonging to a domestic sub-world of the mundane and unimportant. It is assumed in the face of anthropology's interest in these matters that primitive societies are by their natures so limited in content and sophistication that food preparation bears a role which it lacks in advanced societies. Part of my argument will be to show that this is not the case; modern societies are not devoid of this symbolism. Furthermore I hope to show that these symbolic operations that are acted out and have their power at the domestic level - for example the power to bind people together in primary relationships, in commensality - are also linked to the widest ideas about the nature of humanity and of society; how in fact there are congruences between the structure of the ideas at the different levels.

Much of social life revolves around meals - they structure the day. The presentation and character of the food has the capacity to sum up and transmit a social situation - its duration, its character, the expectations of behaviour that are attached to it (1). It conveys a message. Food patterns encode social structure. At a higher level, ideas about the nature of things or of social life can be made concrete in the pattern of food.

I am also concerned to show how features of the physical world of nature can be taken up, developed and given meaning as part of a larger scheme of ideas, and thus woven into culture. We can take two examples from the world

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of food. Vegetarians make much play of the physical propensity of meat for corruption and it is true that vegetables offer by comparison very little danger of food poisoning. But vegetarians then go on to regard meat literally as rotting matter, sometimes equating it directly with excrement. Through metaphorical transformations this rottenness as a quality of food becomes rottenness in other senses: the corruption in human relations or of the state for example. A physiological quality is thus taken up and made a part of a much larger scheme concerning the nature of impurity generally. It is not that the scheme originates in this material reality of meat; rather it is a feature that can be made to fit, it is useful, it opens up another expressive area. This is very much thinking in the style of Lévi-Strauss's *bricoleur* (2). Not all features of food are taken up, however. For example whisky is a sweet drink. It is however a masculine drink, and so its sweetness is overridden, for sweetness both as a taste preference and as a feature of character is thought to belong to women. The pattern of the meaning is selective. It is in this sense that I want to show how food can be in Lévi-Strauss's words: 'good(s) to think with as well as good(s) to eat'. Lévi-Strauss would argue that the ambiguities of Nature/Culture form the central puzzle to which man addresses himself, through myths, or ritual, or other forms of ordering or explaining. Eating forms a crucial arena for this because it is a direct taking in of nature into ourselves, so that it actually becomes us. Vegetarianism is certainly much concerned with this, though I would argue that this is ultimately, in the vegetarian system, subsidiary to a more central concern with the status of the body and the meaning of purity.

It is important to understand that this thinking is not primarily carried out at the level of formal, rational argument, though vegetarians do at times present portions of their arguments - usually the ethical aspect - in this more academic, philosophical form. Vegetarianism contains a strong experiential dimension; it is thinking through actions and objects as well as through theories and concepts. Certain words in the system bear a particularly heavy emotional loading - for example wholeness, natural, pure, goodness - and when applied to food have a meaning that goes far beyond simple description. Such words play a key role, slipping over from one context to another, linking and validating, underwriting and building up congruences at different levels. Take for example 'wholeness'. Whole food is food that contains the whole grain. But the word is imbued with much more. Associated within the vegetarian

milieu are also ideas of psychic wholeness. There are the associations with holistic medicine which aims to treat the whole body (rather than the partial, instrumental intervention of modern drug therapy) or the whole body and spirit (with all the ideas of the unity of mind and body and the role of the psychological in physical ailments and characteristics that that implies). In their ecological interests there is again the emphasis on the whole. We find it crowned in ideas of the unity of all living creatures (central in arguments concerning the evil of inflicting suffering on animals); and above all in the cosmic union of man and nature, and in the belief that the summation of religion and philosophy lies in holism and immanence. All these different meanings are to some extent allowed to collapse into one another, yet without losing their distinctness in context.

Certain features are brought into prominence in the context of one argument, or explanation, or expression of feeling, but then allowed to fade out in another. There are logical inconsistencies in any ideology that attempts to make sense of these sort of dilemmas, and vegetarianism is a system that works as much by feeling and symbolizing as by the more superficial operations of logic. This is characteristic of many religious or similar ideologies where analysis aiming at logical consistency in doctrine does great violence to the real significance of the body of beliefs and attitudes whose ambiguities and elisions are the source of its richness and power to generate meaning. I want to argue, using one of the central vegetarian themes - that of nature and the natural - that these illogicalities and ambiguities are in fact negotiated by means of an underlying structure, and that the unity that can be felt so strongly in the various strands of vegetarianism and its recurrent associations is a unity present at a deeper level. The basic structure recurs: at the level of the presentation and character of the food, in ideas about food, in parallel interests and causes, and in grander theories about the nature of humanity and existence.

For reasons of space and clarity I have been forced in this article to simplify and generalize. I have omitted, for example, discussion of how the central structure has been adapted to the particular concerns of different historical periods and groups; for I have concentrated, rather, on drawing out some of the persistent underlying themes that hold together the ideology. The vegetarian movement for the purpose of this study is confined to Great Britain. No cross-cultural statements are implied (although there are

important parallels and links with Germany and America, the centres of the other significant western vegetarian movements). Indian vegetarianism is not included, except in so far as contact with Indian religion from the 1880s onwards stimulated and reinforced the British movement. Though Indian and western vegetarianism share certain central ideas, these are worked through within very different structures. For example, one crucial difference is that whereas in India vegetarianism and pollution are used to underwrite the elaborate social hierarchy of caste, and are thus fully part of social structure, in the west vegetarianism is strongly associated with an egalitarian, anti-structural ethic. The period covered starts in the early nineteenth century when vegetarianism as a movement first emerged.

It is one of the most characteristic features of vegetarianism that it rarely occurs alone, but comes in conjunction with a complex of other beliefs, attitudes and parallel movements. These associations are strong, but not necessary, both in the sense that they are not an inherent part of the definition of vegetarianism, thus neither an interest in communal living nor a support for nuclear disarmament are themselves implied by an abstinence from meat; and in that, not *all* vegetarians need to espouse these parallel interests. However, what vegetarianism as it were 'goes with' is as important in any understanding of the movement as its more intrinsic features. Similarly while there are, analytically, two major strands in the vegetarian argument, stemming either from the rejection of cruelty to animals, or from ideas of health, it is in fact rare to find a vegetarian who would support only one aspect. Much more significant is the way in which the arguments are experienced as being part of a greater unity. The word vegetarian here, therefore, is of necessity a fluid and inclusive term, designed to describe this unity as much as to define a set of beliefs, or fix a category. Attempts to formulate a clear category particularly where regulated by the rational development of central premisses, cannot cope well with these optional associations or tendencies towards sympathy with, and only serve to expose the point that these diversities are linked by an affinity existing at a deeper structural level.

Lastly, if I seem to have ignored the more straightforward aspects of vegetarianism - its refusal to accept the suffering of animals, and its crusades against inhumanity in all forms; its economic arguments exposing the wastefulness of meat production and the exploitative aspects of

the world economy; and the vindication of some of their medical ideas in the emerging association between disease and the eating of excess animal products and over-refined food - this is not to underestimate their importance. This article does not attempt to give a full account of vegetarianism, but aims rather to explore some recurrent features and show how they embody transformations of a basic structure.

However, before we can examine the theme of the natural, we must look at the meaning more generally of eating meat, for it is in the context of the wider structured relationship between the different food categories that the full meaning of vegetarianism reveals itself. What we have is a hierarchy of foods, both in terms of status and of a certain power. At the top, highest in status, we have the red meats - roast beef - lower in status are the bloodless animal meats - chicken, fish - and below them we have the animal products - cheese, eggs. These are sufficiently high in the hierarchy to support a meal being formed around them, though they are confined to lower-status events - the omelette or cheese flan of light lunch or supper. Below these we have the vegetables, regarded as insufficient and merely ancillary in the dominant scheme (3). If we look at the top of the scale, we see that the highest in status also approaches the nearest the taboo. This is a familiar theme in anthropology, that which is most sacred, most highly prized, can by virtue of the strength of its power be the most defiling. Blood plays a special role here, which is reiterated in the vegetarian version of this hierarchy, for despite their expressed principle of rejecting fish, flesh and fowl equally, the central imagery of vegetarianism revolves around red meat - steak dripping with blood is where the revulsion is focused (4). Blood is the vital fluid; it has long been believed to carry the special essence of the person or the animal - noble blood, tainted blood. But blood is also a peculiarly polluting substance, a symbol of supernatural power or of some disjunction or crime. It has a strange emotional impact; people faint at the sight of it. We find that the blood in meat is associated with virility, strength, aggression, power. These ideas are shared by vegetarians and non-vegetarians alike, though they differ over the exact definition and valuation of the qualities. Part of the central meaning of red meat is sexuality: meat as flesh, as the flesh, as fleshly delights, as carnality. Meat is thought, quite wrongly, to be necessary for strength and virility - think of the lily-livered (again the blood) picture that vegetarians find imposed upon them in anti-vegetarian

HIERARCHY OF STATUS AND POTENCY

TOO STRONG

TABOO

uncastrated animals
carniverous animals

raw meat

Dominant Culture Boundary

STRONG

POWERFUL:
BLOOD

red meat

roasted joints
stewed meat

COOKING NECESSARY

LESS POWERFUL:
NON BLOOD

chicken
fish

roasted
boiled (invalid)
grilled
poached (invalid)

Vegetarian Boundary

LESS STRONG

ANIMAL PRODUCTS

eggs
cheese

fried
poached (invalid)
cooked, as a dish
grated, raw

COOKING INCREASES
STATUS OF FOOD

Vegan Boundary

Vegetarian version of vegetable categories

MOST FULL
OF LIFE

VEGETABLES

fruit
leaf vegetables,
above
root vegetables,
below
cereals

fruit
nuts
grains
leaf vegetables
root vegetables

RAWNESS
FAVoured
(VEGETARIAN
VERSION)

TOO WEAK

MOST KILLING
TO PLANT

Note: This diagram outlines only one dimension of food categories

writing, where they can be presented as feeble and querulous.

The eating of animals is an ingestion of animal nature. Blood as we have seen is associated with the living essence of the animal, so that in eating it we feed our animal nature, and this is the source of a certain ambivalence, for dominant culture prizes the characteristics of red bloodedness - strength, aggression, sexuality, passion - but in a qualified way. Enough and not too much is the essence of its attitude to this power. Cooking plays a crucial role here. Lévi-Strauss has argued that it is through cooking that man asserts he is not a wild beast but a civilized social being. Thus western society does not eat raw meat; tearing at an animal's flesh with one's teeth is one of our images of horror, suited to monsters or to semi-humans. If we eat meat, it is only after the disguising transformation of cooking has brought raw animal nature into the realm of culture, so that the strength and the power has been modified and tamed (5). Vegetarians point out that the need of dominant culture to cook animal flesh, and the development of a separate vocabulary for this food - meat not flesh or bodies, pork not pig etc. - argues for an underlying unease and guilt over eating animals (6).

This nearness to animality underlies the crowning status given to roasted joints. Roasting is a form of cooking that leaves the meat partly raw, and joints resemble their animal origins far more closely than do the stewed forms of meat. Certain categories of people - invalids and babies - are deemed too vulnerable to cope with this red bloodedness and so they eat further down the hierarchy both in terms of food and cooking style; this is the 'low diet' of boiled chicken, steamed fish, poached eggs.

The taboos in dominant culture reiterate the underlying significance of the pattern. We do not, for example, eat carnivores; this is not nutritionally dictated, other cultures do. I would argue that animals that eat animals are like a double dose, too much of a good thing. Similarly we do not, by and large, eat uncastrated beasts. The meat from boars and bulls has traditionally been regarded as tainted, though recent tests have shown it to be wholesome and economic (7).

The vegetarians also display evidence of this hierarchy. It is a commonplace in the process of becoming a vegetarian that you give up first the red meat, then the poultry, then fish etc., until if you become a vegan, you restrict yourself

to the category that lies furthest from the ambivalent animal power (8). There is a fear present in dominant culture, which becomes more acute in vegetarianism, that the ingestion of animals will break down the constructed barrier between men and the beasts. The eating of animal flesh according to the vegetarians increases the animality in man. From its early days organized vegetarianism has believed that to eat meat is both to take in the substance of animality and to behave as an animal: 'If...we wish to become carnivorous, ferocious and unclean in our dispositions, practices and desires let us, by all means, follow the dietetic example of those animals which are carnivorous, ferocious and unclean' (9). These feelings focus on the blood: 'Blood is perhaps the most objectionable form of nutriment: flesh being principally composed of blood is next to it in its gross, stimulating and exciting qualities' (10). Vegetarianism has been much concerned with the reduction and control of the 'passions'. The passions represent man's lower bodily nature, that stands in opposition to rational, spiritual, moral man (11). The sexual undercurrent is frequently present, and at times becomes quite explicit, for example in the numerous books that appeared in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with titles like *Better Food for Boys*, offering vegetarian diet as the 'greatest aide we can give boys in the fight against self abuse' (12).

The association of vegetarianism with sexual control has a long history in the west that stretches back before the period being studied to the Pythagoreans and above all to the influence of Manichaeism. The Manichaeism tradition is one of radical dualism. Flesh is totally evil, all nature is corruption and the only aim is the cessation of human existence. In so far as one does eat (and Manichaeism properly implies starvation) vegetarian food is the nearest one can get to the rejection of all flesh in the rejection of flesh food. The theme continues in the modified form of monastic abstinence and Friday fasting, in which the rules, though they vary, reiterate the hierarchy outlined above (13). The underlying idea embodied in this tradition is of the subduing of the flesh, the rejection of the body in favour of the spirit. This raises certain problems when we turn to modern vegetarianism. There are important similarities, particularly the concern with purity and spirituality, between modern vegetarianism and this strain of dualism, and vegetarianism does have a strongly puritanical strain in its history; and yet it is a movement that is centrally concerned with physical well-being. Vegetarians are the pioneers of sunbathing, walking in the mountains, yoga. They glorify bodily health and at times

interpret salvation in terms of it. Health becomes a concept imbued with religious awe. Vegetarianism also has a very strong ethic of Wholeness and Oneness; the movement is deeply entwined with the transcendentalist religious tradition, with Emerson and Thoreau, with Theosophy, with Trine, and with what is in an important sense, its extension in the contemporary ethos of the Glastonbury vibrations. The resolution of this apparent conflict lies in their concept of wholeness, which is best understood by means of their idea of nature.

The vegetarian attitude to meat does echo Mary Douglas's thesis that it is in ambiguity that impurity arises. The vegetarians choose to eat far away from the ambivalent animal power. But there is a deeper ambiguity present. Vegetarians do not eat meat because it makes you one in substance and action with animal nature, it stokes the fires of an abhorrent animality. But vegetarians also reject meat because we are one with nature and thus to do so is cannibalistic and horrible. Vegetarians have an ambiguous attitude to nature (14): they both fear it and desire to be one with it. How they resolve this tension can be seen in the picture of nature they construct. This is achieved by means of three stages.

We start with a conception of human nature as basically good. We can illustrate this from the Swedenborgian and other similarly optimistic religious traditions with which vegetarianism is associated, in which there is no stress on original sin, and mankind is fully in the image of the divine. Or alternatively if we look at the ethical socialists, there is the same belief in man as essentially good, true and co-operative. The New Age writing of the counter culture is also strongly optimistic (15). The gross, cruel and above all aggressive aspects are not really part of our fundamental natures, but are engendered by a distorting society and a distorted way of eating - the carnivorous. It is not so much that the undesirable features of humanity are controlled or channelled as actually reduced or eliminated by the effects of the diet. They are not fully part of mankind; they are the dross in the true metal.

At the second stage this picture is projected out on to nature, and nature is in effect moralized. If we look at two of the most important of the vegetarian arguments - that based on ethical considerations, and that appealing to the idea of the natural - it is clear that they in fact pull two ways. The ethical argument rests on the assertion of the central importance of mankind's moral sense, and humanity

is directly associated with this capacity to act according to ethical principles, so that implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, we are set apart from the beasts, and no moral issues are raised by their actions. Yet at the same time there is the argument of the natural which stresses mankind's oneness with the animal kingdom. What the vegetarians do, in effect, is to declare that goodness is natural.

There is, for example, a selection among the animals; the ones that come to the fore at these times tend to be those that embody the images of gentleness and innocence. The carnivores do not make much of an appearance, and where they do, they tend to forget their habits or even to assert that they too were once vegetarian. This is how a vegetarian Alsatian - something often featured in vegetarian magazines - can be regarded as not unnatural; and this sort of revision is not seen as any violation of its essential nature. Thus even these animals can be brought into a picture of nature as essentially harmonious and beneficent. Nature is not presented as a vast canvas of death and predation. Nature rather is largeness, the eternal harmony of the stars, the round of the seasons. There is a strong pantheistic element in vegetarianism; nature is a source of redemptive power and contact with it is prized. Thus we find the emphasis on gardening and growing that has been characteristic of the vegetarian counter culture. The flight to farms in the Welsh hills, or attempts to bring rural life into the cities in the form of urban farms display this deep feeling for organic contact with the land. Herbalism represents both a return to a gathering relationship with nature, and ideas of the guiding benevolence of nature, which has provided and even 'signed' the plants for our cure. Nature is seen as containing messages and truths of deep emotional impact, and thus we find connected with vegetarianism a revival in interest in attempts to read it, either through the mystic patterns of field systems or trackways, or through magical skills like dowsing, or through astrology. Nature is a framework of meaning, not just an alien object for our regard or exploitation. This is the significance of the deep hostility of the counter culture to science. The triumph of the scientific world view is seen as producing a tragic fracturing of consciousness; and by living in modern society we have been driven to adopt its objective, calculating and ultimately manipulative approach to the natural world.

At the third stage this picture of harmonized nature is projected back on to mankind and used to criticize the social. Society is identified with falseness; it is artificial, inauthentic and distorting. Humanity is regarded

as having a *pre-social, social self* that is natural to it and good. Vegetarianism, 'the natural diet of man', is part of this. Cooking as we have seen is intimately bound up with civilization; it is the means whereby raw nature is transformed in culture. Vegetarianism reverses this and embraces rawness; not only does it confine itself to the produce that can be eaten raw, but great stress is placed in the ideology on raw food. Vegetarian food is 'natural' because, unlike meat, it comes to us directly in the category of food - we pluck it from the trees. Nature is presented as superior to culture; for example it is frequently asserted, wrongly, that animals never kill their own species, nor do they kill more than they need to eat, and these natural habits are held up against mankind's notorious record of murder and destruction. War is not just wrong, but unnatural. Nature thus becomes the ultimate standard of legitimacy, and we get all sorts of paradoxical concepts like natural shoes, natural soap, natural manners.

The dilemma of what can properly be natural to man, in a social sense, is solved by the constructed yardstick of moralized nature. Man projects his aspirations out on to nature, and then uses it to judge and condemn society. It is a system that works essentially by extraction. William James's comment on the religion of healthy-mindedness applies here: 'The ideal, so far from being co-extensive with the whole actual is a mere extract from the actual, marked by its deliverance from all contact from this diseased, inferior and excrementitious stuff' (16).

This brings us to the central concept of wholeness. It is clearest in the food, though the word permeates the vegetarian system. It is in the wholeness of potatoes mashed with their skins, in the unpeeled chopped fruit, in the whole brown rice. It is in the surroundings of the vegetarian restaurants; the rough pottery, the unbleached wood, the coarse fibres of the materials. Vegetarianism reverses the long tradition that has favoured refinement, artifice and polish both in artefacts and food, and embraces natural wholeness and rawness. If we look at bread or sugar, we see how the previously prized 'purest white sugar' and 'finest white bread' are replaced by the whole brown grain and dark, unrefined sugar. The language of purity however is retained and even strengthened. This appears paradoxical according to the old system. The answer however lies in the prior selection. The rejection of meat forms a boundary around the pure, within which the ethic of wholeness is unassailed. What we have in vegetarianism is a monistic system, and like all monistic systems it suffers from the

lack of what might be called a satanic principle. An ethic of naturalness must struggle inevitably with disjunctions, for where 'natural' and 'goodness' are equated there are serious difficulties in understanding the painful and undesirable aspects of life. This is even more of a problem in a system that emphasises the One and the Whole. It negotiates these by means of the prior extraction. *You can take the whole because all is safely pure: the disjunctions, defined as unreal, have been placed outside the system.*

It is not only against the impurity of meat that the purity of wholefoods is contrasted, for as important, especially in the modern alternative scene, is the rejection of trash foods, through which the concepts of *impurity and unreality* are strongly linked. Trash foods are false, denatured, reconstituted, coloured, flavoured and emulsified. They deprave our tastes with their lurid colours and sugared contents, and lead us away from reality to the falseness and slickness of corrupted society. They exemplify the distorting and malignant power of big capitalism and the multinationals who dominate the food industry, peddling fake food to cater for falsified needs. The concept of the manipulation of wants by capitalist society draws strength from the influence of the New Left on the counter culture, but it also looks back to the conception of the pre-social social self with its real needs which are distorted and disguised by the surface satisfactions of consumer society. Trash food is alienated food; it is processed TV dinners for processed mass culture. It is just given to you, it is not of you. Wholefoods, by contrast, demand time and effort in preparation; they restore your active involvement, and this gives them a special reality and worth. They are fully part of your life. This feeling also underwrites the interest in craft work which represents both an escape from the dominance of consumer-style production, and, most important, an extension of the self in creative labour - a recovery of work as meaningful occupation. Texture also underwrites the political message. Wholefoods are granular, coarsely chopped, fibrous. You are required to chew your rice. Trash foods are pre-digested, pappy, super-whippy - food for a slave culture (17).

It is crucial in the understanding of the vegetarian movement to appreciate that it offers a this-worldly form of salvation in terms of the body. It is a purity movement, but one that operates fully through the concept of the pure body. We can understand this through the symbolic reversal that is achieved in the language of alive and dead. Vegetarians employ the terms alive and dead in ways that

reverse the normal usage and, most important, reverse the opposition on which their explicit ideology rests. They do not eat living things, and yet we find them referring to meat as dead and vegetarian food as alive. Vegetarian food is vibrant, full of a sort of mana which comes from the life force of nature (18). It is alive, but in a special way; it is alive as the universe is alive, it floods through the body bringing life and strength to it, so that by eating this food, you are filled with the same life as the trees, the plants, the waving grain; and all the harmonic images of nature come into play. This feeling is exemplified in Findhorn, which with its giant, life-filled vegetables, had a tremendous following in vegetarian circles (19). Eileen Caddy writes of the vegetarian diet in a passage that reiterated the characteristic images of purification and rising:

We were told that we were purifying the atomic structure of our bodies, transforming the dense physical substance into light and lightness that would be more receptive to absorbing energies from the sun, sea and air....Previously we had thought of food in terms of calories or energy needed for maintaining solid physical bodies. Now we are told what actually nourished us was a more subtle energy. Through our diet we were absorbing the light that made the vegetables and fruit grow - the light of the sun and the light of our consciousness. Our bodies were becoming light (20).

Meat by contrast represents dead food. Vegetarians repeatedly refer to eating meat as eating corpses. It builds up dead matter in you; the poison fills the system. This poison can be bad vibrations believed to adhere in meat (sometimes from the movements of horror in the slaughterhouse), or in more material versions, the decomposition believed to be in meat (21). The concern, however, remains the same: the ingestion of dead animals is an ingestion of death itself. Vegetarianism stands for the rejection of bodily death, for meat eating represents the unresolved contradiction of that which was alive, yet now being dead, and as such presages one's own death and decomposition.

Behind vegetarianism, even of the most explicitly secular version, is the image of re-establishing Eden, on this earth, now (22). Eden represents a state of harmony, in which all the central disjunctions of life are absent, and it is precisely the disjunctions that vegetarianism dreams of eradicating. It is a state of non-time, and as such stands in opposition to the meat-eating realm, dominated

by the symbols of procreation and passion, death and decay that are written into meat. This is how meat can be both too alive, too stimulating to animal nature, and yet also be symbolic of death and decay. There is a clear image of youthfulness in vegetarianism that draws its roots from this Edenic rejection of death. We can see this in the iconoclastic attitude to social rules, the alliance with radical movements for change. Vegetarianism is a movement of the sons, not of the fathers. This association with youthfulness has reached the popular mind also. Recent articles on health and the care of the body - the burden of whose message is always the retention of youth and attractiveness - have taken up vegetarian ideas. There is something about fruit juice and raw carrot that is thought to keep away death and age.

What is spoken of as the 'life' in vegetarian food represents the soul, the eternal, ever-living spirit. But the idea of spirit is emphatically of this world; it is a spiritual body that is being stressed, not a disembodied spirit. They are not aiming at the repression of the body, quite the reverse. Vegetarianism is closely linked with the numerous alternative movements that deny the Cartesian tradition of dualism and assert the unity of mind and body, emphasizing bodily expression and feeling. Unfortunately there is no space here to do justice to the ways in which the meaning of sexuality has altered in the history of vegetarianism. Broadly, what has happened is that the realm of wholeness and purity has expanded to include elements of sexuality, which are no longer quite so simply associated (as they are in the earlier period of vegetarianism), with the gross, unreal and disjunctive aspects of being. There is however - as always with vegetarianism - a certain selection and tidying up at work; and it is an approved, serious-minded version of sex, one associated with deep feeling and realization, that has tended to cross the boundary (23).

There is a strong link with movements like yoga, and in the ideology we find the same characteristic language of lightness and clarification in the body. The aim is an intense consciousness, but one that is fully in the body. Where there is a religious link, it tends to be with immanentist, this-worldly form of mysticism.

There is often present in vegetarianism to some extent an anxiety about eating, that relates to this image of the pure body. There is a fear of taking into the body something nasty or impure. There are parallels in some of the other

concerns; anti-vaccination, for example, is a hostility to the injection of poison. The purity of the body is sometimes given a direct physiological expression. Vegetarian corpses, it is asserted, do not rot as do those of carnivores, nor is their excrement offensive like that of meat-eating humans or dogs (24). In some of the naturo-pathic treatments - hydropathy, for example - there is the idea of the washing away of impurity from the body. At times even the processes of digestion are seen as alien, taxing to the system; so that the body under total fast is restored to a pure state.

What vegetarianism presents therefore is a risen, Blakean picture of the body, an immortal, youthful temple of the spirit. Vegetarians have always expressed a revulsion against physical grossness, which they link with the greasy fatness of meat dishes. Vegetarianism substitutes for the heavy, carnal, meat-fed body, that for them epitomizes the realm of death and decay, a spiritual, vegetable-fed body that rises and sloughs off the unreality of corruption.

We can now look at two other themes - those of non-structure, and of newness, apartness and boundaries - and show briefly how they display the same underlying structure. Once again this raises the fundamental conception of mankind present. Briefly, individuals are regarded as having a basic personality and character (there are parallels here with the pre-social social nature). Society and its manners are regarded as distorting and wrong; something imposed on individuals and not seen as having any positive creative influence on them. It is a strongly egalitarian ideology; social structure is identified with divisiveness and exploitation. We can observe this in the socialist political links, recurrently from the co-operatives, to the early Fabians, the Labour Churches, Tolstoyan anarchists, the ILP (25). Vegetarianism belongs to the ethical and utopian wing of socialism that rejects class war in favour of brotherhood, and sees revolution as being achieved primarily in men's and women's hearts (26). The classic criticism of this strand in socialism is, precisely, that it is deficient in an understanding of structure. There are - significantly - few Marxist vegetarians.

We can observe this also at the level of dress. The rational dress movement attacked both the conspicuous consumption of elaborate and restricting clothes (27), and the use of clothes both as an indicator of social hierarchy and as part of an elaborate structuring of the day and week. The vegetarian naturist link celebrates freedom and

openness - the sun and wind on the body - away from the constraints of society. It is also non-structural in a second sense of being against the structured eroticism of clothes. Ideas of modesty work both ways; what is hidden is also enhanced and, significantly, defined. The naturist ideology attempts to equalize and de-structure all experience and appearance. Once again it presents the pure body - often using the argument that nakedness was in fact purer than the false prudery of clothes.

The ethic of non-structure comes out also in the attacks on formal categories in relationships, for example in the rules that define and distance people as spouses/parents/friends/acquaintances. Vegetarian children are often brought up to call their parents by their first names. In a similar vein, if we look at the communes, their conception of interrelationships is also deconstructed. Abrams and McCulloch in their study of modern communes had difficulty in eliciting any typifications from respondents; theirs - the respondents - was an approach that rejected any social analysis, and substituted, where any account was given, an opaque language of being and feeling that rejected any conception of structure or hierarchy that would mediate self or relatedness, and stressed, rather, felt and lived experience (28). Friendship provides the model for relationships. There is often a rejection of the closed ethic of romantic love which provides the special area for affective relationships in contrast to cooler and more detached friendships, and a substitution of a more open ethic that includes pair bonds and friends in an intense ideal of loving friendship. Sex thus should not be confined by social structure (that is, marriage) but becomes a more general aspect of free and full relating.

This ideology of immediate, structureless and un-negotiated intimacy comes from the picture of human nature as pure and good in reality, for where this is the case there are no problems in relating fully and totally to people, and social structures are experienced as barriers. Systems that do not eradicate the, as it were, impurity attempt to cope with it by structuring the conflicts and stresses that are regarded as endemic.

This ideology we can find written into the style of the food itself. Vegetarian restaurants are rarely places of waiters, of menus structured into courses, of candles, of dressed-up evenings out. They are informal, with trays, benches and predominantly a lunch-time atmosphere. Vegetarian dishes themselves resemble the lunch or supper

dishes - the unstressed, informal meals - of conventional cookery. A conventional meat meal is highly structured and centres around a single high-status item, like roast beef or chicken, that gives its name to the course and which is supported by grades of lower-status items - the vegetables. By contrast vegetarian food is typically chopped up, mixed together, undifferentiated; it is destructured. It implies an egalitarian redefinition of the lowly foods; for example, rice from being a mere fattening fill-you-up becomes, especially for the vegan, a central source of food value. Thus the style of eating becomes a daily repudiation of the world of hierarchy and power epitomized in meat.

Vegetarians can aim at unstructured states because of the prior structuring involved in extraction. Furthermore, the boundary around the pure acts as an external and unofficial structure; and this leads us to the last theme, which is that of newness, apartness and boundaries.

Vegetarianism is quintessentially about renewal. It has been consistently involved in the recurrent attempts to establish the good, saved, pure society; it has been associated with all the major reform movements from anti-slavery, pacifism, penal reform, women's rights, CND, and with most of the major utopias, underpinning attempts to create the New Age from Owenism, to Whiteway, to the Aquarian Age. There have been vegetarians at the head of the great humanitarian crusades, leading the fight against the cruelty and exploitation meted out to both animals and men.

Vegetarianism is about the New Life (the words recur in the titles of journals and articles). This is a fundamental aspect in their attitude to illness and their association with nature cure, which stresses the importance of a change in the style of life of the patient, away from the bad habits that have caused or exposed the patient to stress or illness and towards a more positively healthy life. A vegetarian diet is frequently a part of this new start. Vegetarianism implies a repudiation of the old ways in society also; an end to Old Corruption and the coming of the New Moral Order. It rejects the rule of tradition by attacking the most traditional of patterns - those relating to eating - replacing them with rules based on the application of critical reasoning and conscience to life. Thus the change to the vegetarian diet becomes a daily reiteration of commitment to these values of reform, and a freeing of the self from bonds of accepting tradition. At a more explicit level vegetarianism involves the rejection of the roast-beef

symbolism of traditional conservatism. The sense of newness is written into the food itself; fresh raw food, not the decomposed (cooked) or semi-rotten (meat) food of conventional cooking.

Vegetarianism acts as a boundary around the new community of the saved, and this is especially apparent through its persistent link with utopias and communes. Meals have a special importance in binding people together. They underwrite the most primary of social relationships. Meals bind by the assumption of unity written into them. With and through the food we ingest also the social situation, so that a concern over the purity of the food is a concern over the purity of the company also. Meals have a capacity to symbolize a relationship, to make it manifest in concrete objects and actions and to do this in such a way that the symbolic pattern acts back on the individuals and moulds their consciousness of themselves in relation to the others. All common meals take the symbolic form of a circle (reiterated in the enclosing bowls in which vegetarian food is served) that exemplifies the pattern of in and out; but in the case of vegetarianism this pattern has an added force, for it rests on a further symbolic dichotomy lying in the food itself. Vegetarian imagery is strong with its emphasis on the corrupt nature of meat and blood. It provokes revulsion against the fleshly world at the same time as imposing restraints on social contacts with it. Thus the social relations of in and out are energized by a vivid ideology. This ideology has a special affinity with the commune movement because of their ethic of anti-structure which rejects social structure in favour of free process, and intellectualizing in favour of doing. Categorization is still present however, but in the submerged form of the experience of the common meal. The power to create primary relations that are binding and compulsory in a Durkheimian sense has a special importance where, as is the case in the communes, the people involved come together on the basis of individual choice. Vegetarianism thus becomes a way of choosing to be bound; it is both a product of choice and an antidote to it.

This question of boundaries extends beyond the closed group of the commune, for vegetarianism also acts as a cognitive boundary in the experience of the individual within society. Vegetarianism is an extraction of certain foods from the generality of food; it represents the extraction of certain persons from the generality of society. It offers the apparent paradox of people who vaunt freedom and spontaneity, and yet take up structured and restricted

forms of eating. It is only an apparent paradox because they are both related elements in the emergence of a looser, more fragmented form of social association, that rests on the shift towards increasing privatization of rules and meanings (29). Vegetarianism is highly individualistic; it provides a form of meaning you can carry around with you, and yet one that is not only interior, but has the capacity to be externalized in daily life and thus act to reinforce the plausibility structure of the individual. Vegetarianism offers an individualistic form of embeddedness; it roots one's consciousness of orientation.

The underlying structure of vegetarianism is one of purification and extraction whereby the disjunctive features of life are placed outside the system, beyond the realm of wholeness. But it is the concrete nature of vegetarianism that gives it its expressive power. The features of the external world and the actions of daily life become units with which to think. It is this capacity to act as a condensed and unifying symbol, drawing together the different levels of experience, that causes vegetarianism to flourish in periods and among groups where holistic answers are sought.

NOTES

- 1 See M. Douglas, 'Deciphering a meal', *Implicit Meanings*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1975, for this patterning of meals.
- 2 C. Lévi-Strauss, 'The science of the concrete', *The Savage Mind*, London: Cape 1966.
- 3 The dominant scheme is taken here to mean the pre-dominating meat-eating culture. Though there are regional, class and attitude differences within this, they are subsidiary to a prevailing general pattern.
- 4 Blood plays a special role in vegetarian ideology; it is a focus of ideas of pollution in a second sense also, in that the blood of vegetarians is spoken of as being specially pure. Vegetarians' wounds are sometimes said to heal more quickly; and the blood of meat eaters is spoken of as unclean or diseased. Certain foods - meat, spices - are sometimes recommended to be avoided since they heat the blood. Purity and coolness are associated (this is also used to underwrite the use of raw food, and sometimes the avoidance of very hot dishes and drink).
- 5 Steak tartare does not count in this context. The very fine mincing and high spicing of the dish disguise to a large extent its character.

- 6 See David Wood and others in S. and R. Godlovitch and J. Harris (eds), *Animals, Men and Morals*, London: Gollancz 1971, for a development of this point and for the ambiguous fantasy relationships - what Maureen Duffy calls 'floppsey-bunnijism' - meat-eating culture has with animals. The point over cooking being necessary to disguise a natural distaste is a frequently made one. Animals and animal products are the most common focus of taboos; vegetable products are, by and large, regarded as safe. See F.J. Simoons, *Eat Not This Flesh: Food Avoidances in the Old World*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press 1961.
- 7 Pamphlet issued by Meat Marketing Board, 1977.
- 8 The Vegetarian Society at one time had grades of membership according to whether fish, or worse, white meat, were still eaten. One American 'vegetarian' cookery book includes a fish in its jacket illustration.
- 9 *Vegetarian Messenger*, January 1850, p. 35.
- 10 *Vegetarian Messenger*, July 1850, p. iii, Appendix.
- 11 The exact components of this higher nature - which is regarded as being explicitly promoted by the effects of the vegetarian diet - differ; and though often these three characteristics are regarded as existing in harmony, in some versions one characteristic is more identified with the higher nature, perhaps to the detriment of one of the others. The intuitional/spiritual emphasis of, for example in the nineteenth century, Edward Maitland, the friend of Anna Kingsford (also a keen vegetarian) and early Theosophist, or in the twentieth, of some of the therapy or New Age aspects of the counter culture, is strongly anti-cerebral. Vegetarian diet is here seen as facilitating a more spiritual approach to life.
- 12 Eustace Miles, *Better Food for Boys*, London: George Bell & Sons, 3rd edition 1922.
- 13 Most frequently prohibited is red meat; fish and chicken have a qualified acceptance. The strictest orders eschew all these and, during Lent, all animal products.
- 14 As indeed do most people, however the concern in vegetarianism with the idea of the 'natural' brings this into a special prominence.
- 15 New Age writing represents the part of the counter-cultural or post-counter-cultural scene that is concerned with expanding consciousness, with eastern religion, lost and ancient knowledge, forms of alternative therapy etc. The Festival of Mind and Body represents its eclectic interests.
- 16 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, London: Fontana edition 1960, p. 142.

- 17 *Seed, the Journal of Organic Living*, published 1971-7, provides a coherent survey of these arguments. *Seed* is macrobiotic in emphasis rather than exclusively vegetarian.
- 18 This imagery of vital food and of eating nearer the sun is prominent in New Age writings, such as those of Sir George Trevelyan and the publications of the Wrekin Trust, although it recurs in vegetarianism at least since the late nineteenth century. Arnold Hills, president of the Vegetarian Society was writing in the 1890s of 'vital food, pregnant with the potency of life, suffused with the storage of sunshine', *Vital Food*, 1892, p.2.
- 19 Findhorn, on the coast of Scotland, partly through the fame of its miraculous garden, created by Peter Caddy through personal contact and co-operation with the spirits of the plants, became a centre in the early 1970s for New Age ideas and groups. Spiritual growth, union with the forces of nature, and the unity of mind and body are central ideas.
- 20 *The Findhorn Garden*, published by the Findhorn Trust, London: Wildwood House 1975, p. 40.
- 21 For example, 'From the moment that life leaves the body, putrefaction commences to set in. A dead body may then be looked upon in the light of a quantity of waste and putrefying matter.' *Vegetarian Review*, January 1895, p. 15. C. Leigh Hunt Wallace.
- 22 Eden has a long history of being characterized as being vegetarian; and religious commentators from the vegetarian viewpoint have often equated meat eating with the primal fall. 'In the beginning God created man to live for ever, for no sentence of death had been passed upon him. The food given him by his Allwise Creator to enable him to keep his body in perpetual life, undiminished activity and supreme happiness, was *living* fruit and seed (Gen. i. 29), for the art of destroying the life of the fruit by fire (cooking) was doubtless then unknown. His death was the result of his own action - still he lived 930 years. His descendants, with few exceptions, instead of lengthening their days, or *possibly* regaining immortality, continued to increase in evil-doing and, consequently, in shortening their days. The contrast between the delicious living food given by God, and the dead carcasses fallen depraved man delights in devouring, is enough to account for man's days being only a paltry "three score and ten".' Preamble to the *Rules of the Order of Danielites*, 1893 a vegetarian group who met for debates, essay readings, dancing, theatricals; flourished in the late nineteenth century, but continued into the 1930s. See *Danielite Star*, published 1887-1931.

- 23 'This near divine transfiguration of the body, and therefore of the universe, in the "high" of sexual love, is the complete opposite of the lewd and lustful, of the pornographic, prurient interest in the body, in the sexual organs. The purity which it demands makes it the prerogative of youth.' F.A. Wilson, *Food Fit for Humans*, London: C.W. Daniel 1975, p. 40.
- 24 There are echoes here of old ideas concerning the incorruptibility of the bodies of the saints and of the odour of sanctity.
- 25 Of the early Fabians, Beatrice Webb, Herbert Burrows, Shaw and other less well-known figures were vegetarians - see N. and J. Mackenzie, *The First Fabians*, London: Weidenfeld 1977; K. Muggeridge and R. Adam, *Beatrice Webb*, London: Secker & Warburg 1967. *The Sower*, later *Seed Time* was the organ of the Fellowship of the New Life, 1889-98, and contains much relevant material. The Tolstoyans (Tolstoy preached vegetarianism) grew out of the Brotherhood Church and the Fellowship, principally around Croydon, see M. Muggeridge, *The Green Stick*, London: Collins 1972; W.J. Jupp, *Wayfarings*, London: Headley Bros. 1918; N. Shaw, *Whiteway*, London: C.W. Daniel 1935. For the ethicalists see S. Budd, *The Rationalists: Varieties of Unbelief*, London: Heinemann Educational 1977.
- 26 This is the strain in socialism so disliked by Orwell and the Coles. It has in recent years undergone a more sympathetic reappraisal: see for example Stephen Yeo, 'A New Life, the religion of socialism in Britain', *History Workshop*, 4 (1977), and S. Rowbottom and G. Weeks, *Socialism and the New Life: the personal and sexual politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis*, London: Pluto 1977. The vegetarian aspect of this is well represented by Henry Salt who, with Edward Carpenter, founded the Humanitarian League and preached the Simplification of Life. See H.S. Salt, *Seventy Years Among Savages*, London: G. Allen & Unwin 1921; Edward Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, London: George Allen & Unwin 1916; S. Winston, *Salt and his Circle*, London: Hutchinson 1951; G. Hendrick, *Henry Salt*, London: University of Illinois Press 1977.
- 27 See Stella Mary Newton, *Health, Art and Reason*, London: Murray 1974 for an account of aesthetic and rational dress movements.
- 28 P. Abrams and A. McCulloch, *Communes, Sociology and Society*, London: Cambridge University Press 1967.
- 29 Modern vegetarianism's religious associations are with post-protestant societies (it is weak in Catholic countries) and within them with non-orthodox forms of

religion especially those that stress truth as lying within, knowable only by the individual search and unconstrained by any external, churchly authority.

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