CHAPTER 28

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I EAT, THEREFORE I AM

Disgust and the Intersection of Food and Identity

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DANIEL KELLY AND NICOLAE MORAR

Introduction

A poetic old saw has it that "you are what you eat." The idea has found resonance in radically different schools of thought down through the ages, but whether one chooses to focus on its early Christian expression as a proverb (Gilman 2008) or on the intriguing recent attempts to understand the metabolic relations between the foods that people consume and the ways in which they behave (McKeith 2005), the common thread is that food habits are part and parcel of what makes someone the person that he or she is. How and what one eats informs the construction and performance of identities and is thus expressive, in some small way, of a person's conception of and orientation toward the Good.

Diet has been an object of philosophizing for millennia, with philosophers of many schools sharing the assumption that proper culinary habits are a vital component of living well, and that flouting them could have pernicious effects that go beyond merely spoiling physical health (see essays by Katja Vogt, Henrik Lagerlund, and Aaron Garrett and John Grey, in this volume). Pythagoreans were famously against eating beans, but as Aristotle (supposedly) points out, this guideline is just one part of a larger vision of life that prescribed physical exercise and meditation, together with a disciplined dietary program detailing what, when, and how much to eat (Thompson 2015, 25–26). More generally, the Greeks believed in a strong association between eating and well-being, and saw a rigorously balanced daily food routine as a form of care of the self and expression of excellence. As Thompson also notes, the core Greek virtue of temperance grows out of this orientation toward food, coalescing into "the framework for philosophical dietetics in the medieval world" (2015, 26) and providing the central reason for resisting the simple gratification of personal preferences and the excesses of gluttony.

Later philosophers and other researchers would highlight different aspects of the relation between eating and identity. In the mid-nineteenth century in his review of Moleschott's *Theory of Nutrition*, Ludwig Feuerbach famously stated "Der Mensh ist was er isst" ("Man is what he eats"). Feuerbach's view on these matters evolved as he developed it (see Harvey 2007), but it is clear that his interest was less on the contributions of food to individual well-being and more on the relationship between diet, class, and the ordering of society. Indeed, Feuerbach held that food, and at times even details of the chemical composition of diet, had a direct relation to the ways in which social identities were made and enacted. During his time, potatoes constituted the main diet of the working class; as Harvey notes, given that "potatoes lack phosphorescent fat and protein necessary for the brain, the working class could only hope for revolution by a change in diet." Others like Elias ([1939] 2000) explored the connection between eating and identity by focusing on the cultural evolution and social function of dining etiquette, and the so-called civilizing aspect of disgust in policing boundaries between different groups, especially between classes (also Nichols 2000). In light of such work, it becomes evident that statements like Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's "tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are" are about much more than nutrition and sustenance; food and dining put immediate roots into signaling behavior, group membership, social boundaries, and the identities of people who must navigate them.

Chemistry offers a very different but not incompatible perspective. From a metabolic point of view, there is more than a grain of literal truth to "you are what you eat": the energy and basic biochemical materials by which your body is created, replenished, and maintained come in large part from what you consume. Whether some food preferences and choices are biologically constrained (e.g., the inability to assimilate certain foods in cases like lactose intolerance) or strongly genetically influenced (e.g., the innate human preference for sweets), food chemistry provides another way of appreciating the ways in which food contributes to and changes the biochemical composition of our bodies. This, in turn, opens new avenues for exploring the ways we are inevitably embodied (Shapiro 2010), and how our personal and social identities are informed by our biological and physical identities. The space of inquiry surrounding these issues has traditionally been populated by dieticians and nutritionists, but their treatment of them has recently come under criticism for contributing to a misleading, overly reductionist way of thinking about food (Pollan 2008, esp. section 3 "Getting over Nutritionism").

So for a long time there has been a kind of allure about the idea that food and identity are intimately bound together. Indeed, we are told that a form of magical thinking common to many primitive cultures included the belief that you could take on the properties of the organisms you ate, including even the fighting prowess of vanquished warriors from a rival tribe.[1] Perhaps vestiges of such magical thinking still lurk in the modern mind, waiting to be exploited by clever advertisements. A commercial by Carl's Jr. and

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[1] For psychological research on magical thinking and its connection to disgust, see Nemeroff and Rozin 2000.

Hardee's promoting their Western X-Tra Bacon Thickburger depicts a female Mystique (of X-Men fame) shapeshifting into a bearded man while taking her first bite; such, we are invited to infer, is the transformative power of the Thickburger's manly aura (see Adams 2015). In the contemporary environment, the poetic saw has also acquired less florid, more abstract, but nevertheless real and important connotations as well. It can be used to express something about loyalties to a brand (whether you are a Coke or a Pepsi drinker), about socioeconomic status (your insistence that the fruit you eat be organic), or about your values in general (forgoing any factory-farmed meat or fish on moral grounds).

It is this latter class of connections that we will be mainly concerned with in this essay. More specifically, we will unpack the set of relations that hold between food and cuisine, eating and dining, and norms, social roles, and identities. Our aim is to express these ideas crisply and in a way that is and can continue to be informed by current work in empirical moral psychology, broadly construed. In the second section, we unpack how we will construe identities, focusing on a core component of them, namely the set of social roles that an individual occupies. Next, in the third section, we unpack the notion of a social role in terms of social norms, the often unwritten rules that regulate behavior and social interactions, and describe recent empirical work that illuminates the power and psychological underpinning of norm-based cognition. This discussion, in turn, will allow us in the fourth section to remark on the peculiar, expanded role that the emotion of disgust has come to play in human moral psychology, regulating dining practices, and thus helping shape and maintain personal and social identities; you are what you eat, but the flip side of this may be just as telling: you are what you won't eat, too. Finally, in the fifth section, we briefly discuss the implications this perspective might have for thinking about food norms, the potential avenues and prospects for changing them, and the class of identity-based ethical considerations that different strategies might raise. An important upshot is that in light of the connections between food, norms, and identities, attempts to alter a person's eating habits can run up against deep and distinctive forms of psychological resistance because they are in part attempts to change who he or she is.

Identities and Social Roles

For our purposes, to say that you are what you eat is to say, roughly, that the food you consume (or refuse) and the reason and practices surrounding your consumption (or refusal) of it bear some set of interesting and important connections to your identity. A person's identity is an encapsulation of who that person is.[2] Broadly construed,

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[2] Put another way, descriptions of a person's identity can serve as an answer to what Marya Schechtman (1996) calls the *characterization question*, which she clearly and correctly distinguishes from answers to Locke's problem of personal identity (or persistence) through time, which she calls the *reidentification question*. However, see White (1989) for arguments that identity in the first and second

identities include a person's personality and sense of themselves, as well as other people's sense and recognition of who they are. These senses are typically expressed by and reflected in actions, stories, expectations, and interactions. Hilde Lindemann sketches a concise picture:

> Identities function as counters in our social transactions, in that they convey understandings of what those who bear them are expected to do. If an answer to "Who are you?" is "the bartender," for example, I expect you to know how to mix a martini; if the answer is "a practicing Muslim," I don't. Moreover, identities also convey understandings of how those who bear them may be treated. If you're my three-year-old son, I can remind you to use the toilet, but if you're my boss, I'd better not. Personal identities thus make intelligible not only how other people are supposed to act, but how *we* are supposed to act with respect to them. (Lindemann 2014, 5–6, italics in original)

Later she stresses that while identities often serve to compress information and help people make sense of themselves and others, they are not merely descriptive: "identities are *normatively prescriptive*—they tell you what you are supposed to do and how others may, must, or mustn't treat you" (87, italics added). As Lindemann's sketch illustrates, crucial to an individual's identity are the variety of parts she plays and positions she occupies, and the expectations and guidelines that attach to and make up those parts and positions. We can unpack these core elements of identities in terms of the notion of a *social role* and that of a *social norm*.

The notion of a social role may be a familiar one, but it is worthwhile to flesh out the general idea a bit. Typical examples of social roles that individuals might occupy include overt ones such as their profession (bartender, lawyer, community organizer), religion (practicing Muslim, lapsed Catholic), marital or family status (husband, divorcée, great aunt, son), and membership in various organizations (citizen of Costa Rica, treasurer of the local chapter of PETA, goalie on the soccer team). Other social roles are more covert, less explicitly or obviously social roles. Examples of these might include membership in a particular race, ethnicity, gender, or category of mental illness.[3] Any given individual typically occupies many different social roles at once (a Tico mother who is a bartender and goalie), and the set of social roles an individual

senses have more in common than typically thought, especially if one accepts the kind of social role and social norm centric account of identities we are working with.

[3] Views that categories such as these are socially constructed can be expressed in terms of social roles; for the discussion and development of such a view about race, see Mallon and Kelly 2012. As we note presently in the main text, different social roles vary along a number of dimensions, and one important way that social roles like race and gender, for example, differ from more obviously socially constructed ones is that occupancy in the former is often not optional or chosen by the individual occupying it. This feature, in turn, can lend intuitive support to the type of view the social constructivist rejects, namely that membership in the category is based on some intrinsic, non-social (perhaps biological) feature of individuals. As many theorists point out, occupation of these non-voluntary social roles is too often accompanied by systematic oppression and prejudice (for discussion, see Young 2004).

occupies typically changes over the course of a lifetime (one can become a father, leave the legal profession to become a chef, or resign from the NRA). Note that given the inclusive sense in which we are using the notion here, other features of social roles can vary along a large number of dimensions as well. They can range from the very general (bartender, Muslim, woman) to the very specific (weekend day shift bartender at the Tiny Tap, interim treasurer of the local chapter of PETA), from the voluntary and overt (bassist in a garage band) to the involuntary and covert (Latino man) and from those that come with a very specific set of expectations and guidelines (starting goalie on the soccer team) to those that have very few (lapsed Catholic). Moreover, the social roles an individual occupies can be more or less central to her sense of herself and to how others understand and respond to her.

However they might vary on these kinds of dimensions, social roles share some general features. Occupying a social role means being a member of a socially recognized category, being treated and thought of as an instance of that category by members of the wider cultural community (including, often but not always, the occupier of the social role herself), and thus being subject to many of the same sorts of norms and social pressures as other individuals who occupy that social role.

While there are obviously many nuances involved in thinking about identities (for overviews and a broad range of perspectives, see Appiah 2007; Korsgaard 2009; Witt 2012; Lindemann 2014; cf. Shoemaker 2016), we will use this characterization of social roles to capture the core part of an individual's social identity, of who she is, that is made up of the set of social roles she occupies (and, assuming personal history contributes to identity, she has occupied in the past). Social roles can be further analyzed in terms of different kinds of psychological entities, about which a wealth of empirical research can be brought to bear to help illuminate details about different aspects of identities.[4] Of particular importance, especially given that identities are action guiding and tailored to specific roles and groups, we focus on the key category of social norms.

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[4] Ron Mallon's work (e.g., 2003, 2014, 2016) can be used to characterize social roles more precisely and explicitly in terms of many theoretical entities of contemporary cognitive science:

(1) There is a *conception* of the role that includes
    (a) a term, label, or mental representation that picks out a category of individuals *R*
    (b) a cluster of informational states (beliefs, stereotypes, exemplars, scripts) about that category *R* and the individuals who occupy it
    (c) a cluster of social norms centered on that category *R*
(2) Many or all of the informational states and social norms that make up the conception are widely shared by members of a community, as is the knowledge that they are widely shared, and so forth; the conception of *R* is *common knowledge*.
(3) Since the descriptive elements help in identifying and determining expectations about instances of the category, and the normative elements prescribe and proscribe behaviors in situations likely to arise in interactions with occupiers of the social role, conceptions are *action guiding*. Put another way, conceptions not only help recognize members of *R* as such but also specify appropriate behavior by and toward members of R.

Social Norms

A venerable tradition in philosophy sees significance in the fact that, from a subjective viewpoint, some rules seem to impress themselves upon us with a distinctive kind of authority or normative force: one feels their pull and is drawn to act in accordance with such rules, and violations seem charged, egregious. Although the first person experience of it can be mystifying, there is reason to think this phenomenology is just one aspect of the operation of a psychological system crucial to morality, ethical thought, and sense of self.

Recent research on human capacities for moral judgment and social behavior sheds light on the psychological machinery underpinning social norms (see Boyd and Richerson 1985, 2005; Chudek and Henrich 2011; Henrich 2015). These are the often unwritten rules of social life, rules that may or may not also be codified in formal institutions, but that either way deeply and directly influence our moral intuitions, judgments, and actions. This "suite of genetically evolved cognitive mechanisms for rapidly perceiving local norms and internalizing them" (Chudek et al. 2013, 443) is invoked to help explain the evolution of distinctively human forms of prosociality and large-scale cooperation. These mechanisms also help explain behavioral, cognitive, and cultural differences between groups, as well as diversity in the different kinds of normative standards that apply to occupants of different social roles within groups.

This account of human norm psychology connects the individual capacity for learning and internalizing social information to regularities in the social environment concerning interactions between different types of people. A psychological mechanism for norm acquisition is posited to be present in the minds of individuals, but it monitors and extracts information from other people, about the roles they play, about appropriate ways to interact with each other in different settings and situations, and particularly about the ways they cooperate with each other—and punish those who fail to cooperate. The account holds that humans share a universal set of cognitive mechanisms that not only support acquisition of local social norms, but underpin the performance of norms, producing the motivation to comply with those norms that they have internalized as applying to themselves, and to punish others who violate norms that apply to them and the roles they occupy. The appeals to both innate structure and social learning allow the account to accommodate the fact that norms are a ubiquitous and crucial part of human social life in all cultures. However, the content of social norms varies greatly, both from one culture to the next and between different members of a single culture, especially with respect to the social roles different members occupy. The account is also well equipped (was motivated) to capture and explain the fact that social norms change and evolve over time.

Sripada and Stich (2007) emphasize other psychologically interesting features of the norm system, especially about the way it processes information; it is fast, intuitive, automatic, and thus difficult to intentionally stop, and its operation is implicit and not easily

accessible to introspection.[5] They argue that there is a distinctive motivational signature associated with social norms, marshaling evidence that in internalizing a norm, a person thereby acquires intrinsic motivation to both behave in ways that conform with the norm, as well as intrinsic motivation to punish, or at least direct punitive attitudes toward, those who violate it. Calling these paired motivations intrinsic means that they are not instrumental: one does not comply with a social norm merely as an intermediate step toward satisfying some more basic urge nor does one punish merely as a means to attain some further, more primary end. Rather, it is simply a feature of a person's norm psychology that when it recognizes she is in a situation to which one of its proprietary rules applies, the system produces motivation to comply, and when she detects another person violating one of those rules, the system produces motivation to punish. The character of this motivation can vary from one norm to the next, however, and not just in intensity and objective. More interestingly and importantly, different norms can draw on different emotions (anger, jealousy, disgust, admiration), with details of the behaviors and attitudes associated with the norm being colored by the character of the emotion to which it is linked (more on this later, but see Shweder et al. 1997; Rozin et al. 1999; see also Haidt and Joseph 2007; Graham et al. 2009). In virtue of this kind of emotionally valenced intrinsic motivation, social norms can influence intuitions, choices, behaviors, and social interactions independently of any formalized institution, codified set of laws, or explicit, material system of incentives and disincentives. And in virtue of much of this psychological processing happening without effort or attention, and below the level of conscious awareness, the influence of social norms can be immediate and thus potentially mysterious from a first person perspective. As mentioned, social norms can also be enshrined in law and enforced with institutionalized mechanisms of punishment and reward—a rule X can be widely distributed in psychological norm systems of the individual members of a culture, and rule X can also be explicitly articulated and officially recognized by that culture's legal system—but they need not be to shape the social life or have a deep psychological grip on the members of the culture. Social norms are often the proverbial "unwritten rules" that organize and regulate many spheres of action, define social roles, and shape people's identities, and can do so, and can remain motivationally powerful, even when they remain covert.[6]

[5] In cognitive scientific terms, many of these features are characteristic of modular or System 1 processing. Dual process theories of mental architecture distinguish these from central or System 2 psychological mechanisms and processes, whose operation is by contrast slow, explicit, requiring effort and attention, and conscious and easily accessible to verbal report. The *locus classicus* is Fodor 1983; for more recent discussion, see Carruthers 2006; Kahneman 2011; and for a particular application to moral psychology, Greene 2014.

[6] See Mallon (2016) for an illuminating discussion of overt and covert social roles, and what he calls the "revelatory aims" many social constructivist theorists have with respect to covert social roles. Categories like race, gender, and mental disorder are covert, claims the social constructivist, because it is not obvious that they denote social roles, or because the intuitive, received view is that they are natural, biological, or otherwise non-socially constructed categories. The aim is to reveal that they are, in fact, socially constructed, and to show how, despite initial appearances, the intuitive, received view is mistaken.

Details about the internalization of norms are also important, since they can explain why the social norm a person has internalized can shape feelings about identification and the right thing to do. Even though one may have never reflected upon, explicitly articulated, let alone consciously endorsed, many of the unwritten rules that she has internalized, she might experience the influence of those norms as something like the urgings and motivations of a conscience or a true inner self. Once a social norm has been picked up and internalized by a person's norm psychological cognitive architecture, it can subjectively seem natural, compelling, normatively authoritative, and thus contribute to her sense of what kind of a person she is and should be, how she should interact with others, and where she fits into the larger social scheme.[7] Even though a person may not be able to easily verbalize many social norms she has internalized, those unwritten rules can shape thoughts, emotions, and behavior, and delineate the social roles that become a core part of her identity.[8]

The cultural and moral ecology—the marketplace of ideas, perhaps—in which social norms are acquired and transmitted is far from monolithic or static, of course. In addition to characterizing the special capacity for recognizing and internalizing social norms, defenders of this account also make a convincing case that the capacity is subject to several kinds of learning biases (e.g., Richerson and Boyd 2005). For example, and perhaps least surprisingly, when faced with more than one potential norm to follow, a conformity bias makes people more likely to adopt the norm most common among their perceived peers.[9] Another important type of bias is sensitive to prestige and makes

[7] See Hacking's classic "Making Up People" (1986) for a complementary discussion.

[8] This psychological story dovetails nicely with Charlotte Witt's view about what makes an individual subject to the normative force of any particular social norm or social role. She convincingly rejects the perhaps better known *voluntarist* view associated with Kantians like Korsgaard (1996) that (roughly) the authority a norm holds over an individual rests in the individual's conscious endorsement and acceptance of it. Against this, Witt defends a limited *ascriptivism*, the idea that in many important cases, norms are ascribed to an individual by others, and so that the individual is responsive to and evaluable under those norms, even if the ascription is made without the individual's consent or even explicit knowledge. As Witt points out, individuals do not voluntarily choose what culture they are born into or many of the social roles they occupy within it. Thus, they do not choose which social norms will apply to them, or even which norms they will internalize as applying to themselves. Hence, voluntary acceptance or endorsement does not determine which norms others will evaluate their actions by, which norms they will be socially pressured to comply with, and even which norms they may feel intrinsically motivated to conform to themselves. She goes on: "ascriptivism adds to the richness of our understanding of the grip of oppressive social norms by explaining why an individual might feel drawn under the normative umbrella of a social role which she is also at the same time critical" (47). And, given the account of norms and norm internalization we have described, we can also explain why an individual might feel drawn under and psychologically influenced by a norm that she has not fully articulated to herself or even become explicitly aware of.

[9] There are complications, of course, perhaps most interesting of which is that norms and other units of cultural transmission are not discrete, and social learning is not a particularly high fidelity process. An upshot of this is that a social learner can blend together information from several cultural parents to arrive at a new norm, one that bears more resemblance to an "average" of those found amongst her peer group than to any particular instance antecedently found in that peer group (see Henrich and Boyd 2002; Henrich et al. 2008).

social learners more likely to acquire norms demonstrated by those held in high regard or seen to have the greatest success and status. These biases affect how norms are transmitted and thus how they change over time.[10]

DINING AND DISGUST

Charlotte Witt, whose discussion of the connections between social norms, social roles, and identities informs much of our discussion here, and whose ascriptivism about social normativity we take to be supported by the empirical picture developed in the last section, nicely articulates the distinction between feeding and dining:

> Consider the natural phenomenon of feeding. Feeding is an animal function, and it is realized in and by animal bodies. In human societies, feeding (which requires bodies with specific organs—mouths, tongues, stomachs, intestines along with other material conditions) is elaborated into the social function of dining by an array of social norms. Dining is a socially mediated form of feeding . . . connected intimately to biology and to bodies and their organs. (Witt 2012, 37)

The "many, elaborate social norms that govern dining" (37) are a subset of the category we will call food norms, which can include norms about what types of plants, animals, and other substances are appropriate to be consumed, how different types of food should be acquired and prepared, what types of person are fit or unfit to prepare and eat certain types of food, and the package of norms that assigns roles to individuals and choreographs the many smaller individual and joint behaviors that need to mesh during the complex dance of a collective meal. As Witt points out, even dining norms are not merely about edibility, nutrition, the pragmatics of eating, or the coordination of meal-related behaviors. They also structure the social practices surrounding food and eating in ways that give them and their component parts meaning and cultural significance.

Two more points from recent empirical work on social norms can help flesh out Witt's picture. The first is that of all of the emotions, disgust tends to play a predominant role in dining and is the emotion most prevalent in food norms more generally.[11] This is

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[10] Theorists of our status psychology also draw a distinction between prestige, which they take to be a uniquely human form of status rooted in cultural information and success, and dominance, which, while still present in humans, is much more widespread in nature, and rooted in coercion and the potential to inflict physical harm (Henrich and Gil-White 2001; Henrich 2015, ch. 8). We think it likely that dominance plays an interesting and important role in food practices and norms, and potentially in the development of food preferences. As far as we know, this role has not yet been well explored, though. Thanks to Patrick Hoburg for discussion on this point.

[11] Indeed, many food norms fall under the broader category of *purity norms*, which are typically associated with and follow the logic of disgust (Shweder et al. 1997; Horberg et al. 2009; Rottman and Keleman 2012).

understandable, given that the primary evolutionary functions of disgust are, on the one hand, to monitor potential foods and protect against eating what might be toxic, poisonous, or otherwise cause insult to the delicate human gastrointestinal system, and, on the other, to act as the first line of defense of the human immune system, monitoring the environment, particularly other people, for evidence of potential sources of infection, and producing aversion toward and avoidance of anything that presents such a threat. As norms sprung up around the most pragmatic aspects of the gathering and preparation of food, disgust would have been a natural candidate to provide the intrinsic motivation associated with them. Moreover, due to the intrinsic salience of food to disgust, together with its sensitivity to other people as sources of social information about what is disgusting, as eating became culturally elaborated into dining, disgust would have once again been the emotion most suited to plug into the norms governing dining. It would thus exert its subtle but potentially important proprietary influence on the associated clusters or practices and social roles.[12]

The second point is that eating and food norms are likely to play an important part in people's identities; and via this route, so is disgust. It follows that the empirical research on norms, disgust, and the interaction between the two can shed light on how those identities are likely to be formed and maintained, how they are liable to change and resist being changed, and thus how people's food-related habits may or may not be susceptible to being nudged in various ways. There are more general connections between norms and identities (i.e., clusters of norms help constitute particular social roles, and the set of social roles a person occupies makes up a core part of her identity). The empirical perspective on norms can add detail to this. For instance, the emphasis on the variability of social norms from one culture to the next, from one social role to the next, even from one person to the next, points to the importance of *ethnic boundary markers*: easily detectable cues displayed by a person that signal information about who she is. These serve as visible proxies for more abstract psychological properties that may not be directly perceivable or easily manifest, such as what groups a person belongs to and values she embraces, which social roles she occupies, which norms shape her judgments and actions, and thus what others should expect of her, and how they should interact with her and evaluate what she does. Indeed, there is reason to think that the psychological capacities for social norms evolved in tandem with similarly universal and emotion-involving psychological capacities that make us sensitive to social role occupancy, group membership, and ethnic boundary markers, as part of a larger package of uniquely human cooperative abilities that have been called our "tribal social instincts" (see Richerson and Boyd 2001, 2005, ch. 6; Richerson and Henrich 2011; Kelly 2013, 2011, ch. 4).

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[12] For more extensive discussion and citations on the empirical side, see Rozin et al. 2008; Kelly 2011; Chapman and Anderson 2013; and Strohminger 2104; and for empirically informed debate about the normative questions concerning the putative moral authority of disgust and the different roles it should or should not play in social contexts, Plakias 2013; Clark and Fessler 2015; Kelly and Morar 2014; Fischer 2015; and Kumar 2017.

Eating is a universal, biologically inescapable activity that is necessary for survival, it is typically a social experience, and it is heavily monitored and regulated.[13] It thus provides a rich arena of information salient to these tribal instincts and their various concerns—and thus for the performance of identity: following the proper sequence in which to serve food, and appropriately portioning out the choicest morsels to the most prestigious people at the meal; knowing which utensil to use, how, and for what; or choosing to observe or flout persnickety etiquette rules about which one is fully aware. As many have noted, even specific cuisines are bound up with identity and can serve as ethnic boundary markers, especially types of food celebrated and relished by members of one group, but found disgusting by members of others. Paul Rozin and Michael Siegal (2003) present some experimental evidence along these lines concerning Vegemite and its unique place in Australian identity, but other examples include pairings like escargot and France, sushi and Japan, and jellied moose nose and indigenous populations of Canada and Alaska. In today's global village, food preferences may vary in this way more dramatically along socioeconomic lines than traditional cultural lines, thus marking the boundaries between class more often and effectively than between nationalities. In general, the signaling function remains the same, though: you are what you eat, but you aren't what you won't eat, too.

The larger class of food norms, including those having to do with the more ethical dimensions of what we eat and the moral reasons for eating or not eating it, are likely to have deep psychological connections with people's identities and their sense of disgust, and thus who they are and what kind of person they take themselves to be—and what kind of person they aspire to be. This dimension of psychological complication suggests one reason that mere appeal to utilitarian calculations or deontological obligations may fall on deaf ears, or at least fail to be persuasive or motivating, namely because such appeals might fail to effectively speak to the identity component of eating and dining. However, the empirical research might be leveraged; proposals for how to best communicate arguments about more ethical food practices, promulgate new food norms, or effectively change eating habits can take into account the empirical psychological research, both on tribal instincts and the way disgust is likely to inform the domain of food norms and cuisine-based identity displays.

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[13] Sterelny (2012) develops an extensive and convincing case that some of the most ancient, persistent, and multifaceted collective action problems faced over the course of human evolutionary history were food-related: the production of hunting and cooking equipment, the division of labor in the gathering and preparation of edible plants, the organization and assignment of roles for coordinated hunting strategies, the fair distribution of food once it has been acquired, particularly in the case of a single large calorie haul that can result from a successful hunting effort, and so on. This picture implies that the connections between our cooperative psychological capacities, on the one hand, and the norms and practices surrounding food, on the other, are far from recent or superficial. Our concern for food is primal and runs deeply through our tribal social instincts.

Disgust, Identity, and the Ethics of Improving Eating Habits

Thus far, we have attempted to develop a concise account of the construction and maintenance of identities in terms of social roles that brings to bear the burgeoning empirical literature on social norms, and via this, highlights the centrality of disgust in the cognition of dining norms. Our account complements the work of anthropologists and sociologists who focus on culture (Douglas 1966; Goody 1982; Bourdieu 1987), but we emphasize that eating and the norms that govern it cannot be fully captured in social and cultural terms because dining is equally shaped by stable features of human psychology. Whether one is interested in the development of food preferences, the rise of specific food practices (e.g., locavorism—Oxford dictionary word of the year 2007), or the significance of networks of representation and meaning associated with certain cuisines (e.g., veganism vs. pescatarianism), it is obvious that such phenomena cannot be captured with biological or psychological resources alone. We hold that they cannot be fully explained by cultural and social factors alone, either. The interrelations between dining, identity, and emotions like disgust are multifaceted, and an epistemological and methodological pluralism is needed to understand them in their full messy complexity.
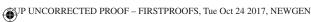
Here we briefly sketch two types of ethical implications that can be drawn from our own pluralist account. The first concerns how use of disgust makes it too easy to dehumanize those people whose eating habits are targeted. The second is that, given the connection between dining and identity, attempts to modify eating habits could raise interesting and distinctive problems, both practically and ethically. We end by reflecting on these and setting out some questions suggested by the view we have presented.

Dehumanization

There is an important distinction between two kinds of claims ethicists might be making in the normative debates that have recently swirled around disgust. One kind concerns whether and when feelings of disgust, in and of themselves, should be taken to justify the judgments that they accompany. For example, should the putatively widespread (see May 2016) reaction of disgust toward emerging practices like human cloning or the replacement of natural foods with GMOs be taken as a reason in favor of the view that such developments are morally wrong—and should widespread disgust inform how different institutions react to such practices and emerging biotechnological possibilities? The other kind of claim concerns whether and when it would be acceptable to cultivate widespread feelings of disgust toward different kinds of objects, broadly speaking, and thus which ethical and political uses of disgust are morally appropriate. Is, in other words, disgust an admissible social tool, one that might be harnessed by activists and policymakers to bring about morally and socially desirable ends (directing disgust

at wildly unhealthy foods or barbaric factory farming conditions to discourage certain eating habits), or is there something about the emotion itself that renders it ethically ill-suited for such purposes? While we have defended skeptical positions with respect to each of these (Kelly and Morar 2014), it is this second kind of issue that concerns us here.

Consider the West Australian Live Lighter Campaign.[14] The ad opens with a man reaching into the fridge for a slice of pizza. While sizing up the slice, he reaches down and squeezes his belly. At that moment, the camera moves inside the man's body, revealing slabs of thick, viscous yellow fat covering his organs. As a voiceover calls obesity toxic and describes how it increases risk for disease, the viewer experiences embarrassment at the man's lack of control over his eating, and the visual spectacle triggers a visceral sense of disgust. Obviously, this ad aspires to more than merely informing viewers of nutritional facts (e.g., about how diets high in carbohydrates lead to unhealthy levels of fat storage). It also employs disgust-inducing imagery in an attempt to alter people's behavior and combat eating habits that might be engrained in many people's daily routines. What harm in giving into the temptation to enjoy a last slice of pizza, eat one—just one!—more potato chip, indulge in another bit of instantly gratifying, nutrition be damned, tasty at any cost foodertainment? On the other hand, who wants to be gross, bloated with nasty yellow goop? That's disgusting.

It is not the effectiveness of disgust in getting across this kind of message that we doubt (Marks 2006), but rather the moral defensibility of using it in such ways. Emotional appeals of all sorts probably make public health messages, like most other kinds of messages, more likely to be understood, remembered, and perhaps even acted on.[15] But features of the particular emotion of disgust make its use in these kinds of messages, directed at people, in this case those with unhealthy eating habits, unacceptable. Perhaps most worrisome for such tactics is how disgust dehumanizes those toward whom it is directed. Many writers have documented the long history of this particular emotion's role in stigmatization, prejudice, and oppression (especially Nussbaum 2004, 2010). We think this appalling history is no accident. The recent empirical research on disgust shows that the relation between disgust and dehumanization is not that of a good (or even neutral) tool that has an unfortunate record of abhorrent uses, but rather that the dehumanizing propensity is intrinsic to the tool itself. The activation of disgust disrupts or reduces the disgusted person's ability to fully "see" the object of disgust as an agent. If, say, you are disgusted by a group of people, or the occupants of a certain kind of social role, you become less sensitive to their intentions and the cues that signal their intentions (Russell and Giner-Sorolla 2011; Young and Saxe 2011; for complementary neurocognitive evidence gathered using fMRIs, see also Harris and Fiske 2006, 2007). Not only is disgust intrinsically dehumanizing in this way, but it appears to be uniquely so; most of these empirical results are comparative and show that other related emotions like anger and contempt do not have similarly disruptive effects on social cognition.

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[14] See Rebecca Kukla's contribution to this volume for more discussion of this example, as well as the more general philosophical issues we discuss in this section.

[15] For empirical evidence about disgust along these lines, see Heath et al. 2001 and Nichols 2002.

This is perhaps due to disgust's distinctive evolutionary roots in dealing with poisons and parasites rather than navigating the subtleties of interpersonal interactions and the social world. Whatever the ultimate explanation, it remains that making an individual, or group of people, into an object of disgust makes it difficult to think of them as fully human and deserving of full moral status. Once they are seen as disgusting, they become easier to dismiss, to demonize, and to treat hideously; that which is gross is disposable.

There are other components of the disgust response that we think also make it unsuitable for these kinds of social uses. To be disgusted by something is to conceptualize it as aversive and to be avoided. But it is also to conceptualize it as tainted and contaminating, able to pollute with its disgustingness other things that it comes into close proximity with, physically or figuratively. This property of the emotion is understandable and adaptive when it is functioning to protect against communicable diseases and track the cues that accompany them, but it contributes to the sticky stigmatizing power of disgust when the emotion operates in the social arena. Since the different elements of disgust tend to cluster together as a psychological package, the dehumanizing propensity can be transmitted via this same mechanism of contamination sensitivity. Disgustingness is likely to bleed beyond its intended boundaries, encompassing not just the sin but also the sinner, bringing its dehumanizing stigma with it.

Returning to food and eating habits, the idea of harnessing this emotion to advance some well-intentioned program or even just help get a public health message across seems misguided to us. Disgust may be a powerful tool to change individual and collective behavior, but we hold that there is good moral reason to refrain from using it, even in the service of advocating for morally laudable ends like more compassionate food production practices, healthier eating habits, or more just food norms. The advantages it would bring to the cause are far outweighed by, but also psychologically inseparable from, its attendant risks. Indeed, the unintended or unanticipated effects of such uses could be morally disastrous, especially when social disgust is normalized, and modern technological, advertising, and media sophistication is used to make a category of people into the target of the collective disgust of an entire population.[16]

Nudges and Identity Tampering

Our second concern centers on the view we have developed about dining and identity and its relevance for the use of nudges in food policy.[17] Here we aim to raise questions rather than fully articulate and defend a position. Ethicists and social theorists have long recognized the trade-offs between individuals' right to a sphere of unencumbered

[16]   For an interesting discussion about the potential of disgust to stir up moral panics and drive the creation and stabilization unjust laws, see Douard 2007.

[17]   Earlier drafts introduced the terminology of "identity-based harms," but we decided we did not want to contribute to the "concept creep" of the notion of harm in psychology and philosophy (Haslam 2016).

autonomy, on the one hand, and the right of others', including the state and other institutions, to place limits on that sphere (see Sarah Conly's contribution to this volume). In the case of public policy attempts to improve eating habits and install more healthy and humane food norms, the tension can be understood as a worry about approaches that are overly paternalistic. Even when they are well-intentioned and the ends to which they aspire are morally laudable, policies that would limit individual choice in the name of public health and well-being risk crossing the line, illegitimately interfering with people's capacity for self-determination, even if that capacity is often exercised to make unhealthy or morally questionable but perfectly legal food choices. We will frame our two points about this tension in terms of the viability of the tactics now commonly described as nudges.

Debates rage about where the line should be drawn between acceptable measures and those that are unacceptably coercive or manipulative, and on what grounds that line should be established and justified (e.g., Hausman and Welch 2010; Saghai 2013; Sunstein 2014). Some have explored reasonable boundaries on paternalistic public health policies that limit consumers' freedom in the name of healthier eating practices, including those that appear to directly impinge on consumer choice by delimiting the range of food options among which they can choose available (e.g., the SNAP sugary drink ban or the New York big soda ban). Many appeal to economic and the medical arguments for justification (Basu et al. 2014). Others comment on the idea that less restrictive message-based programs are more likely to be effective when they also draw an emotional response. Critics have raised legitimate worries about the potential side effects of such policies, pointing out how they are liable to reinforce the stigmatization of obesity or incite unwarranted blame toward lower income segments of the population for their dietary choices and poor health (Barnhill and King 2013).

The notion of a nudge and the development of an accompanying vocabulary centered on it have been welcome recent advances. Measures that were once perceived as stark limitations on personal autonomy (Resnik 2010) are now easier to see as elements of larger, previously unappreciated "choice architectures." These, proponents of nudges argue, have always been present, have usually been shaped by some interested party or other, and are practically inescapable, even if they are only now becoming the objects of scientific study (and of systematic ethical debate as such). The libertarian paternalist deployment of nudges and choice architectures seeks to act primarily on the set of available alternatives among which agents can choose, or to appeal to non-rational ways of influencing an agent's choice by, say, arranging food options in cafeterias in a way that promotes the best nutritional choices without hindering one's personal preferences (see the example of Carolyn the director of food services in the introduction of Thaler and Sunstein 2009, 3–5). The framework is controversial but intriguing and certainly advances a sophisticated conception of human agency that both properly appreciates the influence of situational and ecological factors on human behavior (cf. Doris 2002; Clark 2007) and seeks to countenance, anticipate, and often preemptively compensate for the litany of imperfections that riddle human decision-making, for example, overconfidence, motivated cognition, status quo and

confirmation biases, cognitive inertia, the multitude of fallible heuristics (anchoring, availability, representativeness) on which we constantly rely, seemingly, ad infinitum (Ariely 2010; Kahneman 2011).

In other places, debates specifically about food can feel caricatured and could benefit from more nuance.[18] One way to achieve this is by taking into account a wider range of factors, like for instance the fact that certain food experiences can have value for individuals independently of their relationship to deliberate and informed choices (Barnhill et al. 2014). Our concern can perhaps be located among this wider range of factors that deserve more attention. Not every act of eating is equally representative of a deep self, but people's identities are often inscribed in their diets and food practices; there are distinctively Italian ways to cook and eat pasta that many would consider central to being a "true" Italian, or particularly French ways to taste and appreciate pungent cheeses that many French people would consider an important part of their self-conception (de Solier 2013). We have argued that these types of relations between dining and identity are robust and have deep psychological roots. We further hold that these relations and the relevant aspects of identity should be taken into account when assessing the viability and acceptability of nudges designed to improve eating habits and modify food norms. In short, attempts to alter some eating habits will also be attempts to alter something significant in people's identities.

One set of problems this could raise has to do with the practical effectiveness of eating habit nudges. People may be more willing and able to change shallower aspects of themselves, behaviors or tendencies that they take to be more peripheral to their identities, but less willing and able to change those that are more central, or that they take to be expressive of who they really are. Or in the terms we introduced earlier, nudges could bump up against a food norm that is resistant to change because complying with it is an important way to signal commitment to a larger group, or because it is woven into an especially stable social role that many people strongly identify with and do not wish to abandon. Asking (or subtly prodding) people to change such eating habits and the norms that govern them is asking (or subtly prodding) them to change who they are. Changes could be practically harder to achieve because the identity-based psychology of some dining practices runs "deeper" than that associated with run of the mill cases of behavior, even habitual behavior. This seems to us an open and interesting empirical question. The prominence of disgust in food norms may add an additional psychological wrinkle to this question about the likely effectiveness of eating habit nudges. It could also inform one of the factors that Thaler and Sunstein appeal to in justifying the use of nudges, namely that nudged choosers often approve of nudges because they see themselves as making better choices (i.e., better by their own standards of evaluation), whatever those may be. However, people may be less likely to so favorably assess a nudge that turned them into an object of public disgust (or an object of self-disgust, for that matter).

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[18] Not too much, though (Healy, 2017).

A related set of problems is about not practical viability but justification and moral acceptability. Again, there will be a line between acceptable and overly coercive or manipulative nudging strategies, and different factors should be taken into consideration when deciding where it should be drawn. Our questions here center on whether and when moral appraisal should take account of identity. Is asking someone to change who they are and take themselves to be asking too much, or does subtly prodding them into altering certain behaviors amount to tampering with their identity? What are the conditions under which it is permissible to challenge a person's identity? When, if ever, is it permissible to tamper with it in less overt ways? Where do these factors sit with respect to those more common to discussions of paternalism and nudging, and how should they be weighed?

For example, there is a family of views on which autonomy and agency are deeply bound up with a person's ability to express her identity through her actions, or act out his deepest self in his deeds (Benson 1990; Lindemann 2014, esp. ch. 3; cf. Sripada 2016). Critics could use such views to build a case that tampering with people's identities is tampering with their agency and constitutes a kind of infringement on their autonomy. These infringements, like other infringing factors, need to be taken into consideration when assessing the moral acceptability of different nudging strategies. Moreover, given the overlap of food and dining with identity, these kinds of factors are likely to loom large when thinking about eating habit nudges. Certainly this line of thought needs to be spelled out in much more detail, but we hold that it is intriguing and worth pursuing, and hope to have laid some of the necessary groundwork for exploring it more carefully in the future.

Conclusion

If you are what you eat, then attempts to change what and how you eat are, in effect, attempts to alter your identity, who you are. Given the connection between food practices, dining norms, and identities, we have argued that there is another dimension along which arguments and attempts to change food practices and dining norms need to be evaluated, namely the dimension that considers if and when it is permissible to change a person's identity. Moreover, we have developed an account of identities in terms of social roles and social norms, which allows a wealth of work in empirical moral psychology on the acquisition and performance of social norms to be brought to bear on questions of how identities are psychological housed and how they might be effectively altered. It also illuminates the role that disgust is likely to play in food practices and dining norms, and the kinds of benefits and drawbacks this is likely to bring with it. We have argued that the nature of disgust restricts the uses to which it might justifiably be put in the service of creating more ethical eating habits.[19]

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