

INTRODUCTION

PURE FOOD: THEORETICAL AND CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

Paul Collinson and Helen Macbeth

A quest for eating healthily has become one of the defining features of food consumption habits in the Western world in the twenty-first century. Awareness of and concern about the origins of food, the nature of its production, its constituent ingredients and, fundamentally, the relationship between what we eat and who we are has grown markedly and permeates many different aspects of popular culture and day-to-day living. This is manifested in innumerable different ways, from food labelling to diet books, from organic farming to guerrilla gardening,¹ and has profoundly influenced the way in which food is produced, distributed, bought, consumed and recycled today. It is associated with other interrelated attitudinal and behavioural trends, including: a greater concern with issues surrounding the environment and sustainability; the rise of consumer activism and green politics, anti-globalisation, localism and communitarianism; the emergence of the ‘risk society’; and more awareness of issues surrounding the relationship between physical and mental health, along with movements such as ‘gym culture’.

The quest often involves a striving for a biological or quasi-biological concept of ‘purity’. But what does ‘food purity’ mean? Why is purity itself regarded in such a positive way? How do notions of food purity vary cross-culturally? What implications does food purity have for food production and consumption? And how do concepts of food purity link with our own sense of psychological wellbeing? This book seeks to answer some of these questions. It collects together contributions from anthropologists and scholars from other disciplines, as well as practitioners, who examine different aspects of pure food from theoretical and empirical standpoints. Some chapters focus on the historical and theoretical dimensions of notions of purity as related to food, whereas others provide examples of the importance of pure food in

different cultures, drawing primarily upon ethnographic research conducted variously in Latin America, Melanesia and Western Europe, along with practitioner experiences of food-related issues of significance in contemporary societies. The objective of the book is to shed light on variations in practices, behaviours and cultural beliefs in different places in relation to pure food, while also highlighting some of the similarities between them.

This Introduction will set out the main themes of the book and the chapters that follow, which are described at appropriate points in the discussion. It begins with an examination of purity itself, the origins of the term and what purity means when applied to food. This leads into an exploration of anthropological concepts of purity, drawing on theories of classification and ideas surrounding dirt, disgust and pollution, and noting how notions of food purity form a central component of religious and social ideology in a number of societies. We then discuss the associations between pure food and health, examining issues surrounding food hygiene, safety, regulation and risk, health foods and food labelling, in terms of the listing of ingredients, additives and nutritional information, as well as new forms of labelling that consider environmental impacts and fairtrade, among other issues. We go on to consider the rise of vegetarianism and veganism in relation to pure food, as well as the recent emergence of dietary regimes in which the quest for food purity is the key goal. The rise of organic farming and food is the focus of the next section, which also examines how food is promoted and marketed. Motivations for dietary choices are then explored in the context of the important relationships between the factors underpinning food choices and pure food itself. We finish by drawing the discussion together and offering some tentative conclusions.

What Is Purity?

According to the online etymological dictionary *etymonline*,² the word ‘pure’ is derived from the Latin term *purus*, which means ‘clean, clear, unmixed, unadorned, chaste and undefiled’. The same source claims that the English word ‘impure’ was in common use in the early sixteenth century as meaning ‘earthy, mundane, not spiritual’. It goes on to explain that during the course of the 1500s, the meaning of ‘impure’ expanded to encompass people and activities that were considered ‘obscene, lewd, unchaste and immoral’ and then, by the 1590s, the word conveys anything ‘mixed with offensive matter, tainted’. Thus, the positive moral association of purity and the negative association of its antonym were there from the early usage of the words in English and are reflected in the way in which the terms are frequently viewed today (for a further exploration of these concepts, see Lejavitzer and the Epilogue, this volume).

Notions of purity and impurity – and pollution – are interwoven throughout social and cultural life across all societies, and anthropologists and

other social and behavioural scientists have exhaustively documented the numerous different ways in which the concepts are manifested (Duschinsky 2016). The body is a key locus for these ideas. The potential polluting effects of bodily secretions are, as far as is known, a cultural universal, albeit a highly variable one, and are reified in the form of a welter of different taboos from, for example, the consumption of nasal mucus (e.g. Portalatín 2007) to the ritualised seclusion of menstruating women. Whereas purity is commonly associated with chastity and virginity, anything deemed sexually transgressive is often labelled as ‘dirty’. Many religions have complex ideas concerning ritual pollution, with blood being particularly marked out. On another level, it is no coincidence that the etymologies of *holy* and *whole* are closely linked; to be complete (and pure) has long been associated with being sacred. The contemporary resonance of ‘whole’ when used as a prefix in relation to certain types of (pure) food – viz wholefoods, wholegrains, wholewheat, etc. – is almost certainly related to this association as well.

These days, discourses surrounding the environment are frequently imbued with notions of purity and pristine(ness), whilst the popular understanding of the term ‘pollution’ now largely implies the contamination of the environment to the exclusion of virtually all other meanings. The boundaries between communities, societies and nations themselves may sometimes also be drawn with reference to highly contentious ideas surrounding cultural and racial ‘purity’. Even space in the home is organised with reference to culturally proscribed ideas about correct layout and the possible polluting effect of cross-contamination, such as, to take a classic example, shoes being placed on a dining table (Douglas 1966: 44). Finally, and most importantly for our topic, the purity or otherwise of what we eat has become a dominant motif, manifested and transmitted through a myriad of cultural forms, in shaping the social significance of food and foodscapes in the modern world.

In Chapter 1 of this book, the social anthropologist Jeremy MacClancy writes about the notions of purity and impurity in different periods of time. He discusses how, as the distance widened between producers and consumers from the late eighteenth century onwards, concerns grew about the ingredients in food sold commercially. This led to various pieces of legislation being passed in the United Kingdom and the United States that started to regulate additives in food. Whilst noting the apparently universal association of purity with the positive, something also explored by the human ethologist Wulf Schiefenhövel in the following chapter, MacClancy emphasises the fact that, when it comes to food, ‘purity’ is also a contested concept, its definition changeable according to time and social context. He also poses the question as to why, fundamentally, purity is viewed positively – and, as he points out, answering this is not at all straightforward. However, probably the best starting point is structuralism, a prominent theoretical paradigm across the social sciences and humanities in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Purity and Systems of Classification

That human beings need to classify the world in which they live, with systems of classification being socially determined and varying cross-culturally, is something that all students of social and cultural anthropology learn early in their education. It is one of the most fundamental concepts in the discipline and was articulated initially in 1903 by Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss in their book *Primitive Classification*. Their direct intellectual descendant, the renowned French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, was the great pioneer of structuralist thought in the last century and his ideas helped steer the development of social anthropology during the 1950s and 1960s and beyond. In books such as *Le Totémisme Aujourd'hui* (1962, published in English as *Totemism* in 1963) and *Mythologiques I: Le Cru et le Cuit* (1964, published in English as *The Raw and the Cooked* in 1966), as well as numerous articles, he demonstrated the importance of food for the understanding of social life; his often quoted assertion that ‘natural species are chosen not because they are “good to eat” but because they are “good to think”’ (1963: 89) has resonated down the ages. The ideas of Lévi-Strauss were imported into British social anthropology through the work of several influential figures, including Edmund Leach, Rodney Needham and Mary Douglas (Kuper 1973: 206).

Douglas’ work pushed the concept of purity to the centre of the discipline through the publication of *Purity and Danger* in 1966. Her ideas were formulated and illustrated partly through reference to food and food taboos, in showing how what we eat and what we don’t eat are derived from systems of classification that reflect how societies view the world. In the famous third chapter of the book *The Abominations of Leviticus*, Douglas comprehensively debunked the functionalist and ‘medical materialist’³ view of food taboos, which held that they stemmed primarily from hygiene and environmental considerations. Instead, she showed, through a detailed analysis of the Book of Leviticus from the Old Testament, how they derived instead from societally based systems concerning the classification of animals. Some animals were considered unclean not because they were dangerous to health, but because they did not conform to the expected characteristics of the major categories of animal as they were understood in ancient Hebrew society. They therefore had to be ‘marked out’ in some way, by being tabooed.⁴

The overarching dictum of *Purity and Danger* that ‘dirt is matter out of place’ (Douglas 1966: 36) was not actually coined by Douglas – its first use has been attributed to the then future British Prime Minister Lord Palmerstone in a speech made in 1853 (Fardon 2013) – and yet it remains one of the most influential insights ever to emerge from social anthropology. By drawing on cognitive science, Douglas’ ideas emphasised the fact that systems of classification work on a psychological as well as a societal level by removing ‘mess’, enabling human beings to make sense of their disordered,

chaotic world. Dirt, for Douglas, ‘exists in the eye of the beholder’ (1966: 2). Classes of things rely on maintaining boundaries between them and this is achieved by separating out those things considered anomalous. In relation to food types, those that are viewed as disgusting are (usually), she argued, held to be so because they are seen as not conforming to a particular set of alimentary rules – examples of course abound, from the eating of pork in Muslim communities to insect consumption in many Western countries (e.g. Schiefenhövel and Blum 2007). As Marvin Harris (1985) famously said, some foods are dirty and disgusting because we don’t want to eat them, not the other way round.

In Chapter 2, Wulf Schiefenhövel provides a comprehensive treatise on the nature of disgust cross-culturally from an ethological standpoint. Schiefenhövel stresses the dichotomy of food as being either pure or impure, and the association of ‘pure’ with ‘proper’ and ‘impure’ with ‘improper’. He emphasises the primarily social basis of dietary laws around the world and demonstrates that these can have a physical manifestation in terms of the disgust reaction. His chapter also reminds us that categories can change over time as well as space, so that what may have once been considered disgusting can be transformed into a delicacy in another era. Schiefenhövel demonstrates his theme through a survey among students in Indonesia, the results of which underline the social basis of attitudes towards pure and impure foods. He also makes the point that the relationship between the physiological reaction of disgust, including nausea and vomiting, and the social classification of food is not a simple one, something to which we return below. Although dynamic and fluid in nature, the key message is that socially determined categories exist in all societies and serve a fundamental human need for order.

How fundamental this is can be illustrated by recent developments in neuroscience, particularly the Bayesian Brain theory, as outlined by the psychotherapist Mark Carter in Chapter 3. Carter draws together concepts developed in anthropology, psychoanalysis and neuroscience that emphasise that the need to understand and classify the world, to make it more ordered, has been shown to be critical for survival. In taking Douglas’ (1966) work as a starting point, he shows how her ideas dovetail well with recent ideas on how the brain regulates emotions and survival mechanisms. He describes a clinical example from his own work, in which a young boy uses a ‘pure’ food in the story of *The Gingerbread Man* as a metaphor for his emotional and psychological state. Carter uses this to reflect the wider themes of his chapter, with the purity of form of the gingerbread man at the start of the story and its messy end when it is eaten, reflecting, in microcosm, overarching ideas concerning the importance of ‘order’ to human psychological wellbeing.

Although Douglas’ ideas changed over the years and she revised some of her 1960s insights later in life, *Purity and Danger* undoubtedly left an inestimable and lasting legacy on scholarship, something explored in the collection

Purity and Danger Now (Duschinsky et al. 2016). According to an article published in *The Times Literary Supplement* (1995), it was one of the 100 most influential books in any sphere written since the Second World War. As well as being referred to in many of the following chapters, Mary Douglas also has an indirect connection with this book, as she was one of the founding members of the International Commission on the Anthropology of Food and Nutrition (ICAF), the organisation that gives its name to the series in which this volume forms the latest part.

Food Purity: A South Asian Example

In many societies around the world, ideas about purity and pollution are much more central to everyday life than in others, and often form part of a complex cosmology within which food plays a central role. We find their fullest expression, perhaps, among South Asian communities. In Hinduism, for example, food is an intrinsic component of the social and moral order of society, as well as being intimately connected to psychological wellbeing. That the purity of mind depends on the purity of food is something emphasised throughout the Vedas, the Hindu sacred texts. The Chandogya Upanishad states:

The earth (food) when eaten becomes threefold; its grossest portion becomes faeces, its middle portion flesh, its subtlest portion mind. (6.5.1) (Max-Müller 2000: 188)

Effectively, ‘you are what you eat’. Hindu teachings divide food into three categories: Tamasic, Rajasic and Sattvic. Tamasic foods are considered impure and include categories such as leftovers or spoiled food; they are associated with negative emotions such as anger, jealousy and greed. Rajasic foods include meat, eggs, fish and spicy foods, and are considered to produce strong emotions and passions as well as psychological restlessness. Sattvic foods, which include fruit, vegetables, wholegrains and nuts, are held to be the purest form of food and the most desirable, promoting stability, calmness and wellbeing (e.g. Dhanya et al. 2019).

Notions of food purity and pollution are part of a complex belief system that underpins how food should be procured, prepared and consumed (e.g. Sen 2004: 30)⁵ – as well as reinforcing social hierarchies between different communities and castes. The latter connection was explored by Louis Dumont in his famous structuralist study, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications* (1980 [1966]), which was published in the same year as *Purity and Danger* and became another anthropological ‘classic’. Debate has since raged about Dumont’s thesis on the importance of purity and pollution in the creation and maintenance of the caste system, which is

well beyond the scope of this chapter. What is clear, however, is that these concepts remain important in shaping ideas about the purity of food in South Asia and among South Asian diaspora communities globally.

Ethnographic evidence abounds on how this is manifested.⁶ In relation to food preparation and handling, space constraints restrict us to a few basic highlights. In orthodox Hindu households, the kitchen is often seen as a sanctified space akin to the inner sanctum of a temple. Cooking is generally performed by a senior female within the household, who must not be menstruating and must wash thoroughly and wear fresh clothes before entering the kitchen. Non-Sattvic foods such as onions, garlic, chicken and eggs are sometimes prepared using separate sets of utensils from those used to cook traditional foods; some affluent households may have secondary cooking areas or even additional kitchens for preparing different categories of food. A plate that has been used is considered as defiled by the eater's saliva and polluting to the person who washes it up. Sharing food is defiling, as it may also have been contaminated by saliva. The cooking process itself is a potential source of pollution, through possible contamination by the chef's saliva or sweat. Food should never be tasted during cooking, with readiness determined by odour and appearance alone. Food cooked by members of a lower caste is considered defiling for those of an upper caste. Food is always eaten with the right hand, with the left believed to be unclean.

An illustration of just how powerful these cultural beliefs can be comes from an orthodox Hindu family in London known to one of the authors of this chapter. The household is strictly vegan. There is a small temple in the house in which separate sets of plates, bowls and cups are used to offer food to God prior to a family meal. Once an offering is made, the food is added to the saucepans in the kitchen and incorporated with the rest of the food being prepared, in order to bless and purify it. On one occasion, a male acquaintance of the family, who was known not to follow Hindu strictures closely and to eat meat, fish and eggs, visited the house. He was served tea using an old set of crockery that the female head of the household had at the back of the cupboard; when he was gone, these were thrown away.

It is clear from the anthropological record that, in a South Asian context at least, food purity and the cultural imperative to maintain it are associated with far more than the avoidance of infection and disease, being absolutely intrinsic to familial and social life in both the subcontinent and in the diaspora. This echoes Douglas' thesis. The deep links between religious ethics, systems of classification, societal mores, and familial and social organisation in South Asian communities are articulated by and through food, which forms a complex language of symbolic and cultural expression.⁷ The same could be said, with varying degrees of emphasis along the relational axes, of food the world over, except that these connections may not be as obvious or as pronounced – or studied in such depth (cf. Messer 2007).

Pure Food and Personal Purity

In a Western cultural context, Chapter 4 by Amalia Lejavitzer, a scholar of classical Greek and Roman philosophy, explores the relationship between pure food and diet in Greco-Roman belief systems in terms of the therapeutic, health and spiritual associations of different types of food. Against the background of the wider meanings of ‘diet’, as in *δίαιτα* in ancient Greek and *diæta* in Latin, both concerned with lifestyle⁸ (Medina and Macbeth 2021), she refers not just to healthy eating but also to exercise and rest, baths and purges as elements related to concepts of purity and ‘paths to purification’. She describes how honey and olive oil were seen as divine gifts, which, as well as stemming from their health-giving properties, rendered them purer forms of food. She then goes on to discuss vegetarianism and dietary frugality, and their links with ancient medicine in the works of Porphyry and Hippocrates. In concluding, she makes the important point that pure and impure foods ‘represent a complex universe of meanings’ and a ‘system of symbols that have deep spiritual, moral and, above all, identity implications’. In summary, there is a strong sense of interaction, even unity, between the purity of the foods eaten and the personal purity, hygiene and health of the ancient peoples she is describing.

A noteworthy modern parallel to the Greco-Roman integration of food choices, lifestyle and the ‘purity’ of the body is found in Chapter 5 by the social anthropologists Lorenzo Mariano and Xavier Medina. This is based on ethnographic research into the culture of adherents to an ‘Eat-Clean’ fitness regime in Spain, concentrating particularly on the detailed attention paid to the types of food and drink that their informants consume. The authors argue that the intense control of consumption and culinary practices by members of this community is a central element of their self-identity, ideology and culture. Their informants’ use of the phrase ‘eating clean’ describes a concept similar to those used in other cultures to classify different types of food as pure, impure or tabooed. Furthermore, rules surrounding alimentary transgressions are very strictly defined, with self-punishments administered for deviations from the pure dietary path. In this way, their system implies a complete separation between what is considered ‘pure’ or ‘impure’ in what they consume, which is employed in order to maximise their fitness. Members of the community share information with each other, surf the internet to become experts, and learn to be precise over the amount and type of ingredients included in every portion of food that they eat, while neither pleasure nor price is significant in their dietary choices.

These last examples fit well into Douglas’ thesis. They highlight a unity between the purity of the food, body and mind, with social rules playing a critical role in directing behaviour. We now change tack somewhat to examine some of the wider and more everyday relationships between pure food and health – and, in so doing, highlight some drawbacks of Douglas’ ideas.

'Medical Materialism', Pure Food and Health

Safety, Regulation and Risk

As Douglas herself acknowledged later (2004), the somewhat rigid, monolithic and overly deterministic schema Douglas outlined in *Purity and Danger* has significant limitations (Macfarlane 2006), and for these her work has been extensively criticised (e.g. Hetherington 2004; Navaro-Yashin 2009). These shortcomings are evident in relation to her outright rejection of what she termed the 'medical materialist' perspective.

For most people today, hygiene is a significant consideration for the way in which food is handled, prepared and consumed, and is very much linked to concepts of cleanliness and therefore purity. Most of us are familiar with the reasons behind practices such as washing hands before cooking, sterilising food preparation areas, using separate utensils for cutting raw meat and other foods, taking care over the handling of raw poultry, etc.⁹ Our desire to wash, to scrub, to disinfect, to *avoid dirt* is seemingly driven, in modern complex societies at least, from what we have been told about pathogens and infections. However, Douglas had argued that this is essentially superficial and what is really going on springs from a much deeper and more fundamental desire for order; the South Asian examples cited above would appear to back this up. Although this is a compelling argument, a central criticism levelled at this model, and at the way it has been applied by some of her intellectual descendants, is that dirt is not *simply* matter out of place; dirt can also be a source of pathogenic infection. Dirt therefore does in fact exist as a risk to health, *pace* Douglas (1966: 2), and in an absolute form (see, for example, Curtis and Biran 2001; Curtis 2007; Rozin et al. 2010). The disgust reaction is germane here: evolutionary mechanisms may also be important in the association of disgust with certain things almost universally seen as inedible, such as soil and faeces, in order to avoid infection and disease.¹⁰

In the public sphere, news reports about people becoming ill or dying after being served 'dangerous' food are commonplace, and are often related to the use of food additives or artificial chemicals, either introduced intentionally or otherwise. Some of the more high-profile food scandals have included: the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) or 'mad cow disease' crisis in the 1990s in the United Kingdom (discussed by Macbeth in Chapter 10 in this volume); the deliberate contamination of infant milk powder in China in 2008–9, in which a chemical (melamine) was added in order to raise the protein content, which killed at least six children and affected thousands of others (Xiu and Klein 2010; Watson and Klein 2019: 13); the discovery of the illegal use of clenbuterol in pig feed in China in 2011 and in cattle feed in Mexico in 2001 (discussed by Deraga in Chapter 9 in this volume); the horse-meat scandal in Europe in 2013, in which significant amounts of horsemeat were found in meat products being sold as beef; and the chlorfenapyr scandal

in Punjab in India in 2016, when baked confectionary products were deliberately laced with insecticide, reportedly as a result of a family argument, killing thirty-three people. There are also the controversies over genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in Europe, the United States and elsewhere from the 1990s onwards.

As we were completing this Introduction, an alert was issued by the World Health Organization in October 2022 that said that the deaths of sixty-six children in The Gambia could be potentially linked to contaminated children's cough syrup, which contained 'unacceptable amounts of diethylene glycol and ethylene glycol'. The substances can apparently cause acute kidney injury and, according to local medical authorities, there was an increase of this condition among children under five detected in the country in July 2022.¹¹ Also at the time of writing, media reports emerged drawing on a newly published George Washington University study, which found that almost one in three Americans had detectable levels of a toxic herbicide, 2,4-Dichlorophenoxyacetic (2,4-D) acid, in their urine, which has been linked in high doses to birth defects, reproduction problems and some cancers. The implication was that this was being ingested with agricultural products. 2,4-D was also a key ingredient in the notorious Agent Orange used as a defoliant during the Vietnam War (Freisthler et al. 2022; Lakhani 2022).

With a widening gap between production and consumption of food, such scandals and controversies about food purity have emerged with increasing regularity over recent decades. As Inglis (2015: 475–78) has pointed out, food has never been more regulated than it is today – and with more regulation has come a greater propensity to uncover issues over 'food purity' that need to be addressed. However, given that there are so many different bodies involved in the regulatory processes and many of the most serious food controversies transcend national borders, their practical resolution becomes increasingly complex and problematic.

The issue here is that such food controversies reflect real biological and medical problems understood in materialist terms. However, not all cases of food-borne illnesses are so dramatic. In the United States, it is estimated that there are around 48 million cases of foodborne illness annually, equating to one in six of the country's population, resulting in 128,000 hospitalisations and 3,000 deaths (US Food and Drug Administration 2022a). Research by the UK's Food Standards Agency (2020) estimated the number of food-borne illnesses each year in the country at 2.4 million, up from one million in 2009. Partly as a result of the latter finding, a standardised system of hygiene ratings, the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme, for public businesses and catering establishments serving food was introduced by the UK government in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in 2011.¹² Through regular inspections, outlets are rated according to a five-point scale, which they are encouraged to (in England) or have to (in Wales and Northern Ireland) display on the premises. Surveys suggest that the ratings are an important consideration used

by consumers in deciding which outlets to choose (e.g. Benson et al. 2019; Armstrong et al. 2021). Other countries have introduced similar schemes that have also become relevant for consumers when making decisions about where to eat, in some cases even more so than in the United Kingdom (e.g. Aik et al. (2018) for Singapore and Vainio et al. (2020) for Finland).

So, returning to our earlier definitions of purity, it is important to acknowledge that these regulations are a response to a ‘medical materialist’ perspective on hygiene and food safety, or at least a popularised version of it. It follows that our care with hygiene and avoiding harmful food impurities stems not *only* from what scientists and educators tell us about germs and pathogens, nor is this *all* down to a psychological desire for order or the need to maintain cultural categories. It also emerges from day-to-day human experiences as well as from reports in the media – and chapters in academic books(!) – of the consequences of not being careful and consuming potentially dangerous substances, whether seen or unseen (cf. Curtis 2007, 2011; Paxson 2019). Overall, it seems clear that for most people today, food hygiene and safety are important both inside the home and outside it, and the reasons they would give for this are drawn from the medical sciences, even if these reasons are sometimes filtered and popularised through the media and social communication.

Contemporary concerns over food safety, as well as healthy eating, have led many commentators to conclude that we are currently living in an ‘age of anxiety’ in relation to food, especially in Western countries (e.g. Coveney 2006; Jackson 2010). Anxiety has undoubtedly been heightened by the global COVID-19 pandemic, with some research suggesting that this has led to a change in consumption patterns in some countries. This dovetails with wider societal trends associated with the emergence of the ‘risk society’, a term most closely associated with the German sociologist Ulrich Beck (1992). The concept takes as its starting point the observation that everyday life in modern, complex, industrialised countries (and increasingly in less industrialised countries as well) has become increasingly focused on identifying, managing and mitigating risk at both an individual level and in relation to whole communities and populations. Modernity has led to a bewildering variety of potential risks, and sometimes these are very real and responses are entirely reasonable and proportionate. Beck himself was particularly concerned with ecological and environmental risks, viewing these as the main consequence of industrialisation. However, sometimes they are based on fallacies in which perceived risk in the popular imagination balloons out of all proportion to the risk that is actually present. In this case, it is often the media (especially social media) that act as an echo chamber and loud-hailer, amplifying single, often very rare events to the status of an everyday occurrence, usually by simply not mentioning their rarity – with the implicit message that ‘this could easily happen to you’. (The same principle applies to the marketing of lottery games!)

In relation to food, perceived and actual risks vary on a case-by-case basis; in some instances, they may be entirely in accordance, while in others, the gap may be very large indeed. One current issue relating to ‘best before’ and ‘use by’ dates on food products illustrates this well and encapsulates the meta-debate over the role of risk in modern society. Food manufacturers err on the side of caution in calculating ‘best before’ dates, building in sufficient elasticity to guarantee food quality, minimise the risk to consumers and ensure that the latter will continue to buy their products (e.g. Vågsholm et al. 2020). Consumers, meanwhile, often fail to distinguish sufficiently between ‘best before’ and ‘use by’ dates (e.g. van Boxstael et al. 2014; Aschemann-Witzel et al. 2015; Tiwari 2016; Toma et al. 2020), with the latter carrying a much more serious risk of illness if ignored. From the perspective of campaigners, the approach of the manufacturers combined with the risk aversion of consumers contributes significantly to food waste, with millions of tonnes of perfectly edible food being thrown away each year.¹³

Globally, the UN’s Food Waste Index estimates that around 17 percent of all food that entered the food chain in 2019 was wasted, equating to 931 million tonnes (UN Environment Programme 2021: 8). This excludes losses from food production, transport, storage and processing, which were estimated at 13.3 percent globally in 2020 (Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN 2023). In the United Kingdom, it has been estimated that around 22 percent of all food that enters the food chain is wasted, worth a total of £19 billion per year (WRAP 2022). In the United States, the equivalent figures are a staggering 31 percent and US\$161 billion (UN Environment Programme 2022; US Department of Agriculture 2022; US Food and Drug Administration 2022b). While comparable statistics for the European Union (EU) are difficult to come by, EU countries reportedly waste 88 million tonnes of food annually.¹⁴

In this case, then, a striving for food purity in the sense of avoiding pathogens reflects the wider risk-avoidance culture that is an increasingly important feature of modern life in the industrialised world – and something that has serious implications for the future sustainability of food production. In many Western countries, there is a developing movement to reduce food waste by encouraging people to consume rather than dispose of food that has gone past its ‘best before’ date – or to scrap the latter guide altogether. Several major UK supermarkets have already removed such dates from major product lines in recent years,¹⁵ while the European Commission is, at the time of writing, reportedly planning a change to its rules.¹⁶ Given their potential impact on reducing food waste, it is to be hoped that these efforts will achieve their desired aim and elevate the bar of perceived risk for the average food consumer. However, this will be challenging, given the rise in food-borne illnesses, as noted above, as well as pushing against wider societal trends that are moving in the opposite direction.

We can debate almost endlessly about where to draw the boundaries between materialist, functionalist and structuralist interpretations of the origin of ideas

of purity and pollution – as indeed many people have. There is probably no one definitive answer to be found here, and for now it is enough to note that there is more to the quest for pure food than meets the eye (or mouth!), as we will hope to demonstrate in the rest of this chapter and book.

Health Foods, Purity and Labelling

It is evident that a striving for healthier, less processed and ‘purer’ types of food has been driven largely by a far greater popular awareness today of the links between diet and health.¹⁷ This derives not only from a desire to avoid the dangers of pathogens, as discussed above, but also due to a recent emphasis in popular discourse on the dangers of the modern ‘Western diet’, containing high amounts of processed foods, fats and sugars – and probably about as far away from the teachings of the Vedas as it is possible to get. Levels of obesity in many countries (and not only in the West) have risen significantly in recent years, particularly among children, placing additional burdens on public healthcare services.¹⁸ Worldwide, governments, health authorities and other public bodies spend vast sums of money on information campaigns about healthy eating, a reflection of the significant costs to the public purse of treating diet-related disorders (which include diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, cancers, neurodegenerative disorders and autoimmune conditions) in industrialised nations.¹⁹

As so-called ‘health foods’ have recently moved from specialist shops into mainstream supermarkets, they are sold alongside ‘ordinary’ foods, albeit usually for a higher price.²⁰ Information relevant to certain dietary restrictions may also be shown on labels. Whilst some health foods claim to be ‘purer’ and are bought as such, not all of them can be equated to pure food. Most, unsurprisingly, relate to dietary requirements as defined by medical and nutritional science, often with reference either to supplement(s) needed for some health conditions or to the absence of an ingredient to be avoided by certain groups of people, such as ‘gluten free’ for coeliacs and ‘lactose free’ for the lactase deficient. Other health foods are those sought by followers of different dietary regimes, which may have real, exaggerated or imaginary links to scientific nutritional advice and unclear links with ‘purity’, if any. This is a significant point, because the vast literature on nutrition and dietetics is almost entirely directed towards the relationship between dietary patterns and personal health, and is often focused on different individual health conditions rather than on different belief systems.

In recent years, the category of health foods has been supplemented by the rise of ‘superfoods’ – foods that are supposedly intrinsically imbued with enhanced health-giving properties. As well as their nutritional benefits, superfoods are also often viewed as ‘purer’ and are generally foods that have been subject to no or only minimal processing – wholefoods being a prime example.

Although what can be considered as a superfood varies widely, examples of those that are usually included in any lists or cookbooks include quinoa, kale, sweet potatoes, wholegrains, beetroot, wheat grass, pomegranate, acai, root ginger, ginseng, certain types of nuts (particularly almonds and walnuts), and ingredients for making drinks, such as rooibos, burdock and kombucha. As McDonell and Wilk point out, superfoods are at once a marketing device and a ‘folk category’ (2020: 2) for classifying foods, and are often believed to have ‘magical’ properties that have simultaneous physical, psychological and spiritual benefits. Loyer (2016) notes that superfoods have become a distinct sociocultural category in their own right, the production, distribution and consumption of which have important social and environmental implications (see also Reisman 2020 in relation to almonds), as well as ‘social power’ in view of their liminal and ‘marked out’ status (echoes of Douglas here as well). In the sense that purity is usually a defining characteristic of superfoods, they can also be considered pure foods – although this is potentially changing due to the proliferation of processed superfoods now available, often sold in the form of shakes, powders and tablets (e.g. LeBlanc 2020). We explore some of these points further in the next section, in relation to pure food and diet.

Another recent aspect of health foods is related to the growth in the consumption of ‘traditional’ foods, some of which may have been ‘rediscovered’ after having fallen out of favour – a trend likely to be motivated partly by the cognitive associations in the public imagination between ‘traditional’, ‘healthy’ and ‘pure’. Seaweed and arugula (rocket), both pure foods *par excellence*, are two examples, with consumption growing significantly in recent years in Europe and the United States. Cultivation of arugula was apparently prohibited in the Middle Ages in Europe due to its reputation as an aphrodisiac, and it became a marginal food in consequence, only being rediscovered in the early years of the twentieth century in Italy and southern France.²¹ Another example is the Icelandic yoghurt Skyr, which is now eaten in many European countries and the United States, and is marketed as a more healthy alternative to other yoghurts, being free of artificial additives and lower in fat. According to a manufacturer’s website:

Skyr had long been one of the food world’s best-kept food secrets, until recently that is. Arla has now brought the Icelandic-style yogurt to the UK, bringing a little taste of Arctic serenity to those who long to embrace the Nordic way of life.²²

The importance of food origin in the marketing of certain types of foods, as suggested by this quote, is a point we shall address further below. Foraging, another significant aspect of recent popular food trends, is also germane here – with the idea that entire steps in the food chain can be bypassed by simply collecting food directly from the forest or seashore, etc., greatly enhancing the perceived healthiness and purity of the foods that are gathered.

In the United Kingdom there has been a huge push in recent years to introduce healthier food into public institutions, such as schools and hospitals, with greater attention paid to its purity in the sense of origin and processing. High-profile public campaigns, such as that mounted by the British ‘celebrity chef’ Jamie Oliver over food in schools, have had a marked effect. An example of the results of such a campaign is described by the food consultant, researcher and campaigner Lucy Antal in Chapter 6 in relation to institutions in the city of Liverpool. Her chapter is focused on how local community groups have worked with public bodies to develop ways of ensuring that the food that is served in public buildings conforms with the latest guidance on healthy eating. She uses two case studies, one relating to the Royal Liverpool University Hospital and one focused on schools in the city, to show how, despite various challenges and barriers, such a partnership has greatly improved the wholesomeness and nutritional value of the food served to hospital patients and to young people in Liverpool. She concludes by suggesting that recognition of the importance of healthier and purer forms of food by at least some public bodies in the United Kingdom is a source of hope for the future.

Following high-profile controversies about what it is that we are eating, which have underlined the uncertainties that occupy the gap between ‘farm and fork’, nutritional labelling – listing all ingredients – has become enforced in law and is a central aspect of the way in which food is sold and consumed in many countries today. In the United Kingdom, labels publicise ingredients and admixtures in products for human consumption as well as emphasising their purportedly health-giving properties, as exemplified in Figure 0.1.

Various pieces of legislation related to food were implemented in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in both Britain and the United States, a response to the huge rise in mislabelled and mis-sold food and medical products at the time (see MacClancy, Chapter 1 in this volume; Young 1989). In the United States in 1938, the Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act was passed, which stipulated that food manufacturers identify on the packaging any artificial colourings, flavourings or preservatives added to the food. The United Kingdom passed the Food and Drugs Act in the same year, which had similar provisions (Skrovan 2017). With the United Kingdom’s accession to the then European Economic Community in 1973, UK legislation fell into line with European provisions, with various European Council Directives being incorporated into UK law and that of most Member States, which became progressively more comprehensive over subsequent years. Since the United Kingdom left the EU in 2020, UK labelling has so far remained in line with European standards.²³

Food labelling is now central to the retail branding of food, with some consumers demanding increasingly detailed information on what it is they are eating. The UK government’s stipulation in April 2022 that food outlets with over 250 employees must include calorific information about the food they are serving is a case in point. Some researchers have pointed out that



Figure 0.1. The historical roots of food labelling can be traced back at least a century. Nutritional and health labelling on the side of a cereal packet.
 © Paul Collinson

the proliferation of labels can also cause confusion among consumers (e.g. Chrzan and Ricotta 2019: 2), who may stop paying attention to them and cease engaging with certification schemes as a result (Grunert et al. 2014; Gray 2016). Yet, this labelling does allow consumers who do (or perhaps have to) check ingredients to identify any that for them would be problematic. However, that admixture *for them* should not necessarily be called an impurity or pollutant *for all*. This highlights a distinction between different modern uses of the word ‘pure’ in relation to food, as to whether it means without *any* admixture or only without a *harmful* admixture.

As well as nutritional labelling, food products also increasingly come with other forms of labels to designate compliance with principles such as fairtrade, organic farming, sustainability and environmental benefits. In the United Kingdom, they include the LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming) mark, the Rainforest Alliance certification, the Marine Stewardship Council’s Sustainable Seafood label, the Forestry Stewardship Council Mixed Sources mark and the Soil Association’s Organic Standard label. All of these reflect the integration of concerns over the intrinsic qualities of food with other wider societal movements and trends – a relationship that has a long history and is becoming ever-closer, something that we consider below.

Pure Food and Diet

At a surface level in contemporary Western societies, there is apparently a significant divergence from ideas concerning the strong unity between personal and/or metaphysical purity and physical health found in ancient Greco-Latin and contemporary South Asian cultures described earlier. However, scratch below the surface, and these differences are not so obvious – and sometimes dissolve entirely. The gap also seems to be narrowing rapidly.

In *Risk and Blame*, a collection of Douglas’ essays on cultural theory first published in 1992, she proposed a fourfold typology of urban culture, in which a ‘city core’ whose values and ideas stem from professional scientific knowledge is contrasted with ‘individualist’, ‘isolate’, and ‘dissenting enclaves’ (Douglas 2003: 104–8). In the latter, she argues that the values of the core group are regarded with suspicion, and alternative theories hold sway – and uses food to illustrate this. She cites the Arts and Crafts movement of the early 1900s in Britain, in which ‘natural products and raw foods’ were emphasised (2003: 108), as well as the Californian gay community in the 1980s, which apparently believed that a healthy diet and macrobiotic foods could prevent HIV infection (*ibid.*), as examples. Although still existing as social and cultural entities, one might argue that, in relation to food, the ideas of Douglas’ ‘dissenting enclave’ are in the process of being absorbed into mainstream culture in many Western countries and are no longer seen as out of step with it in the way that they were in the early 1990s (and early 1900s).

The ever-closer intersection between pure food and diet illuminates this point and is the main focus of this section.

Vegetarianism and Veganism

Vegetarianism and veganism²⁴ are commonplace in many societies today, while a bewildering array of other dietary regimes have also emerged in recent years, some of which emphasise a ‘purer’ form of eating. The widespread adoption of these diets shows that Douglas’ (1966) clear-cut division between ‘medical materialism’ and her structuralist interpretation of the ordering of ‘pure’ and ‘impure’ within a relevant belief system need not be such a dichotomy. One reason for this is that in most societies today, acceptance of a scientific materialism (or its popularisation) is part of their cosmology. The emergence of vegetarianism and veganism in different societies illustrates this observation well.

There is not necessarily an easy relationship between vegetarianism and veganism, and pure food. After all, there is no intrinsic, biological reason why fruit and vegetables should be considered ‘purer’ forms of food than fish and meat. However, the historical rise of these dietary regimes around the world was strongly linked to ideas of food purity, both in Western and non-Western societies, and remains so in some contexts – although quite different motivations are sometimes involved as well, as is discussed below. Both vegetarianism and veganism involve the elimination of certain types of foods from the diet, and reflecting on the motives for doing so reveals some that involve perspectives on food purity, whereas others are linked to different ideals.

The Vedic principles of food classification have already been mentioned in relation to South Asian communities, in which meat, fish and eggs are thought of as less pure (and potentially more polluting) forms of food than others. These ideas have had an important influence on the take-up of vegetarianism in the West, where they were combined with more general notions of purity (and puritanism!) relating to various social movements from the seventeenth century onwards. Whether followed for ideals of purity or not, vegetarianism and, especially, veganism are associated with healthier eating. This relationship has deep roots, but has become particularly emphasised in associated dietary regimes that have emerged more recently, in which the quest for purity often forms a central goal.

Although the English term ‘vegetarianism’ was only coined in the 1840s, the dietary choice has a long history (e.g. Stuart 2008). Pythagoras is often cited as being the first vegetarian (or vegan) and several famous historical figures such as Leonardo da Vinci, John Wesley, Leo Tolstoy, Mary Shelley, Franz Kafka and George Bernard Shaw, to name but a few, were also adherents. Motivations for their vegetarianism varied: for some, personal health and concern for animal welfare, for others religious conviction (Twigg 1979).

Religion has been highly significant in the adoption and spread of vegetarianism and veganism, with various religious movements through the ages espousing a meat-free diet as part of an overall philosophy that emphasises the importance of purity in various aspects of life – thought, behaviour and mode of living (e.g. Calvert 2012, 2018). Lejavitzer's chapter shows just how deep the historical origins are that unite metaphysical ideas with the purity of food and associated lifestyle regimes in Greco-Roman cultures. A separate history can also be traced in the case of Eastern religions, in which those doctrines incorporating the ancient Indian concept of *ahimsa* (meaning 'non-injury' in Sanskrit), the principle of not causing harm to any other living creature, have been especially influential. *Ahimsa* forms an important tenet in Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism and Jainism.²⁵

Currently there are more vegetarians in India than in the rest of the world put together, with estimates from survey data ranging from 23 percent to 37 percent of the population – approximately 317 million to 511 million people (Natrajan and Jacob 2018: 56). However, vegetarianism varies between the four religious communities cited above, with incidence ranging from 22 percent in the case of Buddhists²⁶ to 98 percent for Jains,²⁷ according to survey data (National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) 2013, quoted in Natrajan and Jacob 2018: 57).

Modern dietary habits and cuisine in India have been shaped by these different religions but also by many, more recent political, social, economic and environmental factors, as well as external influences through exposure to other culinary traditions (cf. Banerjee-Dube 2021: 106). This observation can obviously be applied more generally worldwide as well (Inglis and Gimlin 2009; Moffat and Prowse 2010), and yet vegetarianism and veganism remain important to a significant proportion of the Indian population. Western dietary habits are also becoming more influential on the subcontinent, as testified by the success of the fast-food chain McDonald's,²⁸ albeit by tailoring its menu to suit local tastes and with a complete separation of vegetarian and 'non-vegetarian'²⁹ foods (Nandini 2014). This illustrates the important point, also made by Watson (2006) in relation to the rise of McDonald's in China, that the globalisation of food does not necessarily mean homogenisation, but the transfiguration of global foodways to suit local consumption traditions and habits. Nevertheless, in India, religion continues to be an important influence on determining people's dietary choices, with the connection between sacredness and purity being fundamental to this.³⁰ With ideas imported from abroad, modern scientific understanding has merged with the various cosmologies of a population as large and as socially diverse as in India to create new forms of alimentary ideologies and cultures.

In relation to the rise of the vegetarian movement in the West, Stuart (2008) shows how ideas imported from India from the early seventeenth century onwards had a marked effect on the rise of European vegetarianism, and were combined with ethical and proto-ecological concerns in the

work of various influential advocates from the European elite of the time, including Jean-Jacques Rousseau, René Descartes, Pierre Gassendi, Francis Bacon, Voltaire and Benjamin Franklin. For these early adopters, to take up vegetarianism was to subscribe to a purer form of living, something that, in its most extreme form, became associated with Puritanism itself. Some of Oliver Cromwell's soldiers and followers during the English Civil War, for example, apparently called for the creation of a 'slaughter-free society of equality' (ibid.: 3). These sentiments were echoed later in the Victorian era in Britain, when vegetarianism was linked to powerful notions surrounding the importance of individual self-restraint and often went hand in hand with other nineteenth-century political and social movements, including socialism, teetotalism, spiritualism, naturism and the campaign for women's suffrage (Gregory 2007; Schweers 2021). An integration of such food consumption patterns with wider patterns of social ideals fits well with Douglas' model, and it is notable that the word 'puritanical' is still used today in relation to veganism (as well as other supposedly strict forms of behaviour), both as a badge of honour for its adherents and also, more usually, as a means to castigate them by its detractors.³¹

The rise of vegetarianism and latterly veganism has been a major aspect of food trends in the Western world since the 1960s and has gone hand in hand with the emergence of wider social movements and attitudinal changes (Wright 2021). Bestselling books such as Frances Moore Lappé's *Diet for a Small Planet* (1971), Mollie Katzen's *Moosewood Cookbook* (1974) and Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* (1975) were highly influential in giving impetus to the take-up of meat-free diets. Data concerning incidence of vegetarianism and veganism today abound, but they can be highly contradictory and sometimes of questionable validity. However, there appears to be a significant rising trend among millennials (and their successors, Generation Z, as they are sometimes called) in the United States, with, according to surveys, 22 percent of them having tried a vegetarian diet at some point (Jacimovic 2021). In the United Kingdom, the adoption of these diets also appears to have risen more quickly than in the United States in the last few years.³²

Recent research by a UK supermarket chain noted that half of those who said they were vegetarian or vegan also eat meat 'at weekends', 'occasionally' or 'on special occasions' (Waitrose and Partners 2018: 6). This survey demonstrates that – as with pure food itself – such categories are not absolutes, but are, in essence, social constructions and incorporate a certain latitude for flexibility. The rise of the term 'flexitarian', defined as having a semi-vegetarian, or meat-reduced diet, in recent years is an obvious manifestation of this. Thus, although people might be aspiring to adopt a 'purer' diet by *attempting* to eliminate meat, fish or all animal-based products, the reality for many is, literally, more mixed. It is also interesting that the survey revealed that meat is eaten on occasions that are 'marked out' in some way as 'special'; Douglas would certainly have had something to say about that.

A variation on this theme is explored in Chapter 7, in which the anthropologists Gabriel Saucedo, Claudia Mercado and Paul Collinson review the use of blood as food in different societies around the world. Self-evidently, to adopt a diet free from the consumption of animals and animal-derived products is to eliminate the consumption of blood, but some, who do not avoid all meat, may have specific views about consuming blood products. The authors describe the social and cultural contradictions in the ways in which blood is used as food (by whom, whether it is cooked or consumed raw, etc.) and contrast these examples with other contexts in which blood is considered dirty, dangerous and polluting. These instances are then reconsidered in terms of health and nutrition by comparing the chemical constituents in the blood of different species reared for their meat. The authors use an ethnographic example to draw attention to the social significance of blood consumption as part of a traditional ritual in rural Mexico. The chapter also serves to highlight the significance of blood consumption down the ages in religious and spiritual practices derived partly from its ambiguous status as an intrinsically pure food on the one hand and yet potentially a source of danger and defilement on the other.

New Dietary Regimes

In the ‘Lisa the Tree Hugger’ episode of *The Simpsons*, Lisa’s friend Jesse states that he is a ‘Level Five Vegan’ and ‘won’t eat anything that casts a shadow’.³³ Life imitates art and apparently the term has since caught on in vegan circles to refer, with tongues slightly in cheeks, to anyone who refuses to make any sort of compromise with their dietary strictures (Vegan.com 2022). Whilst obviously not going to Jesse-like extremes, some of the diets that have emerged in recent years – many of which are variations on veganism – can be dauntingly prescriptive in what they advocate for their followers, and we now turn our attention to some of them.

In recent years in the West, vegetarianism and veganism have morphed into – and to a certain extent have been replaced by – several sub-branches, and are now accompanied by a new emphasis on ‘clean eating’ through the consumption of ‘purer’ forms of food (or ‘superfoods’). Most restaurants and fast-food chains are now offering vegan alternatives,³⁴ while a whole movement has emerged around ‘cooking clean’ at home. Detox diets have risen to prominence in many Western countries in recent years and are based on the idea that so many foods now contain unnecessary ingredients and contaminants (pesticides, artificial flavourings, colourings, etc.) that are considered harmful for the body and should be removed from the diet in favour of supposedly ‘detoxifying’ foods such as plant-based juices and foods high in fibre. Raw Foodism (also known as Raw Veganism), whereby at least three-quarters of a person’s food intake consists of uncooked food – or, in the strictest

versions, the elimination of all foods that have been cooked, pasteurised or heated above 118°F (Cunningham 2004) – is also becoming more popular (Raba et al. 2019: 49).

Although not a vegan diet, the Paleo Diet specifies a dietary regime supposedly modelled on that of our hunter-gather ancestors during the Palaeolithic era. Lean meat, fish, eggs, fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, and healthy fats and oils – all of which are held by the diet’s advocates to be ‘purer’ forms of food – feature heavily in this regime (Newman 2017; Mayo Clinic 2020), whereas processed foods, grains, most dairy products, sugar, legumes and any food containing additional ingredients or ‘looks like it was made in a factory’ (Gunnars 2018) are eliminated.

As well as all these, a host of mostly female celebrities around the world – echoing the role of the influencers of the seventeenth century – have promoted their own personal ‘pure’ dietary regimes, drawing on their invariably huge followings on social media.³⁵ The internet is also awash with sites devoted to the supposedly transformational effects of pure food. In the case of BuzzFeed.com’s ‘Clean Eating Challenge’, for example, the claim is that ‘you’ll learn to eat healthily, feel awesome, and stay that way’ by detoxing and eating ‘real food’ for two weeks (Buzzfeed.com 2022). In 2014, with the launch of a scheme by a husband-and-wife team through crowdfunding in the United Kingdom, January became ‘Veganuary’; a reported 620,000 people from 220 countries signed up in 2022 (compared to 4,000 in 2014) (Veganuary.com 2023). Sugar-free bakeries have also sprung up all over the place.

A preview on Amazon.com for a recent book called *The Naked Diet* by the food consultant Tess Ward encapsulates these trends:

The Naked Diet is all about changing your way of eating for the better, making you feel cleaner and purer. It takes a stripped back approach to the food that you eat, that will give you more energy, help you lose weight and cleanse your body... It isn’t about dieting, it’s about changing your mindset, so that you eat less processed, cleaner and simpler foods that restore and nourish your body back to its naked and pure state.³⁶

The chapter headings of this book — ‘Pure’, ‘Raw’, ‘Stripped’, ‘Bare’, ‘Undressed’, ‘Nude’, ‘Clean’ and ‘Detox’ – invoke a liberating, almost quasi-sexual view of clean eating, with the cleansing of body and mind the ultimate goal. The parallels here with the Vedic principles and Greco-Roman practices discussed earlier are manifest. The shelves of bookshops in Western countries are now heaving with similar titles³⁷ (Waterstones.com, a UK online bookseller, listed over 10,000 books that included ‘vegan’ in the title or as a keyword in 2022),³⁸ underlining the apparently insatiable demand that has emerged for guides to how to eat more purely. MacClancy’s chapter in this volume provides similar examples.

Today, as at the time Douglas was writing *Purity and Danger*, contemporary 'Western' medicine is based on scientific research, such as biochemical analyses, physiological measurements and random controlled trials. A significant difference in this from other, traditional, belief systems is that the latest scientific research is always questioning or reanalysing earlier research conclusions, sometimes to prove or sometimes to disprove them. Results accepted and published in refereed journals then become the foundation of our understanding or, at the very least, become the subject of further research. This is also the case for the scientific approach to nutrition and health. Whereas in several cases popularised health food beliefs are supported by evidence from such scientific trials, the claims made for some of the other diets to emerge in recent years are far less certain and, in some cases, may even be harmful.³⁹

To condemn entire food groups metaphorically to the dustbin as 'impure' (and therefore 'dirty') potentially invites an 'unhealthy' relationship with food. For example, from a scientific perspective, there are particular concerns about the take-up of plant-based diets among young people, with the discovery of a rise in micronutrient deficiencies among teenagers in the United Kingdom in the last decade or so being described as a 'crisis' (Derbyshire 2018; Derbyshire et al. 2020). Especially worrying is research showing that the iron intake of more than half of teenage girls in the United Kingdom is below the recommended level (cited in Derbyshire et al. 2020). Others have argued that 'fast' vegan foods may be worse for health than meat-based products, since, as well as not providing the same levels of essential nutrients, they may contain higher levels of fat, sugar and salt (Park 2020). So, in attempting to adopt a 'purer' diet, people may actually be doing the opposite by consuming 'impurer' forms of food (in their own understanding of the term), which contain potentially *more* additives and highly processed ingredients than those foods that have been rejected. In his chapter, MacClancy also refers to orthorexia, defined as an obsession with eating only foods considered 'pure and perfect', something that could also have severe implications for health if followed too rigorously. (The condition is also mentioned in Mariano and Medina's chapter.) All of this emphasises the point stressed throughout this chapter and book concerning the malleability of the concept of food purity.

These concerns aside, the crucial issue for our purposes is that most modern dietary regimes serve to satisfy a quest to consume less adulterated, less processed, less 'complex' – fundamentally 'purer' – forms of food. Along with the intrinsic qualities of food itself and what constitutes a healthy diet, issues surrounding the way in which food is produced, distributed and sold have become central to consumer concerns over contemporary food systems and industrialised food production. These are all important factors in the rise of the organic sector in recent years, an issue to which we now turn.

Organic Farming and Food

For many, reducing the physical and/or perceived distance between field and fork, with hopefully a minimum of human interference both in the field and in processing, has become a key goal in determining food choices and ensuring that what is on the fork is as unadulterated and ‘pure’ as possible. For those adhering to the types of ‘clean eating’ diets described above, foods that have been combined with other ingredients, altered or in any way interfered with during production and processing are considered less ‘pure’ and inherently less trustworthy. This idea has been fuelled further by controversies over food safety, in relation to many of the ways that food is produced, handled, prepared and processed, as well as the contaminating effects of chemical weedkillers, hormones and other therapies used on livestock.

Consumers’ declining confidence in food as well as health considerations – their own, that of their family and that of the environment too – have been important factors driving an exponential growth in organic farming and food in recent years (Monier-Dilhan and Bergès 2016; Macbeth, this volume). Global sales rose from US\$18 billion in 2000 to US\$106 billion in 2019 (Wunsch 2021), with the total value of the sector predicted to expand from US\$165.52 billion in 2018 to US\$679.81 billion by 2027 (Wunsch 2020). Eleven European countries⁴⁰ had more than 10 percent of their agricultural land under organic production in 2020 (Eurostat 2022).

Organic farming has a long history in the West, its origins tracing back to at least the early years of the twentieth century and a particular rural revivalist agenda. Advocates and writers such as Albert Howard (who introduced Indian ideas on composting to a Western audience), Lord Northbourne⁴¹ (to whom the term ‘organic farming’ is generally attributed) and Eve Balfour (who founded the UK’s Soil Association, which today certifies 70 percent of all of the United Kingdom’s organic food)⁴² in the United Kingdom; Ehrenfried Pfeiffer and Rudolph Steiner (who both promoted ‘biodynamic farming’) in continental Europe; and Jerome Rodale (founder of the Rodale Institute, which remains one of the leading organic farming training institutions in North America) in the United States were highly influential in the growth of the movement worldwide.⁴³ Most of their books are still in print.⁴⁴ In believing, to quote Howard, that ‘the health of soil, plant, animal and man is one and indivisible’,⁴⁵ they also anticipated, and indeed shaped, the subsequent environmental movement by calling for a relationship between humanity and the environment based on nurture rather than domination (e.g. Delate and Turnball 2019).⁴⁶

Organic farming and food are by no means only a Western phenomenon. For example, of the 3.1 million total number of producers worldwide in 2019, 1.37 million were in India (Willer et al. 2021: 20). India and China have their own certification schemes, as do many other countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa. Whilst the criteria vary considerably and levels of enforcement

may be questionable in some cases, it is clear that support for the organic sector is expanding rapidly to encompass most of the world's countries. And of course, for many small-scale and subsistence farmers in the Global South, organic farming is something that they have practised for millennia anyway – as Albert Howard (2011 [1931]) demonstrated almost a century ago.

Strong links can therefore be traced in the ideas of the early organicists, as they came to be known, between the purity of food, the purity of land and the purity of those who live upon it, and the philosophies of the Greco-Roman and Indian traditions discussed earlier in this chapter. Their ideas are also, if anything, more relevant to contemporary consumers than they were at the time they were writing in the first half of the twentieth century. In Western societies today, two concepts in support of organic farming seem to have run in parallel. Both result from distrust of some recent food production and processing methods; the first is based on the belief that, in avoiding these, earlier 'traditional' methods were purer; the second follows scientific analyses of harmful residues found in modern foods and the demonstration of how these enter the food chain. Having pointed to these two perspectives, Macbeth (this volume) describes a situation where they diverge.

Exploring Motivations behind Dietary and Consumer Choices

The concerns of consumers over what it is that they are eating have become central considerations in the way in which producers and retailers promote and market food. The result is that some types of foods and dietary regimes may be regarded by some consumers as 'purer' because of how they are promoted. An example of this is in the use of descriptive words, such as *extra virgin* olive oil, *wild-caught* salmon or *line-caught* tuna, or in the publicised association of a food with a specific place from which it originates, such as *King Island Cloud Juice*⁴⁷ or *Galway Bay Gourmet Oysters*;⁴⁸ this is also a concept underpinning uses of the French word *terroir*. Some foods are not linked precisely to a specific geographical place name, but to a region that is often considered 'purer' than the places in which the products are being sold; examples include Milka's *Alpine* milk chocolate,⁴⁹ Korpahunaja's *Arctic* (or *Polar*, depending on the language used) honey⁵⁰ and *North Atlantic* langoustines.⁵¹ Promoting foods in this way is aimed at generating a more positive image by virtue of their being linked with particular environments, cultural traditions or lifestyles, something that imbues them with a heightened sense of 'purity' in comparison to other, nonautochthonous foods. The spread of the 'Mediterranean Diet' – modelled on what has become a popular concept, well beyond its geographical origins, of a 'typical diet' of the peoples of the Mediterranean region (Medina and Macbeth 2021), with its emphasis on fruit, vegetables, beans, fish, nuts and olive oil – has been another significant feature of recent food trends and is a case in point. Whilst not based on pure

foods intrinsically, it is typically held to be a 'purer' dietary regime by many of its adherents from outside the region itself (see, for example, the numerous articles on the Mediterranean Diet in the magazine *Clean Eating*).⁵² There is an obvious element of 'invented tradition' in this (cf. Hobsbawm and Ranger 2012), something that, at a stretch, could potentially be applied to the Paleo Diet too.

Relatedly, the connections between cultural and culinary authenticity have also been successfully harnessed by the tourism industry in recent years in promoting food and environmental tourism. In Chapter 8, social anthropologist Paul Collinson discusses the ways in which the culture of western Ireland has been mythologised through the ages and is now utilised by the tourist industry to promote food and environmental tourism. Drawing from content analysis of various tourism websites as well as ethnographic observations, he demonstrates how the 'pristineness' of the rural culture and environment is explicitly associated with the purity of food for marketing purposes. From an anthropological perspective, the reasons for this stem from the observation that 'purity' represents a manifestation of postmodern social forms, in which the ideas of 'unadulterated', 'uncontaminated' and 'authentic' represent valuable cultural assets, and are contrasted with everyday experience in 'modern' industrialised societies.

There exists a reciprocal and mutually reinforcing link between the marketing and the consumption of foods, with marketeers studying motives and incorporating them into their ideas for publicity, and consumer choices being driven, at least to a certain extent, by the wording of advertising and other means of promotion. A key issue of relevance to this book lies in people's motivation for their dietary choices. In this respect, a distinction is often made in the literature between altruistic concerns (e.g. for the environment) and egoist concerns (e.g. related to the health benefits for oneself and one's family). Hjelmar (2011) also distinguishes between 'automatic' and 'reflective' consumers, with the former mainly concerned with practical considerations such as labelling and price, and the latter who think more carefully about their purchasing habits based on concern for the environment, animal welfare and the purity of food. Marketing and retailing affect these in different ways and to varying extents.

According to survey data, among vegetarians and vegans, several motivational drivers are usually at play in determining consumer choices,⁵³ although some may be more important than others according to the context. Health benefits and concerns for animal welfare and the environment feature prominently among Western respondents, whereas other factors such as those stemming from religious ethics and social mores are likely to play a greater role in non-Western societies. In a comparative study of vegetarians in the United States and India, for example, Ruby et al. (2013) noted that concerns for animal welfare and the environment are more prevalent among western vegetarians than among their Indian counterparts, whose motivations show a

greater concern with notions of pollution and purity. In the Waitrose survey mentioned above (Waitrose and Partners 2018), people cited a variety of reasons for becoming vegetarian or vegan, with animal welfare and health being the prime motivating factors.⁵⁴

In relation to the purchase of organic food, ‘altruistic’ and ‘reflective’ motivations include: supporting small, local producers; participating in the development of more environmentally food systems;⁵⁵ emotional responses engendered through direct interaction with producers;⁵⁶ and traceability.⁵⁷ Importantly for our purposes, the intrinsic qualities of organic food in the context of its perceived purity and concerns around food safety also emerge strongly from the evidence base.⁵⁸ From studies conducted in Sweden, Magnusson et al. (2001) and Magnusson et al. (2003) found that supposed health benefits associated with organic food outweighed environmental concerns, concluding that ‘egoistic motives seem to be stronger than altruistic motives’ (Magnusson et al. 2003: 115). According to Nagy-Pércsi and Fogarassy: ‘The reduced consumption of chemicals in organic farming is the main criterion for which the consumers choose products’ (2019: 6075). Similar conclusions have been drawn by Kapuge (2016), Lee and Yun (2015), and Padel and Foster (2005), among many others. Motivation is also discussed by Macbeth in Chapter 10 in relation to why consumers of organic foods are willing to pay premium prices for these products. Although health benefits are most commonly mentioned, other issues that can be considered ethical, primarily in relation to avoiding pollution of the wider environment, are also important. One can argue that in either case, concepts of purity are involved.

In summary, despite altruistic and ethical motivations, it can be said with some certainty that egoist concerns surrounding the potential deleterious effects of additional chemical inputs in the growing of food and rearing of animals (pesticides, herbicides, insecticides, artificial fertilisers, hormones, antibiotics and so on) are a prime motivational factor driving the growth of the organic food sector worldwide, although other pragmatic issues are also clearly important – including, of course, price.

What one finds, then, is that when dietary and consumer choices are not derived from religious rules, they can be, to varying extents, linked to the social attitudes of individuals – an association that probably arose in most Western societies during the nineteenth century. ‘To varying extents’ means that there is a continuum, not a separation, between Douglas’ categories, at least in contemporary societies. However, whilst that continuum exists across a whole population, each individual is likely to have more clear-cut views.

Ethnographic Approaches

Much of the literature cited above is drawn from survey-based research of consumer attitudes and behaviour. Significant value can be added by

qualitative and ethnographically based approaches that provide more detailed explorations of the attitudes surrounding organic food and how they vary cross-culturally.⁵⁹

Being interested in how modern technological advances are perceived by the general population in West Mexico, Daria Deraga, a biosocial anthropologist, presents in Chapter 9 the results of a bioethical study of consumer attitudes to different forms of agriculture and food production. Her study is based on interviews, conducted variously among low- to middle-income adults in a rural area, at an elite farmers' market, at an artisanal fair in Guadalajara and with university students; individuals of different age groups and gender and at varying socioeconomic levels were included. She asked about food that they considered safe to eat and their criticisms where that they perceived that safety to be compromised. She included questions about genetically modified organisms, cultured meat, vegetarianism and organic foods, and in this chapter relates the responses to concepts of purity or danger. She found that 'most were opinionated on their choices of food they consumed' (p. 175), but that there were interesting differences with socioeconomic status, educational level and age. From her results, she discerns an attitudinal change towards concerns about available foods and their production methods, driven principally by younger consumers.

The main theme in Chapter 10 by biosocial anthropologist Helen Macbeth is an exploration of the perception that food labelled 'organic' is also 'pure'. After a critical discussion of the meaning of the word 'organic' within scientific communities, as concerning all living or once living matter, or in chemical terms associated with carbon atoms, the author presents an ethnographic study conducted over several years of one beef farm in Oxfordshire, England, and describes all the activities essential for the beef produced to qualify for the label 'organic'. What is intriguing is how the chapter ends with the farmer giving up the activities for the right to use the 'organic' label in order to pursue other methods to ensure better health for the cattle and a better quality of the beef. Macbeth's chapter highlights the stringent standards for organic farming in the United Kingdom, despite the variability between certifying organisations, which has led some farmers, as in the case she studied, to decide to withdraw from the scheme. However, this has apparently not held back the organic sector greatly, as is evidenced by its continued expansion detailed earlier.

The chapters by Macbeth and Deraga as well as several chapters by other authors in this volume (including Schiefenhövel, Mariano and Medina, and Saucedo, Mercado and Collinson) are the latest examples of the insights that ethnographic research can bring to bear into understanding food choices – and indeed into food studies generally. This is a key message of this book and a good point to draw together this review and present some concluding remarks.

Conclusion: Towards a Unified View of Pure Food

In this Introduction, we have considered the meaning and contemporary significance of ‘pure food’ across a range of different societies and contexts. The structuralist schema outlined by Douglas (1966) has been a significant thread, telegraphing its inclusion in the first three chapters of this volume. We have noted its explanatory power in relation to the social classification of foods and culturally proscribed ideas of food purity, as well as the relationship between purity and psychological health, as described in Carter’s chapter. However, we have also noted how the ‘medical materialist’ approach, effectively rejected by Douglas in *Purity and Danger* (1966), does have value in relation to the links between pure food and personal health, dietary regimes and notions of food safety.

A quest for pure food also dovetails with observations of wider societal trends concerning the perception, management and mitigation of risk. The rise of modernity has brought with it an increasing variety of real and imagined risks manifested, for example, by concerns over the safety of food and the plethora of regulatory interventions that now govern its movement from field to fork. Additionally, in the risk society, perceptions of some risks are often amplified significantly, with ‘best before’ dates an example we highlighted in relation to food. But equally, risks to the environment, climate and sustainability from the ways in which food is now produced, distributed, consumed and wasted constitute real threats to the future of humanity and the planet itself, considerations that are partly driving the rise in the ‘rediscovery’ of certain types of foods, new forms of ‘traditional’ and artisanal processing, contemporary dietary regimes and organic farming (among other trends), all of which are strongly linked to the desire to eat (and live) more purely.

Another theme in this Introduction has been the strong relationship between pure food and purification of the body and mind, as described by Lejavitzer in relation to ancient Greece and Rome. In contemporary Western societies, for many people the pursuit of personal health is often entirely divorced from the pursuit of purity, and therefore from pure food. However, the South Asian examples cited here as well as the fitness culture described by Mariano and Medina remind us that, in some contexts, parallels with Greco-Roman ideas remain. Similarities are also evident in the latest dietary regimes surrounding the ‘detoxing’ of the body, which also place a strong emphasis on the links between pure food, bodily purity and mental wellbeing.

We have also considered the motivations for adopting certain diets that involve the *elimination* of foods, particularly meat. Whilst for many of their adherents, the pursuit of purity may not be an obvious driver for their dietary choices, by teasing these motivations out a little, we can see how they are often intrinsically related to pure food. As well as the perceived deleterious effects of contemporary systems of food production and processing on personal health, altruistic motivations concerning environmental pollution and

sustainability are also important factors. Dietary choices that focus on reducing or eliminating the perceived harmful effects of additives to food and the environment, either from the human diet or from production and processing, or more usually both, can be viewed as being motivated by a quest for purity. The relationship between the health (for this read purity) of the land, soil and community described by Albert Howard is manifest here, and it is this recognition on the part of contemporary producers and consumers that is driving the growth of the organic sector worldwide, despite the challenges inherent in the endeavour, as detailed by Macbeth in Chapter 10.

One key point that we would like to emphasise – and one that should be obvious from the foregoing discussion – is that pure food, as with purity itself, is not a monolithic category and is by no means immutable. This is a point also picked up in a number of the following chapters, especially the one by MacClancy. Rather, it is always and everywhere a contested social phenomenon, whose meaning and significance can (and does) alter, sometimes radically, over time and space. This can engender significant debate and controversy, both in the academy and outside, some of which we have noted here.

This latter observation is emphasised in the Epilogue to this volume, in which we expand upon the meanings and etymology of the word ‘pure’ drawn from various dictionary sources, before considering the different approaches to pure food used by the contributors, drawing out some of the links between them. In so doing, we explore notions of objective and subjective purity, and discuss the ways in which the purity of food dovetails with concepts surrounding the purification of the individual, physically, psychologically and spiritually, and even to ideas of improving the environment. A concluding section looks at the future of pure food. Here we extrapolate from the observations made in this chapter concerning the strong relationship between pure food and lifestyle, arguing that this is highly likely to deepen in Western countries over the coming decades. The emphasis on food safety and regulation is also likely to become increasingly central to food production, distribution, consumption and disposal. However, one crucial observation we make in the Epilogue, picking up a point made in some of the other chapters, is that for far too many people in the world today who do not have enough to eat, pure food is likely to be viewed as ‘an indulgent luxury with little meaning in their everyday lives’ (p. 208).

This chapter has in many ways only just scratched the surface of what is a vast topic, and we are conscious that there are some areas in which we could have gone into a lot more detail and some issues that we have failed to address at all. However, what comes across strongly from this review are the benefits of adopting a cross-disciplinary approach. This is a principle that ICAF has always championed through its conferences and publications, and is something that we have attempted to uphold in compiling the current volume. Whilst many of the following chapters are written by anthropologists, the book includes a number of contributions from specialists in other

disciplines, which, we believe, add important additional dimensions to the topic. There are certainly gaps in what we present on the following pages, but we hope that this volume adds value to the existing corpus of knowledge on pure food. Above all, we hope it is an interesting and enjoyable read.

Paul Collinson is a social anthropologist with interests in the anthropologies of food, conflict and development in Europe and Africa. He is a Visiting Research Fellow and former lecturer at Oxford Brookes University. He also works as a senior conflict analyst for the UK government.

Helen Macbeth is Honorary Research Fellow and retired Principal Lecturer in Anthropology at Oxford Brookes University. She is a former President of the International Commission on the Anthropology of Food and Nutrition with a strong interest in crossing the boundaries between traditional academic disciplines.

Notes

1. See <http://www.guerrillagardening.org/> (last accessed 6 October 2022).
2. See <https://www.etymonline.com/word/impure> (last accessed 25 December 2021).
3. A term coined by Douglas herself concerning the origin of food taboos to describe a view that they stem from a need to protect humans from foodborne illnesses.
4. The classic example is the pig, which has a cloven hoof but does not chew the cud.
5. It is worth noting that the maintenance of cleanliness and hygiene was a central component in the Ayurvedic principles of medical knowledge that were laid down in India over 3,000 years ago (see e.g. Pushpangadan et al. 1987: 2; Sen 2004: 30).
6. The following section is largely drawn from Sen (2004) and Lüthi (2010), as well as the personal observations of Paul Collinson of Indian families in India and the United Kingdom.
7. Janeja's (2010) 'sensuous ethnography' of food in Bengali society, for example, demonstrates that both Hindu and Muslim notions of purity/impurity are fundamental to the ways in which food works in shaping social relationships and identity. Lüthi argues that from his observations in the town of Kottak in Tamil Nadu state in southern India, notions of food purity stem from a desire to achieve 'spiritual power' (2010: 65). Other examples abound.
8. The translation of the ancient Greek word *δίαιτα* involves many perspectives concerning ways of living, lifestyle, customs and culture; in some contexts it even refers to rules as the word 'diet' is used in the case of the 'Diet of Worms'.
9. A survey carried out by the UK's Food Standards Agency in 2018 found that 82 percent of people always washed their hands before handling and preparing food, and 85 percent did so immediately after handling raw meat, poultry or fish (Fuller et al. 2019: 45).
10. See e.g. Curtis and Biran 2001; Rozin et al. 2010; Curtis 2011; Sherman et al. 2012; Weinstein et al. 2018.
11. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-63150950> (last accessed 7 October 2022).

12. A separate scheme operates in Scotland.
13. An example is the UK nongovernmental organisation WRAP's 'label better, less waste' campaign (WRAP 2020).
14. <https://www.euronews.com/green/2022/08/01/waitrose-tesco-ms-which-uk-supermarkets-are-ditching-best-before-dates-and-why> (last accessed 31 August 2022).
15. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-62658965> (last accessed 30 August 2022).
16. <https://www.euronews.com/green/2022/08/01/waitrose-tesco-ms-which-uk-supermarkets-are-ditching-best-before-dates-and-why> (last accessed 31 August 2022).
17. In the US context, Wartella et al. (2010) date this back to 1973, and the introduction of regulations for the nutritional labelling of food.
18. For insights from social science on these issues, see e.g. Castro and Fabron (2019) for Argentina; Collinson (2013) for Ireland; Gogol and Singh (2021) for India; Hatch (2016) for the United States; Katzmarzyk (2010) for the United States and Canada; Mendenhall (2019), Moffat and Prouse (2010), Poulain (2017: Chapter 5) and Weaver (2018) for India; Yates-Doerr (2015) for Guatemala; and Zivkovic (2018) for Australia.
19. A stark example of this can be seen in the United Kingdom, whose National Health Service (NHS) reportedly spent 10 percent of its overall hospital budget, a total of £5.5 billion, in the 2017–18 financial year treating diabetes. Given that 90 percent of people with diabetes in the UK suffer from Type 2, which is linked to poor diet, a large proportion of these costs are preventable. It is estimated that, for the year 2017, over 950,000 deaths and over 16 million years of life were lost in Europe due to unhealthy diets (*The Lancet* 2018; also see Antal, this volume).
20. Bostan et al. (2019) cite the price premiums for organic food for various European countries: Switzerland 10–20 percent, Denmark 20–30 percent, Sweden 20–40 percent, Austria 25–30 percent, the United Kingdom 30–50 percent.
21. <https://www.nutritionandinnovation.com/arugula/> (date accessed 31 August 2022).
22. <https://www.arlafoods.co.uk/brands/arla-skyr/what-is-skyr/> (date accessed 31 August 2022).
23. <https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/packaging-and-labelling> (date accessed 25 December 2021).
24. Vegetarian is defined as never eating meat, poultry, fish or seafood; vegan is defined as never eating meat, fish, seafood, poultry, dairy or eggs.
25. Jainism is often cited as mandating the strictest prohibitions on the consumption of animal-derived foods of any world religion, with *ahimsa* a fundamental element of Jain philosophy and something that goes beyond traditional veganism in its strong connections to ideas about the purity and liberation (*moksha*) of the soul (Evans 2012: 5; Miller and Dickstein 2021). In light of this and other aspects of Jainism, some authors have argued that its worldview could be viewed as a 'blueprint' for environmental sustainability in the modern world (e.g. Otterbine 2014; Rankin 2018; Shah 2018; Jain 2021).
26. Despite the fact that *ahimsa* forms an important tenet in Buddhism, in which it is one of the Five Precepts and a means of attaining 'merit' for rebirth, vegetarianism is not advocated in the Pali canon (the teachings of Buddha, followed most closely by the Theravada school) and observance varies widely between different Buddhist traditions (Stewart 2015). Most Indian Buddhists are members of the

- Theravada and Vajrayana schools, which tend to allow meat-eating (Kieschnick 2005; Schmidt 2018; Ngo Dinh Bao and Mahathanadull 2019). Practices also vary widely in Western countries (Kaza 2005), although apparently most contemporary Buddhists worldwide are not vegetarian (Stewart 2010, 2015).
27. The incidence of vegetarianism among Christian and Muslim communities in India is lower still, at around 7 percent according to the NSSO survey (Natrajan and Jacob 2018: 57).
 28. McDonald's opened its first Indian outlet in Delhi in 1996. According to Goyal (2021), India now has around 480 outlets.
 29. As Arunima (2014) points out, India is perhaps the only country in the world where meat is not described by its name.
 30. The close relationship between vegetarian observance and religious adherence in India is starkly illustrated by the survey data cited here, ranging from 6.71 percent among Christians to 98 percent among Jains (Natrajan and Jacob 2018: 57).
 31. An opinion piece in *The Times* newspaper from December 2021, which claimed that an English county council had banned meat and dairy products from official events, entitled 'Puritanical Vegan Hectoring Should Be Kept off the Menu', is a typical example (Iqbal 2021).
 32. A Gallup poll in 2018 found that there had been little change in the incidence of either vegetarianism or veganism in the United States from 2012, with 5 percent and 3 percent of the population respectively adhering to such diets – in 2012, the figures were 6 percent and 2 percent (Reinhart 2018). A survey carried out in 2019 among adults aged eighteen and over by the Harris Poll recorded similar figures to Gallup of 4 percent and 2 percent (Stahler 2021). One survey claimed that the number of vegans in the United Kingdom had climbed from 1.1 million in 2020 to 1.5 million in 2021, equivalent to 2.2 percent of the population. This was potentially as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, with people wishing to adopt healthier diets and spending more time cooking at home (Plant Based News.org 2021; see also Filimonau et al. 2021). According to a UK supermarket chain in 2018, almost 13 percent of the UK population identified as vegetarian or vegan based on their own research sample, with a further 23 percent identifying as 'flexitarian', defined as having a semi-vegetarian or meat-reduced diet (Waitrose and Partners 2018: 6).
 33. *The Simpsons* (Fox), Season 12, Episode 4.
 34. Three notable recent examples are McDonald's McPlant burger, Wagamama's vegan 'fish and chips' and Chipotle's sofritas (an organic, shredded tofu dish made with chillies, roasted poblanos and spices).
 35. Examples include Fearné Cotton, Ariana Grande, Lewis Hamilton, Kim Kardashian, Serena Williams and Moby, all of whom are vegan: <https://vegworldmag.com/the-vegan-revolution-how-plant-based-foods-are-set-to-dominate-the-economy/> (date accessed 14 March 2022). An insight into just how influential they are comes from a glance at the followers of Ariana Grande and Kim Kardashian on Instagram – 293 and 283 million respectively (search performed on 30 January 2022).
 36. Preview of *The Naked Diet* by Tess Ward on Amazon.co.uk: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Naked-Diet-Tess-Ward/dp/1849496048> (date accessed 30 January 2022).
 37. A good example is a recent self-help book published in the United Kingdom: *Bosh! How to Live Vegan, Save the Planet and Feel Amazing*. (Firth and Theasby 2019)
 38. <https://www.waterstones.com/>. Search conducted on 29 January 2022.

39. See e.g. Carmody and Wrangham 2009; Katz and Meller 2014; Koebnick et al. 1999; Barad et al. 2020, among numerous other studies.
40. Namely Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden.
41. Born Christopher James Northbourne, who wrote under his hereditary title.
42. Soil Association 2021.
43. See e.g. Scofield 1986; James and Fitzgerald 2008; Paull 2006; Paull 2014: 34, 42.
44. See Pfeiffer 1938; Northbourne 2003 [1940]; Balfour 2006 [1943]; Howard 2011 [1945]; Howard and Ward 2011 [1931]; 2014 [1940]; Steiner 2020 [1924].
45. See e.g. <https://www.thelandgardeners.com/siralbert> (date accessed 24 December 2022).
46. For example, Northbourne apparently had a significant influence on E.F Schumacher (James 2008: xxii; McKanan 2017: 187), who was widely regarded as the ‘father’ of modern environmentalism and the author of *Small Is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered* (1973), one of the most influential works in the history of ecology and environmentalism. According to James, Northbourne and Schumacher organised a conference (presumably in the 1960s) on the revival of family farms in the United Kingdom (James 2008: xxii).
47. <https://www.cloudjuice.com.au/> (date accessed 16 April 2022).
48. <http://www.galwayoysters.com> (date accessed 30 August 2022).
49. <https://www.milka.com> (date accessed 16 April 2022).
50. <https://www.polar-honey.com/shop/en/finnish-natural-honey/20-arctic-honey-115g.html> (date accessed 24 December 2022).
51. See e.g. <https://www.faroese seafood.com/species/langoustine/> (date accessed 24 December 2022).
52. <https://www.cleaneatingmag.com/> (date accessed 19 February 2022).
53. See e.g. Dimitri and Lohr 2007; Wojciechowska-Solis and Soroka 2017; Bosona and Gebresenbet 2018; Petrescu et al. 2020.
54. The survey results were as follows: 55 percent citing animal welfare concerns, 45 percent health reasons, 38 percent environmental issues, 33 percent saying they don’t like meat, 24 percent citing taste and 2 percent saying it is fashionable.
55. See e.g. Durham (2007), Hashem et al. (2014) and Seyfang (2006) for the United Kingdom; Monier-Dilhan and Bergès (2016) for France; Scalvedi and Saba (2018) for Italy; and Tobler et al. (2011) for Switzerland.
56. See e.g. Scuderi et al. (2019) for Italy.
57. See e.g. Mattevi and Jones (2016) for the United Kingdom; Tessitore et al. (2020) for Italy; Wier et al. (2008) for the United Kingdom and Denmark; and Yuan et al. (2020) for China.
58. See e.g. Kamenidou et al. (2020) for Greece; Kamenidou et al. (2017) and Pham (2020) for Vietnam; Rahman et al. (2021) and Thomas and Gunden (2012) for the United States; and van Loo et al. (2013) for Belgium.
59. For example, Adams’ (2016) study of the ‘fascination’ with local food in the Brooklyn area of New York shows how people draw from a constellation of various different issues, including anti-capitalism and anti-globalisation, concerns with food production practices as well as a quest for better nutrition, in creating new foodways relating to pure food in the city. Jordan (2012) provides an autoethnographic account of shopping for organic foods in Vienna and Paris, where she finds that ‘local food cultures’ are often elusive. Instead, she highlights

the important point that producers and retailers who sell at local markets are usually operating within networks of production, distribution and preservation that may be obscured by a focus on the ‘traditional’ and supposedly ‘purer’ aspects of the foods that are being sold.

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