

## “Vegetarianism, Mysticism, and Matter in Early Enlightenment England”

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George Cheyne (1671-1743) was an odd advocate for vegetarian diet. By his mid-thirties he weighed 32 stone, containing over 440 pounds of flesh, and he struggled with his weight and health to the end of his life. The Scottish physician had experienced early success in his medical career: he gained his M.D. at Aberdeen, obtained praise for a 1701 treatise on fevers, and found employment in London, where he was elected to the Royal Society in 1702.<sup>1</sup> However, city life ravaged Cheyne’s health. Already disposed to corpulence, his weight exploded in the metropole, where he found “bottle-companions, the younger gentry, and free-livers to be the most easy of access, and most quickly susceptible of friendship and acquaintance.” Cheyne’s hard-drinking and hard-eating lifestyle of taverns and coffeehouses caused him to grow “excessively fat, short-breathed, lethargic, and listless.”<sup>2</sup> Faced with the deterioration of his health and career, Cheyne increasingly questioned the rationalist theology that was fashionable among the intellectual elite.<sup>3</sup> He wondered if there might be “more enlightening principles revealed to mankind somewhere...than those arising from natural religion only.”<sup>4</sup> The crisis of both body and spirit

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<sup>1</sup> Cheyne’s friends and patients included Samuel Johnson, David Hume, Alexander Pope, John Wesley, and Robert Walpole. Wesley recommended Cheyne’s *Essay of Health and*

<sup>2</sup> This began a lifelong struggle. At points in his life Cheyne could barely step into a chariot “for want of breath.” When he walked through the city on his patient rounds, he was “obliged to have a servant [follow] with a stool to rest on.” George Cheyne, “The Case of the Author,” in *The English Malady: Or a Treatise of Nervous Diseases of All Kinds* (London, 1733), 325-329, 342-343.

<sup>3</sup> Cheyne’s anatomical views were influenced by Archibald Pitcairne, an early proponent for the revision of medical practice to reflect Newton’s physical theories as well as older the mechanist philosophies of Descartes, Bellini, Borelli, and Boyle. See Anita Guerrini, “James Keill, George Cheyne, and Newtonian Physiology, 1690-1740,” *Journal of the History of Biology*, Vol. 18 (Summer, 1985), 247-266.

<sup>4</sup> Cheyne, “Case of the Author,” 330-333.

led Cheyne to fuse an older form of mystical self-denial with Newtonian philosophical ideas. Cheyne became a vegetarian.

This mystically inspired vegetarianism made Cheyne unique among the Newtonian physicians, a cohort of doctors who applied Newton's natural philosophy to medical treatment. Scholarship on his writings has focused upon the sources of his mystic turn, attempting to trace the influences and origins of Cheyne's writings.<sup>5</sup> Alternatively, historians have looked forward in time, framing Cheyne and other vegetarians as anticipating the rise of modern sensibilities regarding the treatment of animals.<sup>6</sup> This short paper takes an alternative approach. Rather than revising the sectarian and philosophical labels that might account for Cheyne's therapeutic ideas, I argue Cheyne's vegetarianism confronted and co-opted changing forms of Christian self-abnegation. Cheyne highlighted the vibrant influence of food to apply Newtonian natural philosophical theories to the inner workings of the body. In so doing, he relied upon a strand of Protestant thought that hinged upon the literalized redemption of the self. By consuming vegetable food, man could return to a prelapsarian state of health and well-being; it was a material pathway to godliness.

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<sup>5</sup> G. S. Rousseau's consideration of Cheyne as turning "mere Enthusiast" in 1705 ignores not only the pragmatic aims of Cheyne's therapies, but also his continued adherence to Newton's mechanics (albeit within a broader Neoplatonic cosmology). Yet Anita Guerrini's positioning of Cheyne as a "moderate" between mystical fanaticism and deist naturalism also obscures how the moderation of the physician's thought depended on its immediate context. Indeed, such labels of "moderate" and "radical" are problematic given the shifting political landscape of post-1688 Britain. G. S. Rousseau, "Mysticism and Millenarianism: 'Immortal Dr. Cheyne'," in *Millenarianism and Messianism in English Literature and Thought, 1650-1800*, ed. Richard H. Popkin, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988), 116-124.

<sup>6</sup> See Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution: The English Revolution of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century*, rev. ed. (1958; repr., New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 314-322; Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: A History of the Modern Sensibility* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 290-292; Stuart Tristram, *The Bloodless Revolution: A Cultural History of Vegetarianism from 1600 to Modern Times* (New York: Norton, 2007), 163-181.

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Dietary asceticism was, of course, an old practice in the Christian project of corporeal redemption. From the church's earliest history, Christian abstention from food was embedded in the devotional and eremitic practices of early leaders and writers.<sup>7</sup> Food was a natural target for "the ascetic impulse—the desire to defy corporeal limits by denying bodily needs," and this tendency continued beyond the Reformation.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, in the Calvinist context of early modern England, personal fasting remained a sign of sanctimonious grace. It was proof of godly lifestyle, providing important social and psychological assurance in predestination theology.<sup>9</sup> English vegetarianism has been folded into a longer historiography of spiritual fasting, and abstemious self-denial, but the nature, expression, and purposes of these concerns became increasingly nuanced in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.<sup>10</sup> Modes of self-abnegation were amplified in the aftermath of the English Revolution (1642-1660), as mystical forms of self-

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<sup>7</sup> Prominent in the hagiographies of the early church was the idea of "heroic fast," that situated the control of food and consumption within a wider cosmic struggle. See Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 47-49.

<sup>8</sup> Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 34, passim. For post-Reformation fasting, see David Cressy, *Bonfire and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989), 34-49; Christopher Durston "'For the Better Humiliation of the People': Public Days of Fasting and Thanksgiving during the English Revolution," *The Seventeenth Century* 7, no. 2 (Fall, 1992): 129-149.

<sup>9</sup> Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 80-81; Simon Schaffer, "Piety, Physic and Prodigious Abstinence," in *Religio Medici: Medicine and Religion in Seventeenth-century England*, ed. Ole Peter Grell and Andrew Cunningham (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 1996), 171-203; Jane Shaw, *Miracles in Enlightenment England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 98-118.

<sup>10</sup> Such is the thinking behind Jerome Friedman's consideration of the radical religious heterodoxy in the 1650s as a revival of Gnostic thought, *Blasphemy, Immorality, and Anarchy: The Ranters and the English Revolution* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State Press, 1987). See also B.J. Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 114-115.

abnegation responded to heterodox religious ideas that focused upon the material body as site of corporeal purification and spiritual redemption.

One variation of this blended the eschatological sentiment of radical Protestantism with medicinal forms of abstinence. In the 1650s Roger Crab, a Buckinghamshire haberdasher, foreswore animal meat and outlined, in several pamphlets, a striking form of abstemious vegetarianism. Blending medical concern over food with moral and metaphysical imperatives, he argued that vegetable diet redeemed the human body for godly existence. Consumption of meat made the body unhealthy and prone to disease, but more importantly, eating flesh reinforced the fallen and carnal nature of man. By eating meat, a person became “fleshly,” oriented toward ephemeral desires and opposed to God’s spiritual purity. Crab—who claimed in 1655 to have medically treated over one hundred people with his diet—admonished patients that consuming meat and drinking strong liquors “would inflame their blood, venom their wounds, and increase their disease.”<sup>11</sup>

While peculiar in his emphasis upon meat, Crab’s mystical vegetarianism rehearsed an Augustinian division of the self into fleshly body and godly soul, a dichotomy common in the theologies and religious writings of radical groups in the 1650s and 1660s. Crab considered his corporeal body to be “the old man,” an unruly corpus that required mastery and conquest by his spiritual soul.<sup>12</sup> His body was representative of fleshly existence writ large, a broad set of cultural practices that indulged material desires and exacerbated England’s political problems. By eating flesh one became “fleshly.” We hear explicit Pauline anxiety about carnal desire—the

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<sup>11</sup> Roger Crab, *The English Hermite, or, the Wonder of this Age* (London, 1655), 4.

<sup>12</sup> Crab, *English Hermite*, 1-2. While Crab survived his transition from “the organs of flesh” to a life of vegetarian Christianity, others were less lucky. The prefatory matter in *The English Hermite* suggested that Robert Norwood, a former cavalier officer for the parliamentary forces, died “being inclining” to Crab’s diet. Ibid., “To the Reader.” See also “Norwood, Robert (c.1610–1654),” Ariel Hessayon in *ODNB* (Oxford: OUP, 2004).

lust for meat, fine clothes, and heavy drink—as a deviation from a natural prelapsarian existence in which the body was filled by God’s indwelling spirit and sustained by simple foods.<sup>13</sup>

This form of mystical self-abnegation began to change in subtle ways during the later seventeenth century. Writers, such as the Restoration mystic and vegetarian Thomas Tryon, became increasingly aware of food’s affective power in the human body. Influenced by the Neoplatonic and alchemical writings of Jakob Böhme, Tryon outlined chemical signatures and “similes” contained within food, arguing that meat and rich foods triggered physiological effects within the body. In his popular self-help guidebook, *The Way to Health*, Tryon described how “every sort of food has its various operations upon the body and spirit of man.”<sup>14</sup> When consumed into the body, food held a “shape, form, inclination, complexion, and disposition” that inclined the human body and soul to either health or illness, “to practice either good or evil.” The simplicity of vegetables, herbs, and fruits—their clean origins in nature—meant that their operations on the body were both easy to control and pure in effect. Vegetables contained a “balsamic virtue and healing quality” that made man’s inclinations “more friendly and sanguine.”<sup>15</sup> These guidebooks contained a lingering antipathy to “flesh”—meat inclined man to either carnal evil—but by the end of seventeenth century, they reflected rising interest in the affective properties of food itself. Tryon thus outlined edible matter’s efficacious or detrimental qualities through baroque lists, which contained pragmatic recommendations for how to mitigate the negative influences of meats and dangerous meals.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Tryon, *The Way to Health* (London, 1683), 202.

<sup>15</sup> Tryon, *Way to Health*, 39-43; Thomas Tryon, *Health’s Grand Preservative* (London, 1682), 19.

<sup>16</sup> Tryon noted the dangerous influence of expanding global trade. “A thousand kickshaws enriched with the East and West Indies’ ingredients,” he noted, encouraged English “gluttony and epicurism.” His interest in the chemical force of edible matter

The story is a more complex than summarized above, but the basic Christian anxiety about the body *qua* “flesh” began to encompass more than the human frame, to include foreign objects that interacted with the body. Dietary physiologies emerged as early moderns began to conceptualize the human body as a field, in which other types of matter were active in shaping human health and disposition. While the human body remained the crucial intersection of religious and cultural imperatives, English vegetarians expanded their focus to the body’s wider vital relationships with other material entities. The gut became a space of influential forces that needed to be managed and adjusted. In the aftermath of his crisis, George Cheyne would repurpose this older form of corporeal redemption to provide moral and physiological support to his medical theory. The godly life of vegetarianism not only paralleled the healthy life of temperance; it also provided crucial insight into the material mechanisms of digestion and metabolism.

In general terms, Cheyne’s regimen of “low diet” idealized the human body as hydraulic apparatus—a complex system of pumps, pipes, and pathways—that functioned fluidly if maintained by the correct input of food and exercise.<sup>17</sup> Illness was caused by disruptions in the hydraulic system through large, pathogenic particles “not...sufficiently broken by the concoctive powers” of the body.<sup>18</sup> The obstructions of edible matter hindered circulation, rendering bodily

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functioned alongside a new pragmatism. Tryon conceded that although flesh was inherently dangerous there was “no stemming the tide of popular opinion.” So Tryon outlined lengthy guides to make meat less thick and obstructive to digestion. Tryon, *Way to Health*, 47-49; Thomas Tryon, *A Treatise of Cleanness in Meats and Drinks of the Preparation of Food* (London, 1682), 1-5.

<sup>17</sup> Cheyne’s early anatomical views were influenced by Archibald Pitcairne, an early proponent for the revision of medical practice to reflect Newton’s physical theories as well as older the mechanist philosophies of Descartes, Bellini, Borelli, and Boyle. See Anita Guerrini, “James Keill, George Cheyne, and Newtonian Physiology, 1690-1740,” *Journal of the History of Biology*, Vol. 18 (Summer, 1985), 247-266.

<sup>18</sup> George Cheyne, *An Essay of Health* (London, 1724), 19-20.

fluids corrosive and enervating the organs. Cheyne argued that particles of edible matter held variable cohesive power depending upon mass, momentum, and salinity. If the stomach held greater concoctive power relative to the attractive quality of food particulate, then the digested chyle would be finer. But animal meat consisted of especially large, salty, and cohesive particles, whose attractive qualities made them obstructive. Vegetables were constitutively weak: having absorbed less energy than animal flesh, a vegetable's constitutive parts were "united by a weaker heat" and were thus easier to digest.<sup>19</sup> Eating vegetable food that was "under our concoctive powers" enabled better digestion and health.<sup>20</sup>

Yet this was not mere mechanism as Cheyne's physiological views contained distinctive Neoplatonic tendencies. Although decidedly tory, hailing from Scotland's Episcopalian northeast, Cheyne was part of a circle of correspondence centered on the Scottish mystics George and James Garden.<sup>21</sup> In the summer of 1705 as his weight rose and his health declined, Cheyne fled north back to Aberdeen following two disastrously-received treatises in natural philosophy.<sup>22</sup> A manuscript in the Bodleian Library, attributed to the Scottish physician James Keith, provides insight into how mystical Neoplatonism was injected into Cheyne's latent

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<sup>19</sup> "When [food particles] approach within the sphere of another's activity, they firmly unite in clusters; all which make the separation of their original particles the more difficult. I say, from these three principles [mass, force, salinity], we may in general compare the easiness or difficulty of digesting (that is, breaking into small parts) the several sorts of vegetables and animals." *Ibid.*, 21-22.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 27

<sup>21</sup> For G. S. Rousseau, the proximity of the French Prophets and the possibility that Cheyne read Böhme explains Cheyne's abstemious therapies, "Mysticism and Millenarianism: 'Immortal Dr. Cheyne'," 95-100, 116-124. Anita Guerrini has corrected vague social connections in the historiography on Cheyne by revealing the extent to which Cheyne's patronage and correspondence network centered on the Garden's Bourigianist mystical circle. Anita Guerrini, *Obesity and Depression in the Enlightenment: The Life and Times of George Cheyne* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), 10-20, 79-88, 143-149.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4, 68-79.

Newtonian mechanism.<sup>23</sup> A central figure in the Scottish mystical circle, Keith was a physician and, like Cheyne, trained at the University of Aberdeen. By 1706 he had moved to London and was admitted as a licentiate of the College of Physicians. With friends across British society, Keith effectively bridged the mysticism of Garden's Aberdeen group with Cheyne's Newtonian medical set.<sup>24</sup> Keith's correspondence is loaded with references to Cheyne, indicating continual personal contact and correspondence from 1713 to 1720.<sup>25</sup> The manuscript does not prove that Keith was the source of Cheyne's Neoplatonist turn, but rather displays how such ideas were an intellectual resource as Cheyne revised his medical thinking.

The manuscript contains a vitalist view of matter. Keith believed that all substance was endowed with a mix of material and immaterial properties. Spirit—"a power acting from its own center by its intrinsic and constitutive activity"—was the life of a being, the perceptive sensory center of the will. Spiritual stuff needed to have the quality of extension to be a substance. "Take away from [a thing] all manner of extension," Keith asked, "and then see if you can find there remains any being."<sup>26</sup> But extension did not imply duality; spirit did not need to be conceived "*partes extra partes*," or as different from its constitutive matter. Rather, spirit functioned as the

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<sup>23</sup> Attributing Rawlinson MS A. 404 to Keith cannot be certain, but there is evidence to suggest his affiliation with the manuscript. A flyleaf at the beginning of the manuscript states, "this was found amongst Dr. Keith's papers, a Philadelphian and a mystic." Keith corresponded with the Philadelphian leaders Francis Lee and Richard Roach. A note in Rawlinson A 404, describes the manuscript as a "preliminary treatise" to an unnamed work by the Philadelphian John Pordage.

<sup>24</sup> Anita Guerrini describes Keith as the "nerve center" of the group, but sees the reference to George Garden in *English Malady* as evidence for Garden's central influence upon Cheyne; *Obesity and Depression*, 12-13, 137.

<sup>25</sup> Keith's friends and contacts included Robert Harley, earl of Oxford, Scottish Jacobites, Presbyterians, in addition to the London Philadelphians Francis Lee and Richard Roach; G.D. Henderson, *Mystic of the North-east* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1934), 56-61, 65-67, 75-80, passim.

<sup>26</sup> Bodleian Library, Rawlinson MS A. 404, fo 2. It was this blend of will and perception that defined life. Keith cited Jan Baptiste van Helmont that even minerals "have some sort of perception, will, and election proportionate to their life," fos. 4-6.



“æther of this world”; it was universal and invisible. It permeated the universe, as well as “all the planets that swim in it.” Keith concluded that material objects were imbued with vital force: spirit was “coextended” with “bodily being”—matter and spirit existed as a continuity of unitary platonic substance.<sup>27</sup>

A wider religious cosmology lay behind this material spectrum. God’s spiritual essence defined the spirit-matter spectrum of being. Keith described Genesis, divine creation, as a series of coagulations in which the divine energy was made solid. The divine essence “ejaculated its coagulated vibrations” into lower graduations, which were then “coagulated” into thicker constitutions. This successive process continued until matter, “a most thick and compacted essence,” was created. Material stuff was simply the substantial end point of God’s spiritual emanations—a “vehicle and clothing of a spirit”—and the result of spirit’s motive and active processes. This entailed that God’s *spiritual* substance had generated the world’s variety of *material* beings. The corporeal bodies of the material world were just the various levels of the divine’s rarefied essence.<sup>28</sup>

These platonic continuities were evident in Cheyne’s writings. In his revised *Philosophical Principles*, published in 1715, the physician described creation as “images, emanations, effluxes, and streams out of [God’s] own abyss of being.” Cheyne envisioned the material universe as an inverted “infinite cone,” in which God served as the supreme base from which the created world descended. Body and spirit sat on the cone’s spectrum of being; both were extended and capable of changing each other. “Material substances” were “the same with spiritual substances.” They only differed in degree of solidity, density, and activity: material substance was but spiritual stuff

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., fos. 6-9.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., fos. 98-99.

“infinitely condensed and contracted.”<sup>29</sup> Matter was not so much *res extensa* as it was *res vitalis*, the unitary substance of divine kinesis.<sup>30</sup>

This quasi-vitalist physiology continued to rely upon Newton’s theories of attraction, indeed Newton’s later thoughts appeared to confirm Cheyne’s ideas of substance. In the revised 1706 edition of his *Opticks*, Newton had asserted that material particles had “certain powers, virtues, or forces, by which they act at a distance, not only upon the rays of light...but also upon one another.”<sup>31</sup> This, along with Newton’s suggestive comments in the revised *Principia* (1713) about the existence of the ether—a “certain most subtle spirit” endued with attractive force—encouraged Cheyne to consider the “internal actions of parts of matter upon one another” as attributable to an “elastic fluid, or spirit.” These attractive forces not only guided planetary bodies, they also determined the pathologies of the human body.<sup>32</sup>

This monistic continuity—a chain of elasticized, forceful substance—provided a metaphysical framework for Cheyne’s medical theories of temperate diet. Cheyne considered the healthy body as “a well-tuned instrument,” in which interrelated influences of immaterial passions and material bodies were balanced and synced. Although man had discovered only a few “links of the universal chain” of being, Cheyne argued that Newton’s theories could be

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<sup>29</sup> George Cheyne, *Philosophical Principles* (London, 1715), preface part 2, sig. A3v-sig. A4v.

<sup>30</sup> In *Philosophical Principles* Cheyne wrote that attraction and gravity were caused by God’s love and desire. Keith also described the attractive properties of matter as due to the extended desires of spiritual will and perception. The fulfillment of this desire was consumptive “nourishment;” unifying or “eating” a desired object imparted a “real joy” that diffused into the consuming spirit, “penetrating and tincturing the whole being of the spirit.” Rawlinson A 404, fos. 10-11.

<sup>31</sup> Guerrini, “Newtonian Physiology,” 253.

<sup>32</sup> Anita Guerrini, “Isaac Newton, George Cheyne,” 235-236; George Cheyne, *English Malady*, 75.

adapted to the workings of human bodies.<sup>33</sup> The ether provided the conceptual analogy through which Cheyne injected his platonic metaphysics into human physiology. In *The English Malady* (1733), a treatise on nervous diseases, Cheyne suggested that ether explained how “elasticity, attraction, and other qualities” functioned through currently unknown intermediaries within the body:

There may be intermediates between pure, immaterial spirit and gross matter; and that this intermediate, material substance may take the cement between the human soul and body, and may be the instrument or medium of all its actions and functions where material organs are not manifest.<sup>34</sup>

Just as there was a principle of gravity within planetary bodies, “whereby in *vacuo* they tend to one another and would unite,” immaterial elements *within* matter also directed attractive force. Cheyne insisted God would not have created these laws without “implanting into [the body’s] essence and substance, as an antidote to such variety of distractions, an infinite tendency, bent and bias towards beings of the same nature.”<sup>35</sup> There were a variety of gravitational forces—some corporeal, some spiritual, some a blend of the two—that influenced the mechanics of the human body’s organic functions.

Effective therapy recognized this spectrum of intermediates, and the vitalized interactions between various agents in the body. Cheyne did not believe edible matter was ensouled; the sensitive soul of the consumed creature was dead. But nor was it inert, mechanistic stuff. Rather,

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<sup>33</sup> Cheyne, *Essay of Health*, 144-145.

<sup>34</sup> Cheyne, *English Malady*, 85-87.

<sup>35</sup> Cheyne, *Essay of Health*, 149-150.

food maintained a lively ability to enact vibrant force within the human body.<sup>36</sup> Meat, liquors, and other rich foods were particularly strong agents:

Oily and fat substances elude the force and action of the concoctive powers [of the stomach]; and their parts attract one another and unite more strongly than other substances do, (except salts) as Sir Isaac Newton observes.<sup>37</sup>

In his *Essay on Regimen* (1740), Cheyne argued that animal flesh and strong liquors consisted of powerful particles that concentrated the attractive power “like the rays of the sun in the focus of a burning-glass.”<sup>38</sup> These attractive particles thickened the blood, caused blockages in the guts, and encouraged the accumulation of fleshy mass. Again, Cheyne considered himself an example of this: during a meat-eating relapse, his blood became “one continued impenetrable mass of glue.”<sup>39</sup> He was convinced that “a diet of milk and seeds, with water-drinking only” was an antidote for his chronic illness. Temperate regimen—diet, exercise, and abstemious medical therapy—could undo the cohesive blockages created by animal meat, making the human flesh more mobile and alacritous.<sup>40</sup>

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By rationalizing abstemious regimens along the lines of both Newtonian natural philosophy and platonic spectrums of matter, Cheyne emphasized food’s vital influence. The

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<sup>36</sup> Jane Bennett’s argument about the conative powers of edible matter focuses on motifs from Nietzsche and Thoreau, but formulations of food’s vital materiality begin much earlier in the late seventeenth century and indicate the advent of modern interest and anxieties about the efficacy and power of foodstuffs. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 39-51.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>38</sup> George Cheyne, *Essay on Regimen* (London, 1740), 23.

<sup>39</sup> Cheyne, “Case of the Author,” 344-345.

<sup>40</sup> Cheyne, *Essay on Regimen*, xv.

human body was field within which edible particles with innate attractive force interrelated with the organs' mechanical operations. His guidebooks for health were predicated upon the idea that edible matter had effective power within the stomach to enact change upon the body—helpful rules for the medical concerns of the affluent upper classes and the emergent consumer society. The popularity of regimented medical therapies—*An Essay of Health and Long Life* reached nine printed editions during Cheyne's lifetime—indicates not only the persistence of mystical influence in diet, but also its continual adaptation to the changing scientific discourse of mechanism, chemistry, and Newtonian physics. Far from ending mystical forms of therapy and diet, Newtonian philosophies of substance were interwoven into these diets, maintaining their viability, indeed popularity, in the commercial environment of Georgian medicine.<sup>41</sup> In the new society of English epicures, the religious imperatives of the abstemious diet became an important medical safeguard in an age of pleasure.

Cheyne's Neoplatonic turn provided the language for the problem of food and recast the human body as a site of material and immaterial interaction that required regimented guidance.<sup>42</sup> But his inspired religion also maintained older teleological motivations—vestiges of the midcentury efforts towards abstemious purity. We hear in Cheyne's final publication in 1742, *The Natural Method of Curing the Diseases of the Body*, an echo of John Milton's Raphael, who suggested man might one day ascend to spiritual existence. "Man is a diminutive angel," concluded Cheyne, "shut up in a flesh prison or vehicle."<sup>43</sup> The Scottish

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<sup>41</sup> For Cheyne as representative of capitalist processes of social rationalization, see Brian Turner, "The Government of the Body: Medical Regimens and the Rationalization of Diet," *The British Journal of Sociology*, 33 (1982), 254-269.

<sup>42</sup> *An Essay of Health* contained chapters on exercise and sleep in addition to Cheyne's lengthy guides to food.

<sup>43</sup> George Cheyne, *The Natural Method of Curing the Diseases of the Body* (London, 1742), 79.

physician leaves us with an odd historical incongruity: the idea of the ethereal articulated by the fleshiest of men. But we might resolve Cheyne's personal paradox of the flesh through empathy for his lifetime struggle with health and wellbeing. His vitalism provided the possibility that even the obstinate flesh of man was the same stuff of divinity. It is little surprise that Cheyne found solace in the belief that within his many pounds of uncooperative mass there was a diminutive angel that might take flight to God.