

Are Hobbes, Locke, Marx, and Nietzsche walking alongside us at the farmer's market? Chad Lavin's *Eating Anxiety* asks this question, and asks what Michael Pollan, Marion Nestle and the other voices of food politics have to do with central problems in political theory: where does our agency come from? Is our freedom compatible with life lived in communities and under state structures? Is the autonomous and agentive subject imagined by liberal political theory - and taken as foundational by liberal political theorists - a myth? Lavin finds, in a diverse set of stories that have become important in food studies, reason to think that it is. He posits a "digestive subject" instead, a figure conscious of its animal and mortal character and thus unafraid to observe all the effects of metabolism upon it. Metabolism, and its place in the canon of modern European political theory, is thus one subject of this book; the other is Lavin's titular "anxiety," the ambivalent attitude towards politics as such that, for Lavin, animates food politics in the contemporary developed world. Alongside other recent works such as Allison Carruth's *Global Appetites* and Julie Guthman's *Weighing In*, *Eating Anxiety* is a welcome sign that our conversations about food politics have reached a certain level of maturity and reflectiveness.

Lavin's approach involves reading both canonical thinkers (Locke, Hobbes, Marx, Hegel, Nietzsche) and contemporary ones (Jane Bennett, Wendy Brown, William Connolly, Patchen Markell) alongside popular writers who range from the aforementioned Nestle and Pollan to others: the list includes Adam Gopnik, Barbara Kingsolver, Bill McKibben and Jonathan Safran-Foer. Lavin also covers issues crucial to contemporary food politics, including dieting regimes, the "obesity epidemic," locavorism and "food miles" and the horrors of the meat industry. He also examines political theory's historical engagement with the very human themes of eating, digestion, excretion, and the individual political subject's recognition of weakness, dependency, hunger and mortality. In the process, Lavin makes a claim that is fundamentally intellectual-historical: the rise of liberal political theory, founded on the idea of the social contract, was itself a shift away from a prior, organic conception of the body politic (the pun matters). In the process, political theory developed an allergy to human experiences incompatible with the idea of the autonomous and freely agentive individual. These included eating and digestion, which often served as synecdoche for the corporeal limitations of the individual and thus for our fundamental reliance on the world around us. Notably, Lavin's historical claims are not accompanied by an especially rich contextualization of the turns in thought he hopes to track.

Today we are constantly beset by "eating anxiety" not only because of the health, environmental, and food justice crises that present themselves but because we have come to doubt that liberal democratic methods can help us to address these crises. Our doubts about liberalism, however, were anticipated in the nineteenth century by thinkers fascinated by materiality and metabolism: here Lavin presents Marx and Nietzsche as readers of the scientific literature on thermodynamics, thinkers who understood philosophers and political actors not as bodiless abstractions but as bodies engaged in a constant flux of exchanged matter. Marx and Nietzsche thus offer the same unsettling of the subject-position of liberalism that Lavin detects in some contemporary writers on food, especially those who stress our own deep reliance on the environment and the role of metabolism in the constant refashioning of bodies and identities. Lavin calls this the digestive subject. Not all of the writers of the new food politics are animated by an attachment to this digestive subject - Pollan, for example, seems to hew to a basically liberal line while advocating food practices that require considerable economic privilege - but whatever one's orientation, food, the process of growing and eating it and excreting what we can't use of it, forces us to question a set of boundaries in which liberal political theory has always been deeply invested - "between self and world, between public and private, and between human and nonhuman," Lavin writes. (xii)

Perhaps the most common condemnation of food politics (in the popular variation associated with Michael Pollan, or with the Slow Food Movement) is that buying local and organic and even growing one's own food are not properly political practices at all. Indeed, it is almost too easy to argue that a consumerist food politics distracts us from

activities more likely to change the food system for the better. Lavin would tell us that food politics is an expression of our skepticism about politics proper, indicating a desire for horizontal and networked relations with food producers that are structurally similar to the rethinking of sovereign boundaries in the twenty-first century. But Lavin (rightly) does not endorse either the desire for a networked life with food or for the final replacement of a liberal subject with a digestive one. The challenge, according to Lavin, is not to abandon liberalism's desire for transcendence, but to think through the anxieties that arise when transcendence is thwarted - as it is every time we eat or excrete - and learn from them.