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The cacophony of nutrition advice is a constant irritant for everyone who tries to be a responsible consumer in the twenty-first century. An endless variety of official guidelines, stories, and food fads is in the ear of everyone who navigates the aisles of a supermarket nowadays, and one can never be sure whether the latest advice is based on anecdotal evidence, commercial interests, or solid research—assuming that one still has confidence in the advice of experts after so many servings of “according to a recent study.” Corinna Treitel's impressive study roundly dispels any notion that nutrition expertise is becoming irrelevant. German experts have been telling the public how to eat natural foods for more than a century. So why should they stop now?

Treitel traces German discussions on what she calls natural eating from the mid-nineteenth century into the post-Second World War period. She identifies “a changing matrix of hunger and health” (p. 3): one point of reference was the health benefits of a natural diet (with all the ambiguities that health implies), another the collective anxieties of a German nation struggling to feed citizens from its own soil, at least until the agricultural revolution of the postwar years brought forth a cornucopia of food. There is a third implicit strand in Treitel's book, which revolves around the dealings among a growing crowd of experts with shades of scientific credentials. By and large, writing styles of contemporary experts conveyed a greater sense of cognitive certainty than underlying evidence, and Treitel shows that at least some authors were candid about the absence of scientific rigor.

Readers who expect a juicy treatise on “food, agriculture and environment” should be warned that her main interest is in discourse: the book is more concerned with conversations over foodstuff than about food itself. Treitel knows the literature inside out and shows it, and when the discussion moves beyond books and articles, it revolves around the issues that matter most to experts on a mission: networks and positions, outlets, institutional and political support, public acclaim. Treitel's expertise extends into five appendices that run to almost fifty pages with information on periodicals, cookbooks, nutritional guides and other publications, institutions, and biographical information on key figures. The book will be a mandatory resource for anyone who considers a research project on Germany's food history.

The Nazi era was a catalyst for debate, both in terms of sorting out and amalgamating opinions and the new significance of state authorities. However, this empirical finding tends to disappear behind numerous statements that focus on the moral condemnation of Nazi connections. The vegetari-
an predilections of Adolf Hitler greet the reader
on the first page, though the answer as to why he
became a vegetarian (leaving occasional servings
of liver dumplings and sausage aside) is not very
enlightening: as with many other converts to nat‐
ural eating, Hitler's food habits were the mushy
product of advice and personal experience. Treit‐
el's narrative also has a few statements that evoke
Nazi barbarism, which is little more than rhetori‐
cal bluster that suggests moral and political order
where there was none. Treitel details collabora‐
tions but fails to explore underlying motives, and
much points to yet another case where experts
"worked towards the Führer" with little, if any,
thought being given to ethical and professional
red lines. Once more, we see professionals moving
down a slippery slope, and we reach the bottom
of the moral abyss with a physician conducting mur‐
derous nutrition experiments in the Mauthausen
concentration camp late in the war.

The accommodation with the Nazis shows
that ideas about natural eating had come a long
way from its liberal nineteenth-century roots.
Treitel provides an empirically rich account of the
many ways in which more natural eating became
acceptable, co-opted, and mainstreamed—if one
wishes to use the word in a country whose love of
meat endures in the twenty-first century. She stud‐
dies debates among physicians and public health
experts and the milieu of cultural critics, naturo‐
paths, and animal rights activists; the food scarcity
during the First World receives its due along with
Friedrich Naumann, Richard Wagner, and the
popular science journal Kosmos. To her credit,
Treitel does not shy away from including odd
opinions—from the Jewish activist who found ve‐
getarianism a useful accompaniment to Zionism to
the life reformer who celebrated Japan's 1905 vic‐
tory over Russia as the triumph of the plant-eaters
over the meat-eaters.

The introduction establishes the context of
autarky regimes framed by two world wars, a Ger‐
man diet that became meat-heavy in the nine‐
teenth century, and the epidemiological transition
from infections to chronic diseases, but after that,
the focus shifts to the supply side of nutrition ad‐
dvice. The narrative becomes vague when actual
consumption patterns heave into view, and Treitel
is reluctant to talk about commercial interests.
Some of the crucial parameters of food choices—
levels of affluence, foot outlets, agricultural produ‐
cers (unless they went organic)—receive scant at‐
tention, and it does not seem that the author feels
bad about neglecting these wider contexts in favor
of the men who forged a new worldview. In true
intellectual history style, Treitel argues that the
vision of a natural diet "remained most compel‐
ing when it remained closest to its popular roots
among life reformers and their quasi-religious
faith in nature" (p. 305).

The introduction makes a strong case for a
history of the life reform movement that super‐
sedes the traditional movement-centered narrat‐
ives. Life reform was a hodgepodge of ideas and
practices that developed a life of its own, and the
natural diet appealed to a motley crew of intellet‐
uals, publishers, and state authorities, as well as
many different households. Treitel outlines a "bi‐
opolitics of nature" that may cause digestive
troubles among fans of Michel Foucault: it grew
from below and had plenty of room for laypeople.
It was also practically and intellectually liberating
and in fact made people feel better. And yet it is
rather ironic that, in trying to liberate the field
from scholarly constraints, Treitel creates an or‐
thodoxy of her own where the life reformers, their
publications, and (less frequently) their daily
work claim the lion's share of attention. Eating
naturally was about more than having the right
knowledge, but then, it might have remained an
ephemeral vision without a body of knowledge
that seeped into cookbooks, self-styled and state‐
sponsored guidelines, and a plethora of lectures
and outreach articles. One does not need to be a
vegetarian or a fan of Eduard Baltzer (according
to this book, the man who started it all in the clas‐

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volume book series) to come away thinking that the natural diet was a much bigger phenomenon than one had previously thought.

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