

**Manners and Morals;
Or, Why You Should Not Eat the Person Sitting Next to You**

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In his letter inviting me to speak at this year's I.S.I. Honors Conference, Daryl Hart informed us that the four "titles" were in fact place holders, meant to be thematic suggestions only. I think, however, it is a sign of Daryl's good sense that, thus far, two of three of the lecturers have readily accepted the working title as their actual title, and for all practical purposes, John Owen might have easily done the same (but who can resist an allusion to St. Benedict?). I, too, have been perfectly happy to keep Daryl's suggested title, though I have reversed the two main words – "Manners and Morals" – and have added the requisite and informational subtitle, "Or, why you should not eat the person sitting next to you." In case that's not clear to anyone, I hope to clear up any confusion in the course of this lecture.

Furthermore, and more problematically, in that same invitation letter, Daryl laid out his rationale for the organization of the four morning lectures. Each lecture's suggested title was intended to align with the four core themes and purposes of I.S.I.. So, the lecture title "The Good Society" reflects the theme of "Society"; "The Humane Economy" speaks to the theme of "Economy"; "Literature and Liberal Learning" appropriately relates to the theme "Literature." But, here's where Daryl decided to pose a challenge to me, and I can only assume because he thinks we political theorists are know

it alls and need a bit of comeuppance once in awhile, or we are truly brilliant and can answer all of life's questions. Because, the title "Manners and Morals" speaks to I.S.I.'s last great core theme – Religion, naturally. Not only does the title ask whether there is a connection between manners and morals and if so, what the nature of that connection is, but further poses the profound question of how manners and morals shed light on the great theological questions. What light does etiquette shed on incarnation, divinity, forgiveness and redemption, or do manners help clarify the virtues of faith, hope and charity? Certain that Daryl had put considerable thought into the program, I concluded that he had laid at my feet a challenge of such fiendish cunning, such sublime brilliance and profundity that I was ready to conclude that I was unequal to the task.

As I mulled over this conundrum several weeks ago at my kitchen table, head hung low and on the verge of tears, my 9-year old son came up behind me and, glancing over my shoulder, saw that I was to be speaking on "Manners and Morals." And I can only attribute what happened next to some kind of divine intervention, because he looked at me with all earnestness and said, "Oh, I guess you'll be telling the students why they should eat with forks." I looked at him, and, a smile growing on my face, said, "Yes, that's exactly right." "Because that's being a civilized person?" he asked. "Yes, that's why." My son clearly saw what had been eluding me: it was the fork that made the connections between manners, morals, and religion self-evident. So, at the risk of belaboring what must now be obvious to you too, I will talk about Manners, Morals, and Religion, alternatively wearing the hats of an amateur anthropologist, a professional political theorist, and a wholly inadequate theologian. It may seem a lot to undertake, but it's nothing that Miss Manners doesn't do every day.

I think we can all agree that of all the problems facing humanity, from war to poverty, from the threats emanating from human technology and progress to the possibility of killer asteroids, that perhaps the most pressing and challenging problem we all face is teaching kids how to eat. Let's face it: they're like wild beasts, and if they could run around naked eating with their hands, dropping half their food behind them and going back later when they're hungry again to eat off the ground what's left, they would. Anyone who has an idyllic fantasy of peaceful and heart-warming family dinners in which conversation flows freely and gentle wit punctuates gradually unfolding dinner courses hasn't been over my house for dinner recently. Dinner is a kind of near state of barely restrained anarchy. "Use your fork." "Don't lick your plate." "Stop putting your knife in your mouth." "Sit up." "Sit back down." "Don't mash your peas." "No, you can't eat that piece from your brother's plate (or, alternatively, no, you can't put your food on his plate)." "Don't talk with your mouth full." "You forgot to ask to be excused." On and on and on. Incredibly, all one seems to do as a parent is repeat the same things over and over and over. Kids hate it, and parents get frustrated. Why do we bother? What's the point of good manners?

The easy answer is, so that someday we can have peaceful and heart-warming family dinners in which conversation flows freely and gentle wit punctuates gradually unfolding dinner courses. Teaching manners is to instill a second nature to a child: to eat with grace is not natural to them, but someday we hope it will become "second nature" for them to eat with a fork and knife, not to take food from other people's plates, and to excuse themselves when they leave the table. I compare it to my experience coaching my son's Little League baseball team this year. Day after day, week after week, we did drills

– when to throw to first, who covers second, where the cutoff man stands, how to execute a rundown. At first, it’s incredibly painful – the height of unnaturalness for children, and for a long time they’re uncertain what they should be doing. Then, eventually, they start to make some plays, some of the drills click, and you can begin to see some inkling of the beauty of the game when well-played. Our team had a 1-12 record in the regular season, but we had a Bad News Bears run through the playoffs, and came home with the championship. Knowing where to move on the field had become second nature, but only through a very lengthy process of cultivation and habituation. That’s the aim with table manners as well, painful as it may be to get to there.

As I say, that’s the easy answer. It addresses a superficial why, but not the deeper reasons. Why do parents (some, though certainly not enough) exert so much energy in cultivating manners in their children? Are they sinister instruments of torture, as my children believe? What purpose do they serve? Do children know? Do parents know?

As ever, we turn to Aristotle for the answer. In the *Politics*, Aristotle writes: “For just as man, when he is perfected (when he achieves his *telos*) is the best of animals, so too separated from law and justice he is the worst of all.... Without virtue he is most unholy and savage, and worst in regards to sex and eating.” Aristotle doesn’t spell out what he means by this last comment, but it’s pretty clear that humans who lack virtue – who live without law and justice – exhibit the worst forms of human behavior in matters of sex and eating, engaging in what remain, even in our own incredibly permissive time, two largely acknowledged taboos – incest and cannibalism.

Aristotle is not saying that children or humans generally have to be taught how to how to eat or how to copulate. That’s something we all pretty much figure out on our

own at some point – instinct kicks in as a baby in the case of eating, and in the case of sex, well, that will come in time for you all. Both these instincts are deeply embedded in our nature – we *must* eat to continue living, we must copulate in order to reproduce.

But that’s about all that nature tells us in these matters: eat to live; copulate to procreate. That’s all that nature needs to tell to all God’s creatures – all, that is, except mankind. Nature’s admonition to eat and to procreate is not the whole of the story, in our case, because we are creatures not solely in the thrall of nature. *Natural* features of humanity cause us to act according to our natures with a degree of reflection and choice. As Leon Kass has argued in his marvelous book, *The Hungry Soul*, the human form itself resists our “mere” nature. Our upright form places us above the horizon, making it possible to see further visually and metaphorically gives us the ability to set our sights to higher things. Our mouth and nose - set down and back in the skulls, unlike the snout of other beasts – means that our eyes purposively lead and guide our eating faculties, not vice-versa. Our tongues and lips, in addition to assisting in the process of eating, also have a form which permits the faculty of speech and communication. Our omnivorousness gives us actual and metaphorical preferences; we pick and choose what we will eat, given the opportunity, just as we exercise choice about how we will eat, and even further, how we will live. We are conscious and self-reflective; we are conscious too of the preferences of others by dint of the fact of speech and reason. It is thus in our nature not only to eat and to copulate, but to ask about the meaning of these things and to ask whether there are better and worse ways to engage in these natural necessities and urges. As Erwin Straus has written, “Considering [man’s form], we do well to envisage the possibility that [it is] not society [which] has first brought man into conflict with

nature, but that [it is] man's natural opposition to nature [which] enables him to produce society, history, and conventions." This Aristotelian insight suggests, contra Rousseau, that it is in our nature to be "unnatural." Better put, humanity can act in accordance with nature most humanly as a result of a training in virtue, or alternatively, can act in accordance with nature *least* humanly when we act in blindly in the thrall of those basest instincts as a brute or beast. To fulfill man's natural telos is to act in ways *not* most immediately "natural." We might say that man is by nature a conventional animal.

The simple reason that humans have the potential to be unholy and savage in matters of eating is because, as omnivores, we are inclined to eat meat. This means that we are a predatory animal: one of our most primal desires impels us to kill. To kill is an awesome deed: our desire to sustain our lives drives us to combat and overcome the survival instinct of other living creatures. In this, we are primally no different than the lion or the wolf: we must kill other animals in order to slake our craving for meat. Indeed, we are the most successful predatory animal that has ever existed on earth – no animal can for long protect itself from us when we decide upon its death. Our diet reveals our rapacity, our potential for savagery, the very "inhumanity" of our humanity.

The fact that we eat meat also means that we can eat each other. This is not unknown in nature, and of course is not unknown among some human civilizations. The Aztecs ritually sacrificed and ate hundreds of thousands of captives, removing first their still beating hearts as a sacrifice to their sun god and then devouring the remains. Cannibalism is not literally unthinkable, though I much doubt many of us think about it very much if at all – and that's a good thing too. As W.H. Auden wrote in that wonderful selection *A Commonplace Book* distributed by Roger Lundin, "The slogan of Hell: Eat or

be eaten.” To live among people who were always sizing you up as a meal – and perhaps even worse, in which you were doing the same – would be a living hell, worse than Hobbes’s State of Nature. There could be no stability, no decency, no trust, no love. Society as we know it could not exist if we weighed cannibalism as a serious option for our diet. (Cannibalism is merely one domain reveals the shortcomings of so-called contemporary ethics theory: A Kantian might congratulate himself for thinking, “I should not eat my child because that would treat another human being as a means and not as an end.” Enlightenment indeed.) The fact that we do not weigh and consider, much less *think* about cannibalism, is a silent reminder of civilized humanity’s longstanding virtuous decision in which we have concluded that human beings are not food. The negative formulation – humans are not food – implicitly reveals a positive formulation: that human beings are creatures set apart because of their inherent dignity and nobility. It is the very decision not to eat humans that fundamentally reveals the truth of our dignity: we are uniquely the creature that commands itself, that exercises restraint over appetite and instinct and discriminates between human and non-human (sometimes that gets us into trouble, but it is fundamentally a praiseworthy faculty). Man is by nature the ethical animal: all ethics begins in injunctions, in saying no, and the most primal ethical decision concerns what we will eat and what will not be eaten.

Nevertheless, in the deepest recesses of our collective memory and in the most primal depths of our hearts, we know that to eat meat is dangerous and awe-inspiring. Table manners are the inscribed tradition – practice and custom – that reflects and in some senses commemorates this conscious decision to ascend from brute appetite and to demonstrate that we are not slaves to our cravings. Next time you sit down with an anti-

traditionalist, see if they eat by tearing their food apart with their hands, or by eating with their faces in their plates. We are all traditionalists, and it's a good thing too.

Even as we employ our manners as we eat – for we **MUST** eat – manners demonstrate that we seek to constrain and moderate, if not fully to extinguish, our natures. Manners are conventions that shape and govern our nature: we don't cease to be creatures that must eat, but manners are a largely unconscious demonstration our governance of our nature as eating creatures, even as we necessarily submit to and even engage in a more exalted practice of our nature. Far from being a troublesome and meaningless set of conventions, table manners are the daily manifestation of our commitment to the aspiration of human flourishing, of a realized humanity that ascends from “mere” or given humanity. To be a human is to be conventional, and among those most important conventions that express our humanity is to mediate, moderate, and master our appetites through the conventions at dinner time.

(Pass out forks). Now, daily we admire and marvel at various technologies, from the nifty features on our IPODS to the cameras that are phones, or phones that are cameras, or whatever they are... But, how often in recent days, weeks, or years, have you admired a fork? I've been thinking about this talk all week, and this means that I've been paying a bit of attention to people as they eat. And the great thing is, no one pays attention to their table manners – they simply enact them. We are likely altogether unaware of forks – we use them unselfconsciously – their use has become our “second nature.” The only time we are likely to think about utensils is when we go out to Chinese or Japanese restaurants. Our knowledge of forks date back to the 11th century, although they don't become widespread for another five centuries and not universal in the West

until the 19th century. The longstanding manner of using utensils before the introduction of the fork was to eat using one's knife. In fact, as people in Europe moved away from eating with their hands, they began eating with two knives – one to cut and deliver the food to the mouth, the other to hold down the piece of meat. However, as anyone who has ever used this method knows, inevitably the piece of meat starts to turn around in circle on the axis of the second knife. The first use of the fork was as a two-pronged instrument that could hold down the meat (and still takes the same form as a carving fork), after which the pieces were still brought to the mouth balanced upon the knife.

The development of four tines was long time coming – first people used the version of a carving fork to eat, but that was highly impracticable. Eventually, the formation of the anticipated the development of the Gillette razor blade – if two tines was good, why not more and more and more? Anything over six tines forced eaters to open their mouths in a wholly unseemly fashion, and five tines reminded people too much of the fingers on our hands – which the fork was designed explicitly to replace – so the appropriate number of tines was settled upon to be four. It is not arbitrary: it is a convention guided by our natures as eaters, as meat eaters, as five-fingered, as creatures with mouths of a certain width. The fork is the height of human engineering.

The fork does not make eating food easier – it makes it more difficult. By using the fork, we bring food in small portions to our mouths. As my son knows, it's much faster to eat either by putting your face in your plate or just using your fingers. We have a particular challenge with rice – it's hard to eat rice with a fork, so he tries endlessly to position his mouth next to his plate and use his fork as a bulldozer. We end up having to sweep a lot of rice off the floor as a consequence of our insistence that he eat by raising

his food to his mouth. What this allows, of course, in addition to a slowing of the pace of the eating, is the posture of face-to-face diners. We eat in such a way that makes it possible for us to see one another (even as part of good manners is not to look too closely at another person eating), and more importantly, to speak with one another as we eat. By eating with forks – with utensils generally – we raise our heads above our food and communicate. We forge community.

The fork was introduced because over time it became unacceptable to use the knife except when absolutely necessary. The knife is a visible sign of the violence that underlies our meals, and civilization eventually sought to minimize its use, and even when it was used, to make its function nearly unrecognizable. Notice some features of this knife (I won't pass this around, since we've been talking about cannibalism): the end of this knife is rounded, not pointed, and it's pretty much impossible to cut anything with this blade – certainly not British steak. If you eat steak, a knife is brought to you from the kitchen only when the meat is served, and cleared as soon as the meal is finished. As we eat using fork and knife, various customs encourage a certain infelicity and awkwardness. In Europe, the knife is held in the weaker hand, making it less likely there will be knife play at the table. In America, food is cut with the knife in the right hand and the fork in the left; after each cut, the utensils are switched to the opposite hand and that single piece is eaten. Americans are regularly subjected to scorn and derision for this awkward practice. However, let me quote from the Harvard Olin lecture of Judith Martin, a.k.a. Miss Manners, who defends such a practice: “American table manners are, if anything, a more advanced form of civilized behavior than the European, because they

are more complicated and further removed from the practical result, always a sign of refinement.”

Table manners contain and reflect the governance of our basest nature – that we will eat deliberately, in a measured fashion, with layers of convention and practice that partially obscures our potential for bestiality. Manners, we might say, are the visible sign of our depravity, our inclination to submit to appetite. Manners are a constant reminder of our fallen nature: as Byron wrote, “ever since Eve ate apples, much depends on dinner.” Original sin is inextricably bound up with the human inability to control our appetite; manners are the form that forces a degree of control upon us. Manners are a form of what Aristotle calls “habituation”: they are practices ingrained into us when we are young and not yet wholly conscious of their meaning, necessary foundations for the virtuous human who would act with moderation and prudence, *sophrosune* and *phronesis*.

At the same time, manners point also to our higher nature. To have manners, as my son knows but perhaps does not yet fully understand, is to be civilized. Manners aspire to civility.

One of the better articulations of manners occurs in one of the best, most conservative movies in recent years, “Blast From the Past.” (synopsis)

Troy: “He said that good manners are a way of showing people that we have respect for them. I didn’t know that. I thought it was a way of acting all superior.”

Eve: “Where do you think he got all that information?”

Troy: “From the oddest place – his parents.”

We practice manners in the main in order to put others at ease – they are, to a significant extent, outer directed. Ironically, manners are an acknowledgement that we are not given to care about each other. Respect is different from care. As the sociologist Edward Shils has written in his book entitled *Civility*, “There is not enough good nature or temperamental amiability in any society to permit to it to dispense with good manners.” But, such habituation in manners – a sign of our permanent dividedness and insufficient stores of unquestioning love for every human being, contra John Lennon – at the same time also points to our potential for flourishing communal life. To eat with manners is to slow down our food intake, to force us to face one another as we slowly dine. We make time in order to speak and to listen. By holding at bay our primal instinct to gorge ourselves as quickly and efficiently as possible – by restraining our self-interest and practicing self-governance – we foster opportunities for human interchange which may simply remain “civil,” but which may also lead to friendship and even love. By governing the low, we make possible the high.

Civility and politeness, not surprisingly, relate to public things: each word means, at base, “city” – “cives” in Latin, *polis* in Greek. While table manners seems like a wholly private affair – something taught by one’s parents for use at one’s private meals – manners inevitably involves and aspires to a public dimension. We know from the *Odyssey* that the Cyclops did not have good table manners. Indeed, he was a cannibal – he snatches up pairs of Odysseus’s men, beats their brains out on the cave wall, and eats them raw. We also know the following from the poet – lines that Aristotle also quotes in the *Politics*:

we sailed further
along, and reached the country of the lawless outrageous

Cyclopes who, putting all their trust in the immortal
 gods, neither plow with their hands nor plant anything,
 but all grows for them without seed planting, without cultivation.
 These people have no institutions, no meetings for councils;
 rather they make their habitations in caverns hollowed
 among the peaks of high mountains, and each one is the law
 for his own wives and children, and cares nothing about the others.
 (9.105-115)

The Cyclops has one eye – he is more bestial than human, more directed by his appetite than by his vision. Because the Cyclopes have no community, they have no culture (literally, they do not cultivate) – no rituals, no arts or *techne*, no *MEMORY*. When Polyphemus is blinded by Odysseus, the joke is really on his fellow Cyclopes, who are more inclined to believe that “Noman” injured him than to be concerned about his bellows of pain. Because Cyclopes cannot distinguish between man and beast – indeed, Polyphemus is quite solicitous toward his sheep – they are creatures without ethics and politics; they lack the guiding conventions that result from the self-governance that itself arises from the recognition of human distinctiveness and dignity. (Peter Singer?)

Impolite people are likely to be without politics; people without a city are unlikely to be civil. There is not a strict private/public divide here: that which inclines a humans to adopt manners also inclines those humans to foster community with their companions and hospitality toward strangers. To eat together is to seek out others for reasons that go beyond mere utility, to seek companionship – literally, a word whose Latin root means literally “to break bread with.” A really brief description of what happens in the *Odyssey* is eat first, ask questions later. To eat together is to converse; to converse is to make the primary human interaction one of shared speech rather than threatened or real violence. Indeed, *conversari* is a Latin word meaning “to turn oneself about” or “to move to and fro.” Conversation implies a willingness to move oneself, metaphorically, to leave

oneself in considering the views of another, even to be persuaded (again, here words are revealing: in the Greek, the passive of “to persuade” is not strictly “to be persuaded”, but “to trust”). Civility and politeness imply politics and life in the city.

Aristotle writes that “man is by nature a political animal.” Man is by nature the creature that must live according to convention – under law, with self-restraint against nature’s imperatives, by means of a flourishing that can only come about as the result of habituation, education, cultivation. He who is without a city is either a beast or a god. The human telos can only come to fruition within cities of humans: leisure, arts, learning, memory, culture, philosophy, even worship – these are activities that rely fundamentally upon the existence of human cities. Politics begins with politeness – with good manners. Rather than figuratively or literally eating up our opponents, we must dine with them. As T.S. Eliot wrote, “the survival of a parliamentary system requires constant dining with opponents.” Politics, like manners, is the visible manifestation of our willingness to restrain ourselves and to govern our immediate appetites in order to live and even thrive together. The city is like a fork. It is a contrived invention intended to slow us down, to “ruminate,” to put some psychic distance from our immediate whim and to give us time to “converse,” to turn ourselves about. Politics cannot be run on an economic or philosophic (here I mean ideological) model: it cannot be based upon pure interest nor can it wholly transcend interest. Like eating, we can control and restrain how we eat, but we must eat – politics must be driven by interest, even if it is interest and appetite moderated and transformed. Politics does not transcend nature – again, like the four-tined fork, it is the invention appropriate to our nature (though humans have long debated which regime – how many people, like how many tines – ought to govern). If

it's harder to know exactly the form a regime should take, like the fork, it should not be too big nor too small: it should permit us only small portions and not allow us to open our mouths too wide. It should slow us down enough to speak, but not so much that we starve. Politics needs to find the mean between extremes of nature and convention.

We don't debate that much about regimes anymore – we are all democrats now. In some senses, democracy is the regime that best proves the superiority and necessity of human manners: rather than some elites needing good manners, in a democracy, the entire citizenry needs good manners. That's a good part of the reason why I believe for most of world history most thinkers were opposed to democracy: seeing the table manners of most common people, they concluded that it would not be a good idea to give them the vote. The rise of democracy in modern times has directly corresponded to the universal adoption of the fork. Democracy has been made possible by the triumph of aristocratic manners. When we teach our kids how to eat with a fork and knife, we are educating them to be good citizens. To have good manners is to acknowledge the possibility of the common good. To be civilized is to be a citizen.

But, here we have a problem. Democracy is the regime based upon equality, and anyone who has read Tocqueville knows that democratic equality is impatient with forms. Forms appear to be precious and uppity – they are aristocratic. (Lawler and forks). Those of you who are Seinfeld fans will recall the episode when Elaine sees Mr. Pitt eating a Snickers bar – with a fork and knife. Mr. Pitt is an old aristocrat – he even has a British accent, which is the sure sign that he's either a villain or royalty. Elaine mentions this to George, who is quite intrigued by this eating method and adopts it for himself. As the episode goes on, more and more people adopt this eating method, until

by the end of the episode Jerry enters the diner – the quintessential American locale – to see that everyone is eating “finger foods” with a fork and knife. It’s funny, precisely because we know it’s so absurd.

Think instead of the prevailing American portrayal of good manners. Typically, Americans now have the admirable global mission of teaching the world how to act like complete philistines. In films like *King Ralph*, the *Princess Diaries*, or any untold number of films in this genre, the course American is brought to Europe where he or she receives a crash course in good manners. Of course, this proves offensive to our relaxed and informal American sensibility, and we delight in the American revolution, take 2. By the end of the film, Americans teach Europeans how to have a good time (*Princess Diaries 2*, Julie Andrews is mattress sledding down the stairs...). Europe just needs to loosen up and relax. We love Julia Roberts because we identified with her in *Pretty Woman* when she went out to the fine restaurant and did not use which fork to use. As Miss Manners writes, “The idea that good table manners indicate a lack of humility is still with us; to this day, a great many people brag about not knowing which fork to use.... [The rationale that etiquette should be eschewed because it fosters inequality does not ring true in a society that openly admits to a feverish interest in the comparative status-conveying qualities of sneakers. - This stands to reason, that Americans emphasize distinctions that are inherently meaningless – since this is the only kind of distinction we can allow ourselves to accept – while rejecting those forms that are imbued with significance.]

Think about America’s culinary contributions to the world – whether we invented them or not, we have created worldwide markets in hamburgers, hotdogs, pizza, chicken nuggets, ice cream cones, coffee in paper cups with sipping lids and “sleeves” to protect

the fingers from burning – and the list can go on and on. What do these foods have in common? First and most importantly, these foods can be eaten or drunk without utensils, without plates or cups that must be washed. They are made to be eaten figuratively, and often literally, on the run. They are physical manifestation of what Tocqueville described to be an inescapable feature of modern mass democracy: restlessness. Proud of his freedom, democratic man is nevertheless tormented by the openness of democratic society born of the universal “equality of conditions” – a condition that permits the possibility of meteoric ascent but also constantly threatens headlong decline.

Democratic man is denied a resting place, since to rest is to submit to drift, and to drift in a democratic age is tantamount to sinking. In spite of the “well-being” of democratic man, he is “*restless*”: literally, incapable of stillness, rest, leisure, therefore resistant to its concomitant goods – association, companionship, community, conversation, and philosophy. Democratic man seeks always to peer around the next corner, fearful something better lies beyond, and thus necessarily discontent with whatever decencies of the street on which he might live. Motion and dynamism is his lot – both a promise, and a curse. Tocqueville writes:

In the United States, a man carefully builds a dwelling in which to pass his declining years, and he sells it while the roof is being laid; he plants a garden and he rents it out just as he was going to taste its fruits; he clears a field and leaves to others the care of harvesting its crops. He embraces a profession and quits it.

We invented a phrase for the kind of fueling that such as mobile society requires: fast food. We do not dine; we chow. We eat everywhere, all the time: the very

enslavement to our biological processes – to our instinct to eat on a whim, and to eat anything – is now aggravated by “culture.” Rather than culture and restraining our instincts, culture now does the opposite of cultivating – it reinforces our animality. Leon Kass has gotten a lot of fire for prudishness and priggishness for a passage in *The Hungry Soul* that expresses his dismay over the eating of ice cream on the street (something I do, I’ll admit), but consider the whole passage in its context:

Eating on the street – even when undertaken, say, because one is between appointments and has no other time to eat – displays in fact precisely ... a lack of self-control. It betokens enslavement to the belly. Hunger must be sated now; it cannot wait. Though the walking street eater still moves in the direction of his vision, he shows himself as a being led by his appetites. Lacking utensils for cutting and lifting to the mouth, he will often be seen using his teeth for tearing off chewable portions, just as any animal. Eating on the run does not allow the human way of enjoying one’s food, for it is more like simple fueling; it is hard to savor or even to know what one is eating when the main point is to hurriedly fill the belly, now running on empty.

[By the way, the observation that fast food tends to obscure *what* we are eating – often literally hiding the meat between buns or under ubiquitous breading – calls to mind a point that was raised after last week’s lecture by Christian Kopff. He suggested that democracies thrive when a substantial portion of the population is engaged in agriculture. While he didn’t articulate the many reasons why this is likely the case, surely it has much to do with the training and habituation in virtue central in classical republican theory –

virtues like frugality, moderation, self-sufficiency, as well as humility and even piety (witnessed by the fact that we can plant, but we do not control the weather). But surely, too, a virtue that is increasingly lost as we leave the farms is widespread awareness of our food – where it comes from, how it is grown and prepared, the fact that a *civilization* is premised upon how it produces and consumes food. A civilization is, most fundamentally, the collective effort to feed ourselves in a predictable and ongoing manner. The “civilization” of fast food seeks entirely to divorce its producers from its consumers, to render our food largely unrecognizable by means of the very convenience of production and conveyability of its form. Our “fast food nation” – as has been remarkably documented in a book of that title by Eric Schlosser – has systematically sought to eliminate small family farming and non-standardized production in favor of factory farming fueled by poor and uneducated immigrant labor. Humans lose all sense of the natural cycle of life and death; animals are treated with cruelty and enormous suffering. Meanwhile, the structure of our landscape has been altered to make the procurement of convenient food all the more convenient – endless highways and parking lots at the expense of the sidewalks and storefronts of downtowns. We treat animals and all of nature like a vast “filling station,” and eat accordingly. While, in my view, meat-eating in a cultured and civilized fashion reflects and attests to human ascent, in its current social setting, meat eating increasingly represents a return to barbarity. Forgotten has been the Biblical call for stewardship, in which animals and nature are not treated as mere instruments of human convenience, but with respect and dignity in recognition of the way in which we, too, are creatures of infirmity and need. For those of you interested

in these issues, I recommend Matthew Scully's book *Dominion* as well as much of the writing of Wendell Berry.]

If democracy's rise accompanied the universal use of the fork, it may very well be that the increasing disuse of the fork corresponds to democracy's decline and fall. While one of democracy's prevailing tendencies is to dismiss *forms* – to embrace informality in all instances – democracy, in fact, is in need precisely of forms to prevent its self-destruction. Informality represents our impatience with law; convenience reflects our acquiescence to desire and appetite. Our harsh and hateful political culture reflects the decline of civility – of forms. Democracy, properly understood, is a really elaborate form of table-manners in which disparate and *hungry* people sit down together and “agree” to control their appetites. Based upon conversation – upon speech – democracy requires us to take sufficient time to speak, and more importantly, to *listen*. The fork and knife do not “help” us to eat so much as hinder us from eating too quickly; likewise, democracy rightly conceived forces us to slow down. Democracy is not about *efficiency*, but rather, about fostering productive inefficiency. If the fork is the greatest technology in the realm of food, certainly the most dazzling technological advances in the domain of politics is *Robert's Rules of Order*. That stunning apparatus slows debate, gums up works, and most importantly, forces debate; yet, it also gives us a way to end debate and to make a decision. Politics – and democracy especially – like eating with manners, is not about convenience and efficiency, but rather about learning self-restraint and self-governance. Responding to calls for more “efficiency” and “expertise” in government, the great intellectual historian Christopher Lasch has objected that instead we should “defend

democracy not as the most efficient but as the most *educational* form of government, one that extends the circle of debate as widely as possible and thus forces all citizens to articulate their views, to put their views at risk, and to cultivate the virtues of eloquence, clarity of thought and expression, and sound judgment.” Politics permits the gathering of humans not in order to commit violence upon each other, but to foster a common life starting in civility but culminating with friendship and love. When people complain that this or that decision is “just politics,” I respond, and thank goodness too – for, it is politics that makes us most human. He who is without a city is either a beast or a god.

Beasts and gods – humans are neither. And yet, nor can we reject the part of us that partakes of both. To deny our nature as animals would mean to starve. Yet, we starve too if we deny humanity’s participation in divinity. Inherent in those very practices that we develop in order to ascend from violence and bestiality, those customs that make us most human, is a sign of our hunger for more. In lifting our heads above the horizon, in rising above mere appetite, we experience wonder, awe, and curiosity about creation in all its manifold forms. The first sin of humanity – in which the serpent tempted Eve to eat of the apple so that “ye shall be as gods...” – is both a lamentable sign of humankind’s inclination to crave to be more than we should rightly wish, but too it hints at humanity’s praiseworthy longing for communion with the divine. We were forced from Eden and became meat eaters. We were cursed to “eat the bread from the sweat of our own brow”: to know what it is to provide for ourselves and to learn the arts of food preparation and proper eating. We formed cities and civilizations, and developed customs specific to each city and each religion. We became human, and in becoming human, strove to know God.

Yet, in our specificity and difference, our particularity and parochiality enacts into the fabric of daily life a reminder of our non-parochial and universal beginning. As Leon Kass has written, through our rituals surrounding food and its preparation and consumption, we sanctify eating as a memorial to human creation. We seek to feed our souls as much as our bodies. And this particular hunger we enact every time we participate in the Lord's supper. One of the central mysteries of my – for many, our – faith is the transubstantiation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ Jesus. Flannery O'Connor said, "if it's just a symbol, then to hell with it." She was responding to one defense against the charge that Christian mass was a barbarism in which people enacted cannibalism. And, in a way, that's what it is: we do eat the body and drink the blood of Christ. But, by doing so, I eat in a form wholly contrary to the motivations behind cannibalism: I do not submit to mere appetite; by eating, I celebrate their defeat. I do not eat from a hunger that drives me eat; I eat so that I may hunger. If humanity's first sin is to eat so that we may become gods, in the Lord's supper one eats to become fully human. And centrally part of becoming human is take within me the divine who was himself completely human.

Recall the lines from the Auden selection from the other day: "The slogan of Hell: Eat or be eaten. The slogan of Heaven: Eat *and* be eaten."