

Angmagssalik still lived "a completely natural lifestyle" while consuming as much as 2.5 kilos of (low-fat) meat per day; the Europeanized Eskimos of western Greenland, by contrast, suffered cancer rates roughly comparable to those of Europe. The author concluded that the high protein, low-carbohydrate diet followed by the cancer-free Eskimos of eastern Greenland was similar in certain respects to the popular "cancer-fighting diet" promulgated by Johannes Kretz.²¹

Dissenting voices also came from scholars suggesting, oddly, that European butchers were relatively free of cancer, the prophylactic effect coming from the handling of meat. In 1935, a French physician had claimed that Parisian butchers had very low cancer rates; a Prague doctor by the name of Hans Truttwin in 1941 picked up on this, claimed that butchers "almost never get cancer," and proposed a survey to decide the question.²² (In his own medical practice, Truttwin had treated cancer patients with bull testicle extracts, maintaining that the hormones contained therein possessed powerful antineoplastic potency.)²³ Victor Mertens, editor of the influential *Monatsschrift für Krebsbekämpfung*, countered by noting that there were already good statistics on the incidence of cancer by profession—that in England in the late nineteenth century, for example, while butchers had nowhere near the cancer rates of chimney sweeps, they were nonetheless still more likely to die of cancer than were fishermen, doctors, or farmers. Truttwin was simply wrong to have claimed, on the basis of a few French statistics, that butchers had "the fewest cancers of any profession." Mertens asked a doctoral student to research the topic and found that in Bavaria in 1935, 71 butchers had died of cancer (more than half from stomach tumors). There were 27,392 butchers in the state that year, implying a cancer death rate of 26 per 10,000, a higher figure even than was average for the population as a whole (16 per 10,000). Mertens concluded that the controversy should be "buried," since it was unsubstantiated in fact.²⁴

Hermann Druckrey, a Himmler confidant and leading cancer experimentalist, claimed that vegetarians were neither more nor less vulnerable to cancer: "Meat eating and vegetarianism are both held up as either causes or cures for cancer, when evidence is lack-

ing for either assertion. Statistical analyses have clearly shown that there is no connection in either case. Trappist monks, who eat a purely vegetarian diet, are neither more nor less likely to fall ill from cancer than other kinds of people."²⁵

The *Fleischfrage* was larger, of course, than the question of what caused cancer. Carnivory has been equated with affluence for much of human history, and nineteenth-century dietary tracts tended to credit meat with everything from the rise of civilization to modern military ferocity. In the Nazi era, too, meat was often identified as the staple of all staples, the food without which there was none. Some of those who maintained a cancer link championed only an indirect causal chain: a 1941 Hitler Youth handbook thus claimed that people who ate a lot of meat were more likely to drink and to smoke.²⁶

Meat issues spilled over even into questions of human origins: had the earliest humans eaten meat? Professor Paul Adloff of Königsberg in 1938 and again in 1940 repudiated the claim that vegetarianism was the original, and therefore more natural, human diet (Hitler, for example, believed this²⁷—probably unbeknownst to Adloff). Writing in a leading dental journal, the Königsberg professor argued that the structure of the human teeth and jaw indicated an early adaptation to omnivory; there was little evidence for the view that early humans had been vegetarians. Adloff pointed out that the half-a-million-year-old human skeletons found in China ("Peking man," now classed as *Homo erectus*) had been found mixed with animal bones, suggesting a fleshy repast; he also speculated with the émigré anthropologist Franz Weidenreich that these early humans may have even practiced cannibalism. Adloff noted that very few apes were strict vegetarians, and reminded his readers that "the well-known gorilla, Bobby, in the Berlin Zoo, ate warm little wieners with gusto." Humans were omnivores from the point of view of anatomy; it was therefore wrong to suggest that vegetarianism was the more natural diet for *Homo sapiens*. There was in fact "no natural human diet."²⁸

I have also drawn attention to the fact that economic considerations were vital for the meat detractors. Franz Wirz deplored the costly use of agricultural lands to grow grain to be fed to livestock,