The “Butcher’s Philosophy”: Situating Human Health in a Metabolic Landscape

In 1934, nutrition scientist Clive McCay warned that children were being raised with an attitude to growth that he called “the butcher’s philosophy”: the desire to bring animals to market weight quickly and efficiently. This paper revisits McCay’s critique, recounting the history of “feed efficiency” and the rise of medicated feed for growth promotion in animal husbandry between 1920 and 1970. Thousands of variations of antibiotics, arsenicals, hormones, chemical elements such as copper and zinc, vitamins and flavoring agents became standard components of feed in this period. I argue that such historical data can usefully complement and inform the biology and epidemiology of metabolic disorders and cancer in the contemporary moment. Yesterday’s philosophy of growth has material effects, producing the unique chemical landscapes in which today’s cells, genomes, and microbiomes develop and live.

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Date: Wednesday, Jan. 11
Time: 1 - 2 p.m.
Place: LSC 202

Chalk Talk
Thursday, Jan. 12
10:30 - 11:30 a.m.
LSC 202

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