

*A Philosophy of Recipes: Making, Experiencing, Valuing*. Edited by Andrea Borghini and Patrik Engisch. London: Bloomsbury Academic. 2022.

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Are recipes an appropriate object for philosophical reflection? This volume illustrates that the answer to this question must be a resounding ‘yes.’ Although not much work had been done on the philosophy of recipes prior to this volume, the topic can no longer be absent from any comprehensive study of the philosophy of food. Indeed, many of the contributions to this excellent volume will almost certainly serve as the springboard for future discussion and research on the topic. The book is composed of 17 chapters arranged into three parts, corresponding to the themes in the book’s subtitle: making, valuing, and experiencing. Each part is preceded by a few pages introducing the theme, as well as a helpful list of further reading. In what follows, I cannot provide an exhaustive summary of all the chapters. My aim is rather to highlight two chapters from each part of the volume that deserve mention, as well as to offer a general assessment at the end.

After a fantastic first chapter by Andrea Borghini, one of the volume’s editors, which sketches seven of the “core philosophical questions that recipes elicit” (15), the volume’s second chapter, ‘Recipes Without Makers’ by Sanna Hirvonen, continues to explore one of these questions, namely the identity conditions of a recipe or how one comes to be, ceases to exist, and maintains its existence. (20–22) Hirvonen explores two options in detail: realism and constructivism about recipes. According to constructivism: “whether a dish exemplifies a certain recipe (say, a *Coq a vin*) constitutively depends on the declaration of intention of the cook.” (33) This chapter argues for realism, however, according to which the identity of the dish “depends on its core ingredients and its flavour profile, texture, temperature, and look, and a recipe’s identity depends on the identity of a dish. So, whenever a novel dish comes into being [...] a new recipe also exists.” (30) Thus, for Hirvonen the nature of a recipe depends on the nature of a dish, and so the chapter discusses whether the nature of a dish is determined solely by properties internal to the dish (dish internalism), which is Hirvonen’s view, or also external properties (dish externalism) such as how it was prepared, who made it, etc. This chapter is an excellent example of how a philosopher’s toolkit can be utilized to think more precisely about recipes.

In the final chapter of Part I, Maya Hey focuses on the ‘attunement’ involved in the practice of making sake. Hey nicely illustrates how workers at one of Japan’s natural sake breweries rely on song, rhythm, and ‘attunement’ to microbial life to make sake. Indeed, Hey argues that this ‘attunement’ is an essential component of the sake recipe, and can even be considered one of its ingredients. (79) Taking inspiration from feminist ethics, Hey highlights the significance of this shift in focus from ethical principle to ethical practice in sake making, and she emphasizes how recipes can be embodied and involve embodied knowledge that can even be possessed by a collective. (81ff.) This of course raises interesting questions about authorship and responsibility in relation to recipes. (87) Hey’s is a fascinating chapter that will appeal to philosophers and non-philosophers alike.

One of the highlights of Part II is Carolyn Korsmeyer’s ‘Historical Dishes and the Search for Past Tastes’. Korsmeyer asks whether it is possible to recreate how food and drink actually ‘tasted’ historically, as opposed to merely recreating dishes or their approximation. Although we might have access to ancient recipes or even be able to ‘retro-engineer’ them from remnants found at archeological sites, Korsmeyer notes that we do not know the constitution of the ancient palate, and so dishes that historical cultures enjoyed might be repulsive to us now. Even assuming the “physiological stability” (103) of our tasting organs, Korsmeyer notes that there is “phenomenological flexibility” (103) when it comes to taste. Indeed, we can distinguish between “taste sensation” and “hedonic valence”, such that “it is possible to share tastes but simply differ in what one makes of them.” (104) Thus, I might be able to appreciate that an ancient lamb stew tastes of lamb, but my phenomenological experience of the lamb is likely very different from that of the people who ate the dish in the past. She provides a nice analogy with music: playing a historical piece of music likely sounds very different to our ears, even if we use historical sheet music and instruments, simply because what was experienced in the past as harmonious might sound unharmonious today. Recreating historical dishes therefore raises interesting questions about recipes: do they prescribe ingredients or ‘tastes’? This is a rich chapter that is bound to encourage further philosophical debate.

Barbara Haber’s chapter, ‘Writing Cookbooks behind Barbed Wire’, on the other hand, might be disappointing to philosophers. The chapter documents how American prisoners of war in the Philippines during World War II would, when faced with disease and starvation, often turn to daydreaming about recipes and even manically collected, shared, and traded recipes. Many of the recipes were high in fat or utilized ingredients that were difficult to obtain, although many others

were about using the ingredients that were available to their full protentional, sometimes to recreate approximations of favorite dishes from back home. The chapter offers a detailed analysis of this situation but is disappointing for the philosopher because no effort is made to draw out the philosophical implications of the case study. The editors themselves acknowledge this in the introduction: “On the surface, it [Haber’s contribution] does not engage with philosophical questions. However, it highlights the role that imagination (as opposed to belief or knowledge) serves in a certain conception of recipes, offering an important entry point for assessing the epistemological values of recipes.” (4) On the basis of this description, one cannot help but feel that the chapter itself was a missed opportunity, although it simultaneously provides an opportunity for further reflection.

One of the best chapters in Part III is that by Enrico Bonadio and Natalie Weissenberger on both food presentation and recipes in relation to copyright law and intellectual property right. The authors illustrate that food plating, for instance, is not currently protected by copyright, but that a way moving forward is to conceive of plating as an artistic work akin to sculpture. (200) More generally, they illustrate that, to be deemed copyrightable subject matter, a work has to satisfy certain ‘originality’ and ‘fixability’ criteria, which food is often considered not to satisfy. It is hard to deem food and recipes original, for instance, when chefs share so much knowledge with each other to the point that they are considered to possess a “hospitality gene.” (201) Similarly, edible food is often considered to be inherently non-permanent, which makes it hard for it to satisfy the ‘fixability’ criterion. But the authors point out that ‘fixation’ does not equal ‘permanence.’ There are examples of works of art, such as Tracey Emin’s *My Bed*, which change their physical nature, and so are not physically permanent, but are nonetheless ‘fixable’ or identifiable works. Part of the problem, they illustrate, has to do with the pervasive assumption that the senses of smell and taste are often considered to be more subjective experiences than those of sight or hearing. They also illustrate in detail that there is no definitive answer as to whether recipes fall under copyright, especially in the US but in Europe as well. When they have been given copyright protection, they have been considered to possess features common to literary works. The chapter is fascinating and illustrates that philosophical questions surrounding the nature of food presentation and recipes are of central importance to the legal protection they can receive.

A final chapter I wish to highlight is Anne Barnhill and Matteo Bonotti’s ‘The Ethical Dimensions of Recipe Modification.’ Their chapter presents four examples of scenarios where modifying a recipe raises ethical questions, especially surrounding cultural appropriation and

inauthenticity, on the one hand, and legitimacy and public justification, on the other. For instance: is an American university cafeteria committing cultural appropriation if it serves a ‘Banh Mi’ sandwich that does not at all resemble a Vietnamese Bahn Mi? If so, what exactly is the problem? Is it that an inauthentic version is being portrayed as the real thing, thereby disrespecting a culture that attaches great meaning to foods such as these? What about the case of the American National Institutes of Health (NIH) marketing healthy version of southern Soul Food? Is recipe modification of this sort only justified when it serves public values? The authors also discuss the more general questions of why we would want to consider modifications to be just that, namely modifications of an existing recipe rather than new recipes altogether. There is no doubt that this chapter will inspire a significant amount of future work surrounding the ethics of recipe modification.

In conclusion, some general observations. First, despite the volume being a rather large treatment of an under-researched topic, its coverage is not exhaustive. There is no discussion of the role that implicit and explicit knowledge plays in recipes, for instance, nor is there reflection on the historical aims and purposes of recipes, or indeed discussion of recipes for things other than food (for discussion of the first two topics, see Ch. 3 of Lorraine Daston’s *Rules: A Short History of What We Live By*. 2022 Princeton University Press). Second, in the Introduction to the volume, the editors state that one of the goals of the volume is “to present chapters by non-philosophers that should stimulate further philosophical inquiry and that show the fruitfulness of a contamination between philosophy and other disciplines, at least when it comes to food.” (2) I found this “multidisciplinary” (3) approach particularly admirable and effective: many of the chapters clearly illustrate that cross-disciplinary interaction of this sort has much to offer when it comes to the advancement of philosophical inquiry. Indeed, and as a final point, it deserves mention that the volume is presented as having philosophers as its target audience (see e.g., 2). At the same time, one occasionally gets the impression that the target audience is unclear. Borghini’s first chapter, for instance, presupposes familiarity with the ‘type/token’ distinction (see 18), but the introduction to part two (95) explains the difference between subject and objective judgments of taste in such an elementary way that one imagines the target reader as having no philosophical background whatsoever. This is a minor point, however, and overall, the volume is a diverse and rich collection that will serve as inspirational reading, for both the philosopher and non-philosopher alike.

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