

Donald Phillip Verene, *The Science of Cookery and the Art of Eating Well*, Studies in Medical Philosophy, no. 3, Stuttgart: *ibidem*-Verlag, 2018, eBook, 124 pp., € 14.99, ISBN: 978-3-8382-7198-9.

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In *The Science of Cookery and the Art of Eating Well*, Donald Phillip Verene has chosen several works on food, the art of cookery, and philosophy mainly, but not only, from Ancient Greek, Latin, and Tuscan culinary cultures. He specifies that the aim of the book is to underline the importance of “home cooking”⁴³ and maintain the tradition of the art of cooking. He thereby creates a connection between ancient and modern culinary traditions and philosophy. The book is divided into four chapters, with each chapter presenting various aspects of philosophy, cooking, and eating.

The first chapter is dedicated to ancient Greek and Roman cooking, dining, and entertainment experiences. Verene, as a Vichian scholar, provides several connections between Vico’s writings and those of other authors. These include, Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations*, Plato’s *Protagoras* and *Republic*, and Homer’s *Iliad*. Directly related to cooking, we find examples such as the *Deipnosophistai* by Athenaeus of Naucratis and Plutarch’s *Septem Sapientium Convivium (Dinner of the Seven Wise Men)*. The latter appears extensively in the second chapter. In the first chapter, all these books serve as accounts to introduce the importance of dining as the point of contact between discourse and sociality. It is possible to mention the answer of Cleodorus to Solon reported by Verene that dining is “an altar of the gods of friendship and hospitality” (*Moralia* 158c).⁴⁴ Verene argues that humans have several connections with the gods in the act of dining and its sense of

⁴³ Donald Phillip Verene, *The Science of Cookery and the Art of Eating Well: Philosophical and Historical Reflections on Food and Dining in Culture* (Stuttgart: *ibidem*-Verlag, 2018), 11.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

sacrifice.⁴⁵ For example, Verene claims that it is possible to see such imitation of the gods by humans in the preparation of banquets and in the pleasure of eating. In the second part of the first chapter, we find Giambattista Vico's *Delle cene sontuose de' romani (On the Sumptuous Dinners of the Romans)*, where he describes the Roman meal in detail under the "four headings"⁴⁶ of time, place, means, and order of dining. Verene introduces Vico's book and the *four headings* with a correlation to the Florentine contemporary dining tradition. Furthermore, this chapter presents a description of Florentine home cooking mentioned in *La scienza in cucina e l'arte di mangiare bene (Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well)* by Pellegrino Artusi and in *The Fine Art of Italian Cooking* by Giuliano Bugialli.

In the second chapter, Verene maintains his focus on ancient tradition based on Plutarch's *Septem Sapientium Convivium*, as a means to interpret the habits and customs of that time in relation to the nature of the human soul. Verene analyzes different aspects of dining customs and the different positions taken regarding foods such as vegetarianism and the use of meat in ancient cooking. Moreover, he considers other aspects such as what is more important between food, diners, and guests in a *convivium*; the relation between food and being with the gods; and the relevance of what is eaten as medicine for the body or for the soul. In this chapter, Verene carefully analyzes the different aspects of the art of food and of living well in the speeches of the seven wise men, as philosophers and not as simple diners.

The third chapter is dedicated to Athenaeus' treatise *Learned Banqueters* with a brief presentation of the fifteen books. Each book is dedicated to a particular aspect of dining, and Verene presents the work as a "classic for thinking through the idea of dining."⁴⁷ It is a *classic for thinking* because we are introduced to different fields of knowledge by the guests at the banquet. In this way, Athenaeus introduces the art of cooking and eating in relation to different bodies of knowledge such as philosophy, literature, medicine, law, and others still. Furthermore, the fifteen books are also divided into different features of a banquet such as wine, water, appetizers, fish, meat, and the preparation of some courses for special occasions, such as a wedding dinner. Verene contributes to clarifying Athenaeus' books on

⁴⁵ Ibid, 16.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 20.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 61.

some subjects such as table talk and the characters around the dining table acting as *parasites*. Luxury, music, and lyric poetry are not forgotten, nor are love and sexual pleasure around the dining table. Over and above that, Verene's analysis of the fifteen books examines Athenaeus' philosophy.

In the last chapter, Verene treats many works by different authors, most of them contemporary, and devotes the first part to Florentine cuisine. Verene starts by distinguishing two "epistemologies of cookery"⁴⁸ connected with René Descartes and Giambattista Vico. The Cartesian is based on right reasoning, the light of reason. The Vichian is based on a historical approach to the development of the inner principle, on tradition as a production of human activity. Italian cooking is considered Vichian by Verene because it is presented in an "unpretentious manner"⁴⁹ and eaten in a *trattoria*, a traditional Italian eatery. In comparison, French cooking is Cartesian because of its sophistication and the tradition of eating it in restaurants. Verene remarks that real Italian dishes are eaten only at home, and this is the place where it is possible to taste authentic Italian cooking. He ends the work with several presentations of contemporary authors of Italian cuisine and the relation between contemporary cooking and Apicius's *Cookery and Dining in Imperial Rome*, a Roman collection of recipes.

In summary, Verene's work makes two kinds of contributions, highlighting the handing down of the uses and customs of the culinary tradition, from ancient times to today, and the importance of philosophy in cooking and eating. *The Science of Cooking and the Art of Eating Well* provides many connections between food and philosophical thought and clarifies various aspects of them. The valuable achievement of Verene's work is to present the "self-knowledge of the home-cooked meal,"⁵⁰ rather than the contemporary fast-food and weekend restaurant, combined with the pleasures of the "taste" of the courses and conversation at the table. As Verene shows us, speaking and eating are the basis of human nature, and both can influence it.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 85.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 86.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 106.