Summary

This piece introduced the topic, spelling out its limitations and scope in terms of Asia, cuisine, and ethics. After examining the origins of cuisines it moved to consider the ethical aspects of food in India and then China, emphasizing the belief systems and religions that generated ethical beliefs on food. It then looked at the spread of those belief systems and food ethics to areas in Southeast and East Asia. The piece concluded with an overview of contemporary ethical issues relevant to food and cuisine in Asia.

Cross-References

- Buddhism, Cooking, and Eating
- Buddhist Perspectives on Food and Agricultural Ethics
- Chinese Agriculture
- Ethics and Food Taste
- European Cuisine: Ethical Considerations
- Hinduism and Food
- Islam and Food
- Jainism and Food
- Vegetarianism
- Water, Food, and Agriculture

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Authenticity in Food

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Synonyms

Authentic dishes; Dishes; Traditional foods

Introduction

In reference to dishes, authenticity is a central axiological category, informed by aesthetic and

ethical concerns, much used and abused on the part of both consumers and retailers. The application of the concept of authenticity to dishes has indeed grown to be so widespread that – in contrast with a previous reading of the term – some scholars regard judgments of authenticity as social constructs far from any possibility of falsification. Another school of thought, instead, sees authenticity as the expression of a genuine existential sentiment. In order to present the different perspectives, the entry opens up with some terminological remarks on the use of the expressions "dish" and "recipe." To be offered next is an examination of different interpretations of "authenticity," then employed to present four perspectives on the authenticity of a dish.

Dishes and Recipes

Before proceeding any further, the reader shall be made aware of certain important disambiguations. "Food" is sometimes used to refer to a *dish* and other times to a *recipe*, two notions whose difference shall be explained below. For the sake of clarity, the use of the expression "food" will be limited in the remaining of the entry, specifying which of the two senses is intended. Secondly, "food," "dish," and "recipe" are subject to a similar double interpretation: at times they refer *merely* to the item that is consumed – say, a tray of tiramisu; in other contexts, however, the expressions refer to that item *plus* the relevant events that brought to its realization; the relevant events, in turn, may be limited to the action of the cook (say, all the toil and labor that went into preparing the tiramisu) or rather include a more extended series of events (e.g., the chicken farm where the eggs were produced). The latter will be termed the *extended food/dish/recipe concept*. This entry will mainly attempt to offer a characterization of dishes and recipes in the extended sense; a derivative understanding of the less extended versions may ensue.

Authenticity, in reference to foods, is more aptly predicated of dishes; an authentic dish is a dish authentically reproducing a recipe. It is, then, relevant to explain the distinction between dishes and recipes. To put it bluntly, a dish is the *stuff*, a recipe is the *idea*. More precisely, a dish is the specific concoction of that perishable edible stuff, such as *those* specific actions that led to *this* tray of tiramisu sitting on my kitchen counter. On the other hand, a recipe is – in first approximation – the array of repeatable aspects that are found within a dish; that is, a recipe comprises any relevant aspect of a dish whose replication would deliver a dish of the same sort. In this sense, recipes stand for those *sorts* of actions that deliver certain *sorts* of dishes.

What is the relationship between recipes and dishes? Utilizing a terminology familiar to the contemporary literature in metaphysics, a dish can be an *instance* of a recipe or, alternatively, an *example* of a recipe. This tray of tiramisu – a dish – is an instance of tiramisu's recipe; last week another instance of tiramisu was prepared, which has now been all eaten up.

Not every dish, however, need exemplify some recipe. While in principle every dish has some aspect to it that could be replicated, only selected dishes enter the ranks of recipes. Indeed, it might be that some dishes are such gerrymandered or random concoctions of foods that there is no relevant repeatable aspect to them. Furthermore, a recipe may exist before having been instantiated or, in extreme cases, without ever being instantiated. Before executing a novel recipe for the first time, it seems accurate to say that the chef who came up with it had the recipe. Other times, of course, the dish and the recipe come to be simultaneously: as the chef makes a dish, she is also – maybe accidentally – discovering the recipe.

Even if for every dish there is a recipe, the partition of dishes into recipes would still remain the most salient matter of dispute in the foodworld. Do *cecina* and *farinata*, as found respectively in the Italian culinary *milieus* of coastal Tuscany and Liguria, indicate different recipes? Who is entitled to judge of the matter? The partitioning of the foodworld, whose study lies beyond the scope of the present entry, is thus crucial to establish the identity of both dishes and recipes.

"Authenticity"

The axiological relevance of authenticity can hardly be overestimated. Its underpinnings may concern either the aesthetic value of a situation or a thing, or its ethical worth, or both, depending on the context in which the term is employed and on the rationale for its usage. The expression "authenticity" has indeed much relevance in a number of fields, including visual arts, musicology, and cuisine. In reference to a person, authenticity stands for a virtuous disposition, achieved through the cultivation of simpler traits such as discernment, honesty, sound reasoning. In philosophy, the idea of an authentic life occupies a central role in existentialist philosophy and has been employed most notably by figures such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre (cfr. Ferrara 1998; Taylor 1992). Being an authentic person means being *true to yourself*. In a nutshell, regardless of external conditions, the authentic person will persist in her most fundamental propositions. However, it is key not to confuse authenticity with stubbornness. The stubborn will persist in her decisions even when they contrast with paramount changes not just in external conditions but also in personal convictions; the authentic person, instead, will be able to discern her changes and channel her actions in such a direction that they will be most suitable in keeping with her present dispositions and, when applicable, her history. Personal authenticity, then, is entrenched with creativity. The truth in question, when it comes to the authentic life, is uncovered through a creative process rather than via an examination of the past or a measurement of what is present.

How authenticity applies to the arts is much debated. To address the issue, it is useful to borrow the distinction, introduced by Nelson Goodman (1976), between *allographic* and *autographic* forms of art. The former can be represented by a language other than the one in which they are expressed; an autographic piece of art, on the contrary, cannot be expressed other than by itself. For instance, music is an allographic art because musical notation can make do for a musical piece – thus the limit case of pieces that have never be executed; on the contrary, painting is autographic, as any way of representing a painting cannot substitute for the actual work. In visual arts, where autographic works are predominant, authenticity seems to be employed especially to underline a genuine attribution of authorship; the opposite of an authentic work of visual art is, then, a *forged* work (cfr. Hick 2010). Central to an allographic form of art like music, instead, is the notion of *authentic execution* of a piece, and it is debated which performances best deserve such an etiquette (Kivy 1995) – those employing original instrumentation? Those eliciting similar effects in the audience? Those most faithfully interpreting the score, when available? Another story still is authenticity in the context of a collaborative art, as in the case of architecture, which is partially autographic and partially allographic. Three notions are most relevant in architecture: authenticity as authorship, as opposed to forgery; authenticity as cohesion, on the part of an architect, with her own past projects; or authenticity as adequate application of certain architectural creeds to a given situation.

Dishes are human artifacts bearing aesthetic worth; although it is debated whether selected foods may be regarded as forms of fine art (cfr. Telfer 1996, Chap. 3), what said of the arts has a bearing on foods as well. First, we may wonder whether cuisine is an allographic or autographic endeavor. There are several means of expressing a recipe, from cookbooks to culinary reports to videos: this suggests the allographic nature of cuisine. On the other hand, none of the means to express a recipe seems to be able to fully substitute for the actual execution of a recipe that is a dish; the upshot is that cuisine has a fundamental component of creativity too, an adaptation of a generic procedure to circumstances. The unavoidable creative component is implied also by the fleeting nature of food. Out of material necessity, each dish employs novel ingredients: food is perishable and transient; taste is a *destructive* sense, as it destroys what it experiences; and cuisine is a destructive endeavor, as it irreversibly transforms what it prepares to be consumed. Thus, whoever creates

a dish, even on the score of a recipe, will be employing ingredients that are *unique* and that contribute crucially to the aesthetic quality of the gastronomic experience.

Authenticity in Foods

The authenticity of foods has been at the center of a wide debate in the social sciences, particularly intense in the last 15 years, so much so that, according to Taylor (2001, p. 8), "there are at least as many definitions of authenticity as there are those who write about it." In the attempt to devise some threads in the literature, we may extrapolate four distinct perspectives:

1. *Realist perspectives on the authenticity of a dish.* The realist maintains that judgments of authenticity are true or false depending on whether the dishes have or lack certain characteristics. For instance, from a reading of Boorstin (1964), one may extrapolate the idea that an authentic dish reenacts a recipe in accordance to a specific relationship between a people and a place. Boorstin's proposal, however, has been criticized because it presumes a *static* view of a culinary culture, as opposed to one accommodating the seemingly unavoidable possibility of its evolution. Realist perspectives on the authenticity of a dish need not be static, however. It is possible to recognize that certain traits are essential, *at a given time*, in establishing the authenticity of a dish, without assuming that such traits will be valid in the future. Geographical indications (cfr. entry on GIs), which will be more fully considered below, are a case in point here. While the geographical area of production and the essential features of a product such as Champagne wines have changed over the centuries, current standards of production provide allegedly objective criteria on the basis of which a wine is judged as an authentic champagne. Of course, some may argue that the standards associated to a geographical indication are more a product of human *fiat* (ultimately creating a brand) rather than the expression of some fundamental natural properties of the products; this is indeed a major point at stake in the debate over geographical indications.
2. *Constructivist perspectives on the authenticity of a dish.* Constructivist perspectives on the authenticity of a dish move from the observation that no human culture is ever wholly separated from all other cultures; rather, cultural contamination is the norm. What comes to be seen as authentic, then, is the outcome of a selection process ultimately guided by human *fiat*. For instance, there is no objective boundary between authentic and non-authentic Thai cuisine, rather some ingredients, cooking methods, serving tools, etc. are chosen by consumers as being more authentic than others (cfr. Germann Molz 2004 and Urry 2005). Analogous considerations will be made with respect to geographical indications: the borders of the Chianti Classico region as well as the rules and regulations regimenting its production are not discovered, but conventionally established. The upshot – as summed up by Sims (2009) who draws on Jackson (1999) – is that "instead of talking about "authenticity," we should focus upon "authentification," which is the process whereby people make claims for authenticity and the interests that those claims serve" (Sims 2009, p. 324).
3. *"Existentialist" perspectives on the authenticity of a dish.* Some existentialist notions have entered the contemporary debate on tourism and authenticity (cfr. Wang 1999; Sims 2009, pp. 324–325); the ensuing proposal may be labeled "existentialist," among quotes, since it comes free of the broader theoretical framework of existentialism. The basic idea – when applied to our case in point – is that gastronomic experiences contribute to create a sense of the self; the quest for authentic dishes, then, becomes the quest for the realization of an authentic self. This perspective shares much with the constructivist, as it starts from the assumption that there can be no objective authenticity of a dish; on the other hand, for the "existentialist," there is a form of authenticity which may be genuinely devised – personal authenticity. What sorts of

experiences are conducive to personal authenticity and which ones are not, however, remains to be cleared. We may speculate that those experiences conducted independently from societal constraints and in keeping with core personal creeds are to be preferred; still, work remains to be done in this area.

4. *Naïve perspectives on the authenticity of a dish*. Finally, we come to a perspective paying dues to naïve approaches to authenticity (Cohen 2002). To an ordinary gastronomer, some dishes *are* authentic, without the need to justify why that is the case. What to a culture theorist appears as a social construction or an "existentialist" quest to the naïve gastronomer is simply a *sui generis* experience: it is all a matter of relaxing and enjoying a certain way of preparing and serving food. At times, there, you will encounter authenticity.

Authenticity in a Globalized World

The naïve perspective on authentic dishes opens the door to some conclusive remarks on the importance that the concept of authenticity in the kitchen has assumed in contemporary society. Three are the domains where the concept is more notably employed. The first comprises all experiences of "exotic eating" in local restaurants (Heldke 2003), as when visiting a Thai restaurant in Helsinki or an Italian restaurant in Bangkok. Such contexts typically reinforce the conviction that a realist perspective on authentic dishes is of little use.

The second domain is tourism (Heldke 2005; Sims 2009). Also in this context, we find chief examples reinforcing the thesis that the realist perspective is untenable. In tourism, indeed, the traveler's demand for an authentic experience encounters the needs of merchants to package an experience that will match the expectations. Thus, landscapes will be "beautified" so to appeal to visitors – for instance, in a region famous for its wines, vineyards will be embellished and become predominant with respect to other plants; restaurants will orient their menus on the basis of the preferences of the visiting clientele; and architectural styles and internal décor of living spaces will seek to match the tourist image of a place.

The third domain is the quest for local foods, particularly important to study as it suggests that the realist perspective held strong up to these days. Authenticity is indeed often associated to local foods and geographical indications, which in the mind of most consumers demarcate genuine, real relations between foods and places, making for an unrepeatable experience. Here is an example attesting the trend, from a study by Sims of two regions within the United Kingdom, the Exmoor, and the Lake District:

> Tourists tended to associate local food with particular specialty products. Of the 36 Exmoor tourists interviewed, 32 were able to name specific examples of foods and drinks that they associated with the area, with a similar trend being observed in the Lake District, where 38 of the 42 tourists identified at least one food or drink product with the area. (Sims 2009, p. 330).

The variety of contexts within which authenticity has come to play a role in food discourse suggests that more than one of the four perspectives presented above may come in handy to analyze a specific case. As taste and culinary cultures evolve, more work remains to be done in ascertaining the nuances of each perspective.

Summary

Some terminological remarks on the use of the expressions "dish" and "recipe" are offered first. Follows an examination of how the concept of authenticity has been employed in philosophy both to describe a personal quest (in connection especially with existentialist philosophies) and to characterize a work of art. Next, four perspectives on the authenticity of a dish are presented: realist, constructivist, existentialist, and naïve. The conclusive section, which points out three domains where the concept of authentic food is of particular significance, suggests that depending on the case study at hand, different perspectives turn out to be most suitable.

Cross-References

- Cooking Tools and Techniques: Ethical Issues
- Geographical Indications, Food, and Culture
- Recipes

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