

The Values of Local Food

Theoretical and axiological approaches

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Philosophy of food is a relatively new entry among philosophy branches, which is rapidly expanding in multiple directions, involving scholars working within different philosophical schools. The five papers collected in this special issue bear witness to this general picture, while focusing on the specific topic of *local food*.

A growing literature on the so-called locavorism (or, equivalently, eating local) suggests that local food can be the key for changing our food system in a more sustainable way, enhancing community values, and establishing a new and more conscious relationship to the environment (e.g., (Ho 2020)). However, in recent years, the concept has been subject to growing criticism since it has been considered not empirically well founded (Ferguson and Thompson 2021), vague (Schnell 2013), and even unjust toward indigenous communities (Navin 2014).

Reacting to these conceptual threats while acknowledging the shortcomings of the current takes on the concept, many scholars have tried to restore “local food” providing a more nuanced and rigorous philosophical, foundation focusing on its conceptual structure (Borghini, Piras, and Serini 2021b), its ideological assumptions (Werkheiser and Noll 2014), and its political and economical implications (Scharber and Dancs 2016).

In particular, recent philosophical scholarship has targeted four main areas of research, which deserve to be even more carefully explored.

The first area is ontology which, starting from general metaphysical questions on the nature of food (Borghini and Piras 2021; Kaplan 2020), brings us to the question on what are the referents of “local food” often ending up in answers that smacks of Aristotle: locality can be said of in many ways, covering single food

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items, entire diets, consumption patterns, timing of dining, and so on. In fact, as we have already highlighted in our (Borghini, Piras, and Serini 2021b) and (Borghini, Piras, and Serini 2021a), the very concept of local food rests on at least three different understandings: locality as typicality; locality as proximity; locality as social closeness.

The second area regards the moral dimension of local food. Scholars have wondered whether eating local is a moral obligation (Young 2021) and what is the relation between sharing local food and our sense of community (De Bres 2016).

The third area is related to political considerations which, by and large, can be framed within two different domains: whether public policies should protect and foster local food systems in order to improve local economies, public health and food sovereignty exerted by local communities (DeLind 2011); whether typical local food should be protected by means of legislation even when they fail to match sanitary requirements due to their traditional production methods, e.g., fermented foods (Paxson 2013).

A fourth area of inquiry is the aesthetics of local food which has recently investigated the relation between local food and landscapes (Adams 2018; Ravasio 2018), whether local foods own their own flavor due to the specific properties of their terroir (Todd 2012), and what kind of distinctive aesthetic experience is brought about by local food (Borghini and Baldini 2021; Engisch 2022).

Drawing also on such a philosophical background, this special issue puts the notion of local food under new philosophical scrutiny.

In *Ungrounding Terroir*, Bob Valgenti argues for the relevance of the concept of terroir, despite its common polarized understanding, which exalts it as absolute measure or reduces it as a mere fictional market label. For Valgenti, the concept resists representation, and due precisely to its fluid and contingent foundation – its “ungroundedness” – it can serve as an empowering tool for those who are mis- and under-represented in the global market.

In their paper *Pigs in paradise: local happy people raising (happy, local) pigs?*, Vaughn Baltzly and Colleen Myles explore the intersection between local, ethical, and sustainable food. In particular they ask whether a locavore should support particular kinds of agricultural practice, like *Cinta Senese* pigs farming in Tuscany, or not. They will argue that – from a welfarist and conservationist perspective – the endorsement of such forms of local meat production is reasonable.

What is tradition? A phenomenological study of how tradition is kept alive in the context of local food by Liselotte Hedegaard takes on foods rooted in local history as a lens to understand the meaning of tradition. Starting from extant interdisciplinary scholarship on tradition, Hedegaard uses *Abondance* cheese manufacturing as a case study to show the three-layered structure of tradition, where

the corporal, sensory, and emotional dimensions interact at a pre-reflective level.

In *Thinking Food in Poetry: Research on the Chinese Poet Lu You's Food Philosophy*, Siyang Zheng and Hongcheng Zhou analyse the lifelong passion for food expressed in Lu You's work. Throughout the paper, Zheng and Zhou present Lu's approach and thoughts on food consumption, offering a valuable perspective into ancient Chinese food culture.

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