

## Book Reviews

Author, Title	Reviewer
Barry C. Smith <i>Questions of Taste: The Philosophy of Wine</i>	David J. Hoaas
<i>Michelin Guide Tokyo 2008: Selection of Restaurants and Hotels</i>	Peter Musolf
John V.C. Nye <i>War, Wine, and Taxes: The Political Economy of Anglo-French Trade, 1689-1900</i>	James Shepherd

BARRY C. SMITH (ed.): *Questions of Taste: The Philosophy of Wine*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2007, 222 pp., ISBN 9780195331462, \$27.95.

The essays in this volume are based on a December 2004 conference sponsored by the Institute of Philosophy at the University of London's School of Advanced Study. The conference was entitled *Philosophy and Wine from Science to Subjectivity*. The ten chapters in the volume either had their roots in the proceedings from this conference or were commissioned pieces following the conference. The list of contributing writers includes seven professional philosophers, a wine educator, a biochemist, a wine critic, and a wine-maker (albeit one with an undergraduate degree in philosophy).

In her forward to the text, noted wine writer Jancis Robinson asks "could this book represent the most fun you can have with wine without drinking a single drop?" (p. viii). For the casual reader, the answer to this question would be no. This book is not a bedside reader. The essays contained in this text are serious academic works prepared by philosophers, wine writers, and natural scientists. The chapters require study and contemplation by the reader to reach their full meaning. Approached from an academic perspective, the book becomes informative and pleasurable to read.

Plato, Locke, Hume, and Kant all discussed the wines they enjoyed and favored (p. xi). They, like other philosophers, however, have not applied their craft of philosophy to the study of the enjoyment of wine. For those who enjoy fine wine, this enjoyment is a very reflective process. Care is taken to buy wine from specific vintages. Wine is kept at controlled temperatures to safeguard its quality. Discussion takes place regarding when to

open certain wines. Writers provide instruction on deciphering labels on foreign bottles of wine. Books are written concerning the pairing of food and wine. The intricacies of enjoying wine are to be contemplated. It is this contemplation and reflection of the taste of wine that provides a role for the philosopher.

When individuals discuss and reflect upon wine and its taste, the assumption is made that they taste the same thing. But is that actually the case? In ontological terms do we know what we are actually tasting (p. xiii)? To speak like an economist, the question is, does the utility from drinking wine come from the wine itself or does it come from the experience of drinking the wine? If it is the experience, what is it that determines the characteristics of the experience? Does a drinker of wine learn how to appreciate the experience and how is that appreciation learned. To paraphrase an often used quote, is it the case that "I don't know wine, but I know what I like" or is it that "I have to know wine to know what I like."

Wine critics can subjectively describe their impression of a wine. Chemists can objectively list the physical properties of a wine. Is the tasting of wine a subjective or an objective experience? That is the question of this text. As is the case with the review of most conference volumes, the tendency is to want to give a chapter by chapter summary of each presentation. That would be dull. A few of the chapters, however, warrant special mention.

Chapters one, two and three of the text, to varying degrees of depth, discuss the subjective side of wine tasting. In chapter three Barry C. Smith slightly changes the question. The subjective versus objective experience of tasting wine is not based on the metaphysical versus physical properties of wine but on one's ability to describe what they taste. The key issue for Smith is communication. Can a wine drinker communicate what it is like to drink a particular wine and are others able to share the same pleasure from drinking the same wine. Smith uses the analogy of describing pain (p. 58). Most everyone can recognize when they are in pain. Attempting to accurately describe that pain to another individual may be another story. The taster can recognize recurring elements in various wines sampled. Putting definitive names to these elements is where the problem begins. Individuals rely on wine writers and wine critics to help them describe what they taste. The subjective tasting of wine implies that one does not find the advice of all wine critics equally valuable. The valuable wine critic is the one whose personal tastes and preferences are most closely aligned with one's own.

Chapter six of the text by Adrienne Lehrer later returns to the topic of wine vocabulary. This vocabulary relates to the description of a wine's color, appearance, bouquet, aroma, taste, and mouth feel. Philosophers of language will find the choice of words used to describe wine quite interesting.

Chapter four of the text by Jamie Goode focuses on the objective or natural science approach to questions of taste. Namely, Goode explores the taste experience from a biological perspective. For those interested in the different reactions in the orbitofrontal cortex of trained tasters versus untrained taster when sampling wine, this is the chapter for

them. Goode's discussion is on psychophysics the field of study that concentrates on how physical taste stimuli are perceived by the mind (p. 93). The physical stimuli most wine drinkers are familiar with are appearance, scent, taste, and tactile feel. The reader interested in a more complete statement of Goode's views should consult his book-length treatment of the subject in either *Wine Science* (2005) or *The Science of Wine* (2006).

The inclusion of Ophelia Deroy's contribution to the text is quite appropriately placed as chapter five. Deroy tries to reconcile the subjective versus objective debate over the taste of wine. Unfortunately, as is true of most of the questions in the book, the debate cannot be resolved. The chemical properties of a wine obviously affect its taste. Yet no chemical diagnosis can of itself decide the quality of a wine. In the case of wine as in any tasting experience, it is quite hard to say when the evaluative (subjective view) stops and when the purely descriptive (objective view) starts (p. 106).

*Questions of Taste: The Philosophy of Wine* is not a book written with economists in mind. The *Journal of Wine Economics* is written with economists in mind. This reviewer would therefore be remiss if he did not mention the two economic studies cited in the text. The studies cited address the reputation effects of the French Bourgogne and Bordeaux Classification System versus the California 1978 Appellation System. The study mentioned with respect to the French classification system is Landon and Smith's 1998 article in the *Southern Economic Journal* entitled "Quality Expectations, Reputation and Price." The study mentioned concerning the California Appellation Classification System is Podolny's 2005 "The California Wine Industry," that appears in the text *Status Signals*.

This review began by asking the question, is the tasting of wine a subjective or an objective experience? As with many philosophical discussions, this text does not definitively answer that question. The writers of the chapters for this text do, however, thoroughly discuss why this is such a difficult question to address. In closing, the words of Roger Scruton (p. 18) seem to be appropriate for those who either subjectively or objectively enjoy a glass of fine wine. Scruton states, "Nothing else that we eat or drink comes to us with such a halo of significance, and cursed be the villain who refuses to drink it."

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*Michelin Guide Tokyo 2008: Selection of Restaurants and Hotels*. Michelin Travel Publications, Tokyo, 2007 (U.S. release in 2008), 411 pp., ISBN 2067130692, \$12.95.

Tokyo's thriving restaurant scene roots most immediately in the vibrant mercantile culture emerging here in the late eighteenth century. In Edo, as the old city was known, a modern society of wealthy townsmen pushed its way onstage, happy, boisterous, and with a hunger for life's pleasures. The samurai, austere and aristocratic, despised them. But the upstarts took little note, busy as they were with such new, intensely stylish forums for fulfillment as kabuki theaters, brothels, and, indeed, elegant restaurants. By the 1850s, when the first eateries serving Western food opened, and samurai power was on the ebb, the once strictly bourgeois vogue for dining out had become a standard routine of city life.

How many restaurants are there in Tokyo today? I've seen numbers from eighty thousand to twice that. If we assume city hall has a good idea of what's going on, one hundred thousand seems a reasonable figure for the twenty-three central wards. The mayor's numbers cite upwards of five thousand sushi bars, over two thousand Korean barbecues, eight thousand coffee shops, six thousand noodle restaurants, ten thousand Chinese restaurants, more than eight thousand generic Japanese eating places, and last not least roughly six thousand Western restaurants. Each category begs for definition (Denny's serves *miso*); not many beg for customers.

Are they all equal? Hardly, though if you avoid the chains the firm custom of cooking with fresh ingredients usually guarantees at least a nourishing meal. Well, then, unavoidably: Who is best? Undaunted by the potential absurdity of the quest, in 2006 Michelin red guides charged a squad of five inspectors with finding out. The guide's inaugural expedition in Asia, it was a movable feast that would take over a year to finish.

The first step, a practical and sensible one (and controversial because no rationale was given) was to shorten the list to fifteen hundred. As customary in these matters, the inspectors dined incognito, sometimes revisiting. Identities were divulged only after the decision to include a restaurant in the guide. All cuisine types were eligible. Comfort and service, the introduction says, were not relevant to the award.

The result of the undertaking? *All* restaurants listed in the guide, one hundred fifty in sum, received either one, two, or, the highest ranking, three stars. Food bastion Paris takes first with ten three-star establishments (Tokyo claims second with eight). Still, the sheer number of fine restaurants in the Japanese capital is staggering: its total of one hundred ninety-one stars surpasses Paris and New York combined. By far, Michelin's Tokyo is the best-fed city on the planet.

The guide's breakdown of restaurants according to type reflects the breadth of the city's culinary strength. Naturally enough, Japanese restaurants predominate. Yet here it is striking to see how many distinct categories there are of the native cuisine, each having reached a remarkable level of development. In addition to the 52 general Japanese restaurants (all serving exquisite, varied arrangements of seasonal vegetables and seafood) (68 total stars),

we find: Contemporary, incorporating elements of foreign cuisines (4 establishments; 5 stars); Fugu, specializing in the magnificent puffer or blowfish (4 and 6); Soba Kaiseki, an elaborate, delicious way of eating buckwheat noodles (3 and 3); Sushi, in the familiar style born in Tokyo known as *edomae*, raw fish (as opposed to marinated) atop small balls of seasoned rice (15 and 22); Tempura, a gone-native frying style likely learned pre-isolation from visiting Portuguese (5 and 5); Teppan-yaki, beefsteak or, fabulously, lobster fried on a hot steel plate (5 and 5); and, finally, Unagi, the delightful world of Japanese eel, possibly the most tasty of which is *hamo*, or pike eel (1 and 1). Of these restaurants, three in the Japanese category and two from Sushi were crowned with three stars.

Yet this is only eighty-nine of the stellar one hundred fifty. To boot, there are five Chinese restaurants (six stars total), eight Italian (nine stars), two Spanish (three stars), and two steakhouses (one star each). Not to forget, the Michelin also rates forty-four French restaurants. These, both traditional and contemporary, net a total of fifty-six stars.

Among the *grandes maisons*, a number of internationally famous names stand out: La Tour d'Argent, Paul Bocuse, Michel Troisgros, Joël Robuchon, Beige (Alain Ducasse in collaboration with Chanel), Pierre Gagnaire. In a faux chateau in the city's Ebisu section, the formidable Robuchon runs both a three-star operation and his two-star Atelier. Elsewhere in town he sets the one-star Table. His compatriots, each master in 2007 of three-star restaurants at home (Ducasse has two), do not rise quite so high here, and were it not for Robuchon's example, we might wonder if these weren't cases of too many kitchens in the cook. Tying Robuchon for top honors by a French chef in Tokyo is Bruno Menard, of L'Osier.

For all these imported winners, though, what the Michelin notably makes clear is the flair for cooking French of the Japanese. Native chefs run most of the starred French kitchens, their triumph bearing out dedication and depth of understanding, and generous, gifted teaching in France, where many Tokyo chefs have studied. It also argues conclusively that French cuisine thrives under a Japanese touch. Joining the top group is neo-French Quintessence, run by Shuzo Kishida, who at thirty-three may already be best of the best.

How did Tokyo's spectacular ascendancy take place? Several ingredients seem necessary, among them the city's long experience with restaurant cooking. Add to this Japan's admirable cultural continuity. Elements of its cuisine, such as multi-course *kaiseki*, brightly echo the medieval tea ceremony, and rice, whose preparation for sushi takes years to master, has been eaten in Japan for two millennia. Seminal educator Shizuo Tsuji (1933–93) also made inestimable contributions. The key, though, could be the Japanese bent for long, faithful relationships. Many of the honored restaurants have depended for years on the steady visits of loyal customers, raising the delectable thought that a great restaurant grows most readily not from solitary genius or the contest between star-power chefs but from the give and take of a talented kitchen and a discerning, regular clientele. At least one Tokyo three-star, now booked impenetrably, has admitted that a stream of one-time eaters, dining not to their own desires but, instead, chewing, swallowing, and paying up in simple obeisance to received opinion, may not benefit the food. Remarkably, some restaurants

that would have been awarded stars refused the distinction out of similar concerns, to the sighing relief of their fans.

Prices at the listed restaurants range from a demure ¥1,365 (roughly U.S.\$13) for a Japanese lunch at one-star Abe to a brazen ¥80,000 (\$750) plus wine at one-star steakhouse Arakawa. Michelin's disclaimer on restaurant comfort seems sincere: three-star sushi bar Sukibayashi Jiro occupies a windowless basement and shares a bathroom with a fried chicken outlet.

The Tokyo red guide appeared here simultaneously in two editions, English and Japanese. The latter version sold out immediately, and was hotly discussed in the food press and blogs. The enticing question has been how well foreign palates would judge the subtleties of fugu, for instance, or the complex visual beauty of *kaiseki*. With two Japanese inspectors on its team, Michelin was covering its potential to misunderstand. Even so, while three Japanese restaurants (one strictly traditional) and two sushi bars did achieve the top ranking, fugu, seen by many here as the essence of J-cuisine, did not. Similarly, cognoscenti were quick to ask why several sushi bars easily better than the guide's fifteen weren't mentioned, or whether favoritism worked against a number of highly regarded Italian restaurants. The simplest conclusion is that they weren't inspected, probably because there was neither time nor room in the book—or maybe the inspectors never found them. Still, the odd fact that starred restaurants turn up in only eight of the city's twenty-three wards, those frequented most often by foreigners, and the tendency, also odd, to list restaurants encouraging *omakase* dining, where the customer leaves the complicated but often pleasurable choice of dishes to the chef, has persuaded some the inspections were less appreciative and thorough, and possibly less informed, than they might have been. As someone living in this bewildering place, I think Michelin was just being realistic. Its market, after all, is gourmands understandably lacking the leisure and, probably, the culinary or linguistic knowledge to go it alone. The book gives these sympathetic souls the chance to eat a great, maybe life-altering meal. Nevertheless, a tantalizing thought remains: had Michelin *had* the time and space . . . how long would this list be?

A star is a star is a star. Michelin believes a *macaron* represents the same level of quality regardless of place, a universal standard. If this is the case, it's interesting to compare the cost of a starred dinner in Tokyo, whose high prices are legend, with that of a similar dinner elsewhere.

*Table*  
**Average Dinner Prices at Michelin-starred French<sup>1</sup> Restaurants in Select Major Cities.**

	<i>Tokyo 2008</i>	<i>Paris 2007<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>New York City 2008<sup>3</sup></i>	<i>San Francisco Bay Area and Wine Country 2008<sup>3</sup></i>	<i>Mean</i>
<b>3-Star</b>	<b>¥23,276</b>	(¥36,166)	(¥23,506)	(¥27,542)	¥27,623
(Tokyo: 3, Paris: 10, NYC: 3*, SF: 1*)	(€146.83)	<b>€228.15</b>	(€148.28)	(€173.75)	€174.25
	(\$217.53)	(\$338)	<b>\$219.68</b>	<b>\$257.40<sup>4</sup></b>	\$258.15
<b>2-Star</b>	<b>¥15,864</b>	(¥24,746)	(¥12,384)	(¥13,831)	¥16,706
(Tokyo: 6, Paris: 13, NYC: 2, SF: 6*)	(€100.08)	<b>€156.11</b>	(€78.12)	(€87.25)	€105.39
	(\$148.26)	(\$231.27)	<b>\$115.74</b>	<b>\$129.26</b>	\$156.13
<b>1-Star</b>	<b>¥14,738</b>	(¥13,166)	(¥9,158)	(¥9,167)	¥11,557
(Tokyo: 35, Paris: 40, NYC: 5*, SF: 6*)	(€92.97)	<b>€83.06</b>	(€57.77)	(€57.83)	€72.91
	(\$137.74)	(\$123.05)	<b>\$85.59</b>	<b>\$85.67</b>	\$108.01
<b>Tax (%)</b>	5	19.6	8.375	7.25	10.06
<b>Service/Tip (%)</b>	10	15	16.75 <sup>5</sup>	14.5 <sup>5</sup>	14.06

The prices include tax and service charge. Local tax rates and service or tip are given for reference, foreign currency values for convenience. (Exchange rates were current at the time the table was created, i.e., ¥107=US\$1; €0.675=US\$1.)

<sup>1</sup> The question posed was: What would it cost to eat a French dinner? This question, of course, begs another, swampy one: What is a French dinner? For Tokyo, data was taken on the restaurants Michelin itself categorizes as either French or, as a subcategory, French Contemporary. In New York and San Francisco, however, Michelin categorizes only a total of eight starred restaurants as French; Contemporary is a separate category. As a result, neither New York nor San Francisco possesses an "officially" French three-star establishment, and San Francisco no two-star French. To overcome this limitation, I have in the asterisked cases included prices from any starred restaurant in these cities with a menu that strongly echoed French culinary tradition (Le Bernardin, New York City) or was French by implication (L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon, New York City) or restaurant history (Chez Panisse, Bay Area), although the guides themselves group these menus under Seafood, Contemporary, Californian, or something else.

<sup>2</sup> The forthcoming Paris 2008 red guide as well as Paris 2007 were unavailable to me. Thus, I have taken the three-star data from the December 2007 issue of *Ryouri Tengoku (Cuisine Kingdom)*, a Japanese food magazine. Working from a list of starred restaurants provided by a Michelin web site, I assembled the remaining Paris prices from various places on the Internet, including restaurant web sites and travel guides.

<sup>3</sup> Because the New York and San Francisco red guides indicate meal price with symbols (e.g., \$\$\$\$) rather than actual currency values, I have taken the price data for these cities from various places on the Internet, including restaurant web sites and travel guides.

<sup>4</sup> At the single restaurant listed here, service is included. Hence, I have only added tax.

<sup>5</sup> In the U.S. it is customary to tip an amount twice the tax.

Naturally, this survey neglects many interesting things, people, ideas. Still, not a few diners (and restaurateurs) today question the high cost of dining at Michelin-starred establishments and wish to know—the niceties of a particular meal aside—whether they might have paid less “star-wise” somewhere else. By this count, Tokyo’s French one-stars seem overpriced; its two- and three-stars, however, are good values.

As a fair summary of the Japanese capital’s bounty, the Tokyo red guide could tempt you to visit. If so you may wish to make use of its brief section on international hotels. I can also recommend the Michelin for armchair gourmets and Japanese food fans—yes, especially these—whom an enthusiasm for sashimi, dashi, or Kobe beef has wondering what such delights can mean on their home ground. Even without engaging our noses and tongues, the book’s descriptions (one menu meticulous and ornate, the next improvisational, spare) and its photographs (here, *tournedos Rossini* in a sumptuous salon; there, morsels of sake-steamed abalone on a bare cedar counter) are alternately satiating and appetizing, and always an enlightening, engrossing pleasure.

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JOHN V.C. NYE: *War, Wine, and Taxes: The Political Economy of Anglo-French Trade, 1689-1900*. Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2007, 174 pp., ISBN 0-691-12917-4, \$29.95.

In this excellent research monograph, John Nye challenges the conventional belief that Great Britain was transformed into a free trading-nation beginning in the nineteenth century with the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. It is the culmination of his research into Anglo-French trade from the late seventeenth century through the nineteenth. Some of this research previously has appeared in journal articles, but it is most conveniently combined in this book. Of most interest to readers of this journal perhaps will be the author's emphasis upon the trade in French wine, and the protectionist actions of Britain against French wine, even through much of the nineteenth century.

The author surveys British trade policy from the Glorious Revolution to 1900. Until the end of the seventeenth century, Britain imported substantial amounts wine, mostly from France, and such wine formed the greatest part of Britain's large trade deficit with France. (The author uses the term "Britain" and "British" before the union of England and Scotland in 1707, though "England" and "English" might have been more appropriate.) Early in the seventeenth century, wine was nearly a fifth of all imports into Britain by value. Old political and religious animosities between Britain and France, mercantilist economic policies, and domestic economic interests all combined to play a role in British trade policy after 1689. Britain increased tariffs to levels that basically eliminated the importation of the cheaper classes of French wine in the eighteenth century. This increase in tariffs benefited the brewing and distilling industries (whiskey, gin, and rum). These interests were protected in exchange for submitting to effective and enforced domestic excise taxes on beer and distilled spirits which came to be a very important source of revenue to the British government. Their cooperation was secured by the possibility of lowering tariffs any time on foreign alcoholic beverages, including French wine. The author also notes the lower duties on Portuguese wine that prevailed because of British interests there. Some movement toward trade liberalization in the later eighteenth century was cut off by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. After peace came in 1815, a movement toward freer trade was supported by the relative decline of agriculture and the growth of industrialization along with changing ideologies expounded by Adam Smith and others. Tariffs on wine, brandy, coffee, tea, sugar, and rum remained essentially unchanged, however, and continued to prohibit the cheapest classes of French wines from entering Britain. Only after 1860 did an agreement with France cause Britain to modify her tariffs on French goods, including those on wine, in exchange for France lowering her duties while removing all prohibitions on British products. The opening of the British market for French wine, however, was set back by the outbreaks of the blight of oidium in the 1860s, and the more famous scourge of phylloxera in the 1880s.

In a discussion of the brewing industry and British fiscal policy, Nye examines the reasons for the British government to rely upon indirect taxes. Modern economic theory would suggest that direct taxes upon income and wealth would be more efficient because

indirect taxes distort consumer choice. His answer is that the ease and cost of collecting taxes on customs and excises make these more practical to collect (transaction costs of collection were lower). Also, the British squire was well represented in Parliament by the eighteenth century, and landowners wished to avoid higher property taxes and put the burden upon consumers.

Though an unrealistic alternative in the world of mercantilism, the author considers what might have happened in the British-French wine trade had free trade existed. He suggests that consumption of French wine in Great Britain might have been forty times greater than it was in the absence of any discouragement of alcohol consumption, in general, and of French wine, in particular. In the appendix, he also attempts to estimate the effect of British tariffs on national income with detailed statistical analysis. The results of static models suggest a fairly small impact on British economic welfare. The many caveats to these speculations are carefully considered by the author, however. It is, of course, impossible to measure the loss of satisfaction to those British consumers who might have preferred wine to beer and distilled spirits.

The major contention of the book remains that Great Britain did not become the great bastion of free trade in the nineteenth century that conventional wisdom suggests. The story goes that in the eighteenth century Britain was a major European power with colonial ambitions that followed mercantilist policies of trade protection. In the 1830s, however, new interests rooted in growing industrialization, and supported by the ideology of the classical economists and groups like the Anti-Corn Law League, led to the elimination of tariffs and the rise of free-trade policies. The repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 is a central part of this story. This view persists today (see the announcement for a session at the North American Conference of British Studies in 2008 which states: "From the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 through the First World War, free trade served as a cornerstone of Britain's economic, colonial, and foreign policies. Britain's unilateral adoption of free trade and its subsequent agreements with other European powers quickly extended free trade not only across Europe, but also throughout the rapidly expanding colonial empires." This is quoted from an on-line announcement of *Eh.News*, January 18, 2008.) Nye's estimates of the degree of trade protection (as evidenced by average tariff rates) were greater for Great Britain than for France until about 1880. However, one must note that it is also clear from the author's data that there was a trend toward *freer* trade in the nineteenth century on the part of both nations, even if a world of completely free trade did not come into being.

In the end, Britain became a nation of beer drinkers while French consumers remained attached to wine. John Nye has written a superb tale of the economic policies that shaped this story, as well as the tastes of consumers in the respective countries. It is one that will serve to correct old views and greatly improve our understanding of the forces responsible.

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