

FRITZ ALLHOFF (ed.): *Wine & Philosophy: A Symposium on Thinking and Drinking*. Blackwell Publishing, Malden MA, 2008, 308 pp., ISBN 978-1-40-515431-4, \$19.95.

I should begin by noting that I am a public finance economist and not a philosopher. Thus my thoughts on the essays collected in *Wine & Philosophy* reflect that of an educated layperson and wine consumer, not a professional philosopher. Given that the editor's stated goal for the volume is to be engaging, however, I feel confident in being able to evaluate the editor's success in achieving that goal. While my assessment of my engagement is inherently subjective, I hope that I can be clear enough in my description of the volume's contents for you to make up your own mind. Space limitations prevent me from discussing each of the nineteen chapters, but I hope to be able to provide an accurate picture of each section nevertheless.

This edited volume is organized into six sections. The first section contains four essays and is titled "The Art & Culture of Wine" and does not deal directly with the philosophy of wine. Instead, these four essays set the stage for the remainder of the book by providing an overview of current wine practices and how they came to be. Chapter 1 by classicist Harold Tarrant discusses the use of wine in ancient Greece. The information about the role and usage of wine in ancient Greece is fascinating and lends considerable insight to the works of Plato and Socrates. For example, finding out that Socrates was known to be able to drink any amount of wine and still stay sober helps contextualize his philosophical views on moderation.

The remaining three chapters in this section are also quite interesting and provide some interesting background to the U.S. wine experience. In Chapter 2, wine writer Jonathan Altop discusses the rise and fall of wine in U.S. history. His idiosyncratic history is filled with several very interesting tidbits such as the story of Carry A. Nation. Nation was a devout prohibitionist whose followers engaged in "hatchetations," i.e., the chopping up of bars and saloons with an axe or hatchet. Art historian Kirsten Ditterich-Shilakes examines in Chapter 3 the role of geography, time, and types of wine in explaining four different types of wine vessels represented in the collections of two San Francisco museums. The highlight of this chapter is the discussion of the signal being sent by the type of wine represented in the John Singer Sargent's painting *A Dinner Table at Night*. Chapter 4 concludes the section with a discussion of the health effects of wine consumption. While the chapter is informative, I would have appreciated more citations. For example, there is a somewhat lengthy, but non-cited discussion of a "1996 Italian study" on the J-curve relationship between alcohol consumption and health.

The second section is on tasting and talking about wine. It is here that the philosophical portion of the book begins, as these three chapters deal with what happens when we drink wine and (inevitably) talk about it. Chapter 5, for example, uses concepts from the branch of philosophy called "philosophy of mind" to argue that wine appreciation is not solely an analytical or quasi-scientific activity but instead is closer to improvisational theatre.

Chapter 6 by Kent Bach looks at “wine talk” and asks an important question: how does wine talk add to the enjoyment of wine? After taking the reader through all the possible ways that wine talk might help to improve the drinking experience (comparative pleasure, recognition and novelty, and applying standards), Bach concludes that while wine talk leads greater enjoyment *while* drinking wine, there is little evidence that it is beneficial *to* the enjoyment of wine itself.

Philosophical issues related to wine criticism are addressed in the third section. Chapter 8 by Ohio University philosopher John Bender provides a great overview of the issues involved in wine criticism. After showing that there are objective features of the wine that play an important role in wine criticism, Bender points out that there are areas of wine criticism that are inherently subjective, such as those depending on *sensitivities*. While certain objective qualities of wine (such as the degree of tannic) can be argued about and thus mutual agreement is possible, differences in our physical perceptions make our aesthetic judgment of wine inherently subjective. Unlike disagreements over the importance given to objective phenomenon, the key point made by Bender is that there is “no room for argument” when it comes to sensitivities. The second essay in this section, by Jamie Goode, is a very broad discussion of various features of wine tasting. He touches on the biology of flavor perception, the translation of wine tasting into language, and also addresses the degree of objectivity and subjectivity in wine tasting. These two essays are extremely well-written and engaging.

The fourth section is titled “The Beauty of Wine.” Each of the three chapters applies to wine concepts from aesthetics, a field of study in philosophy that tries to better understand ideas like “art” and “beauty.” These chapters primarily focus on two questions. First, should wine be considered to be an aesthetic object? Second, does wine tasting constitute an aesthetic practice? Philosophers Douglas Burham and Ole Martin Skilleås argue in Chapter 10 that wine appreciation is aesthetic. They do so by showing that wine appreciation has the same qualities as aesthetic practices such as art and music appreciation. In Chapter 11, George Gale develops further our understanding of wine aesthetics by probing issues related to wine as an aesthetic object, such as how the legal, physiological, and the tradition of wine-making constrain aesthetic judgments about wine. The final chapter in this section ingeniously uses a survey of wine drinkers to see if wine consumers feel that wine has aesthetic dimensions. The data suggests wine consumers view wine appreciation as having many of the same aesthetic qualities as other aesthetic objects.

The fifth and next-to-last section on wine and metaphysics is the most philosophical. Personally, I did not find these chapters to be engaging or educational although I am having a difficult time articulating why. Perhaps it is the heavily philosophical nature of these three essays that caused me not to appreciate them, although the fact that I learned quite a bit from the essays on aesthetics is problematic for that viewpoint. Regardless, however, I did not feel I learned anything about wine or philosophy from reading this section.

The final section of the volume is on the “The Politics and Economics of Wine” and thus is most likely to be of direct interest to the readers of the *Journal of Wine Economics*. Chapter 16, by economists Orley Ashenfelter, Richard Quandt, and George Taber, re-examines the results from the famous 1976 Paris wine tasting where some relatively unknown California wines beat well-known French wines such as Château Mouton Rothschild. They conclude that while the tasting and scoring procedure used at the tasting did not meet several basic requirements necessary to ensure internal validity of wine tasting results, the general conclusions of the 1976 Paris tasting were correct. Philosopher Justin Weinberg takes on the price of wine and rationality in Chapter 18. I suspect most economists would find at least a couple of things to disagree with in this chapter. For example, Weinberg suggests on page 264 that price is not determined by supply and demand but by stating that wine prices are determined by factors such as “the need to recoup costs due to weather-caused damage of grapes, the cost of labor, debt owed by winemaker, ... the ego of the winemaker,” etc.

I have to conclude by applauding the editor for trying to include many different perspectives into the volume. I think that bringing in non-philosophers to provide their perspective on these issues was a great idea. My understanding and knowledge of the history and culture of wine is greatly expanded by the engaging material presented in the first section, for example. At the same time, however, I finished the volume wishing I had learned more philosophy. While I now have some idea of the questions that surround the field of aesthetics (in addition to the conviction that wine is an aesthetic good), I learned less philosophy from this volume than I did from *The Simpsons and Philosophy*. Thus if your goal is to learn a large amount of philosophy, I suggest you look elsewhere. Readers interested in obtaining a deeper understanding of wine and wine appreciation, however, would likely benefit from picking up this volume.

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