

MATTHEW STROHL

On Culinary Authenticity

ABSTRACT

Recent discussions of culinary authenticity have focused on the problematic sociopolitical implications of Euro-Americans seeking authenticity in food perceived as ethnic. This article seeks to rehabilitate the concept of culinary authenticity. First, the author relates the issue of culinary authenticity to other philosophical debates concerning authenticity, arguing that the concept of authenticity is value-neutral. Second, a general theory of culinary authenticity making use of the theoretical apparatus of Kendall Walton's "Categories of Art" is developed and defended against objections. Third, a variety of reasons that authenticity is valued are discussed, with an emphasis on aesthetic reasons. Ultimately, the author acknowledges that some ways of valuing culinary authenticity are objectionable but argues that this should not lead us to abandon our interest in authenticity altogether.

In recent years, there has been a notable surge of discourse concerning the ways that practices surrounding so-called "ethnic food" relate to considerations of social justice. For instance, Krishnendu Ray argues in his 2016 book *The Ethnic Restaurateur* that the average prices of various categories of food correlate with the social standing of the ethnic groups associated with these categories. Amidst the wave of discussion that Ray's book prompted, concerns surfaced about the concept of *authenticity* and the problematic ways that it is often attached to food perceived as ethnic. Maria Godoy quotes personal communication with Ray: "'One of the big constraints, say, for Indian food or Chinese food is that, if it is expensive, it cannot be authentic,' Ray says. Immigrant chefs 'are trapped for that kind of demand for authenticity—cheap authenticity'" (Godoy 2016). To the extent that Ray's empirical claim is accurate, he has identified a clear and straightforward way in which many Euro-Americans' attitudes about authenticity with respect to ethnic food are objectionable.

Lisa Heldke explores related issues about culinary authenticity in great depth in her 2003 book *Exotic Appetites: Ruminations of a Food*

Adventurer and in other writings. She is particularly critical of replicability theories of authenticity, according to which authenticity consists in replicating the way cultural insiders prepare a given dish. She and coauthor Thomsen write, "to valorize the pursuit of replicability is to encourage rigidity, inappropriate (even bizarre) standards of 'purity,' and an essentializing of ethnic Others. It freezes cultures in amber, as it were, demanding adherence to a standard that is impossible in practice and in principle both" (2014, 87). Heldke thinks that Euro-Americans who prize cosmopolitanism seek to boost their social standing and sense of self-worth through vampirizing the exotic allure of the Other, which is accessed through interactions with ethnic food that is seen as authentic (2003, 45–59). While this critique of certain Euro-American attitudes is apt, I disagree with Heldke's conclusion that we should abandon replicability theories altogether. My primary aim in this article is to develop a replicability theory of culinary authenticity that allows for enough flexibility to stand up to Heldke's objections. The account I propose achieves such flexibility by deploying the theoretical apparatus of Kendall Walton's seminal paper, "Categories of Art."

In Section I, I relate the issue of culinary authenticity to broader debates in aesthetics about the nature and value of authenticity and present Heldke's critique of replicability theories of authenticity. In Section II, I present a more sophisticated replicability theory of culinary authenticity and argue that it escapes Heldke's objections. In Section III, I discuss a variety of reasons that one might have for valuing culinary authenticity and argue that many of these reasons are legitimate and unobjectionable.

I. PRELIMINARIES

Philosophical debate about the nature and value of authenticity has predominately concerned visual art and music. Within the visual arts, we encounter an important distinction between originals and forgeries. This distinction applies both to unique works and to works that have multiple copies but are still subject to forgery, as in the case of etchings (Goodman 1976, 113). Music does not raise the same sort of worry as visual art. A rendition of a musical work is a *performance* of the work, not a *copy* of it. Musical performances are evaluated in terms of faithfulness to the work-determinate properties of the composition. Consequently, there has been a vigorous debate over the question of why and to what extent a performance of a piece of music should aim to be faithful to the composer's intentions (for example, Davies 2001) or to features of the work that come apart from such intentions (Dodd 2015). Culinary authenticity primarily concerns the authenticity of *dishes* or *ingredients*.¹ Like musical performances, particular food preparations are renditions of a dish rather than copies of it. A recipe is analogous in this respect to a musical score. It is reasonable to proceed from an initial premise that a prepared dish is authentic if it presents the right mix of dish-determinate properties. In addition to prepared dishes, we are sometimes also interested in the authenticity of ingredients. We may be concerned that a tin of caviar is authentic wild beluga rather than cheaper farmed kaluga. This sort of culinary authenticity is closer to authenticity in the visual arts because it concerns a contrast between genuine and fake. Culinary authenticity, therefore, is its own beast, not neatly subsumable under either existing debate.

Stephen Davies offers a useful statement of a basic general account of authenticity:

I recommend the following as a way of capturing the central notion: where '*X*' names a type or kind or class of thing (and is not, say, a proper noun), an authentic *X* is an *X*. In other words, something is an authentic *X* if it is an instance or member of the class of *X*s. An interest in authenticity reflects a concern with correct classification. In this view, a hamburger is an authentic McDonald's if it is made by McDonald's and displays the properties that distinguish their products. (2001, 203)

Authenticity, in the most basic sense, is category membership (even if the category only has one member). For the case of food, there are many different sorts of categories that might be relevant. One might be interested in knowing whether a food preparation is a faithful rendition of a certain dish or whether an ingredient is from a special region or whether a traditional processing method has been used. Depending on the category in question and the concerns that are relevant, culinary authenticity may or may not come in degrees (compare Davies 2001, 203). If one is primarily concerned with region of production, the authenticity of a jar of capers purporting to be from Pantelleria is all or nothing. If one is primarily concerned to experience the tastes and textures of a typical *spaghetti alla puttanesca* from southern Italy, a preparation made with Italian capers would be more authentic than one made with Spanish capers, but the latter might still be authentic enough to satisfy one's concerns. In the case of food that is seen as foreign or ethnic, one might be interested to know whether a food preparation properly belongs to a category present in some geographically removed locale. For instance, one might be interested to know whether the twice-cooked pork one is served at a Sichuan restaurant in Salt Lake City properly belongs to the category as it is found in Chengdu. Sometimes, distinct variations of a category exist in different contexts, and one may be interested in trying the version found in a specific context. Neapolitan and Chicago-style pizza both belong to the overarching category of pizza, but someone who grew up in Chicago eating deep dish pizza might have a specific interest in trying authentic Neapolitan-style pizza.

In Heldke's terminology, this is a replicability theory of authenticity. She and coauthor Thomsen forcefully object to such theories:

To define authenticity as replicability is a conceptual misunderstanding about the nature of cuisine. To understand the genuineness of a cuisine as identicalness is to treat it as having a fixed essences and rigid borders—two things no cuisine has ever possessed. Cuisines are not Platonic forms; they are loose collections of culinary projects, all porous, malleable, permeable and changeable to varying degrees. Relatedly, to valorize the pursuit of replicability is to encourage rigidity, inappropriate (even bizarre) standards of “purity,” and an essentializing of ethnic Others. It freezes cultures in amber, as it were, demanding adherence to a standard that is impossible in practice and in principle both. (2014, 87)

There are two objections here. The first is that replicability theories incorrectly imply that there is some one way that a cuisine is. The second is that these theories encourage rigidity and oppose culinary evolution. Heldke and Thomsen take both issues to be particularly objectionable when they are applied to food perceived as ethnic. I reply to these objections in Section II by arguing that a more sophisticated replicability theory can account for the flexibility of cuisine. First, it will be helpful to evaluate a central presumption of their critique. They assume that ‘authenticity’ is a *value-laden* term when applied to food; that is, they think that attributing authenticity to a dish is a way of praising it or characterizing it as desirable, perhaps not overall, but at least in this respect (2014, 84). While I acknowledge that the term ‘authenticity’ is sometimes used in this way, I claim that the most basic notion of culinary authenticity is *value-neutral*; on my account, describing food as authentic is not necessarily a way of praising it or characterizing it as desirable.

Heldke argues that cosmopolitan Euro-Americans associate culinary authenticity with *difference* and *novelty* (2003, 27–29). She writes:

Exotic food is understood as authentic precisely *because* of its strangeness, its novelty. Because it is unfamiliar to me, I assume it must be a genuine or essential part of that other culture; it becomes the marker of what distinguishes my culture from another. Whatever is so evidently not a part of my own culture must truly be a part of this other one. So, in a three-step process, that which is novel to me ends up being exotic, and that which is exotic I end up defining as most authentic to a culture. (2008, 398)

She thinks that attributions of authenticity are grounded in attraction to the exotic and thus connote desirability to this extent. Authenticity is most often mentioned in cases where food is perceived as different or novel, but this does not entail that difference or novelty is part of the concept of authenticity. Authenticity is not likely to be brought up except in contexts where it is threatened or compromised.² When we eat foods that are familiar to us, we typically take their authenticity for granted. An American who enjoys fast food cheeseburgers, for instance, would not generally have reason to attend to the question of their authenticity. But suppose such a person travels abroad and visits two purportedly American-style fast food restaurants; one of them serves their burgers with ketchup, mustard, and cucumber pickles, while the other serves theirs with pickled beetroot. If the person were asked which cheeseburger is a more authentic rendition of American fast food, the answer would be clear.

One evident problem with analyzing culinary authenticity in terms of difference and novelty is that it centers the experience of Euro-American consumers (Ray 2016, 8).³ Cultural insiders sometimes care about the authenticity of their own cuisines. There may be sociocultural reasons to care about authenticity; for instance, it could be that community bonds are maintained through adherence to tradition (Hage 1997). There might also be aesthetic reasons. Steffan Igor Ayora-Díaz writes:

More recently, a friend warned me against a new restaurant [in Yucatán] specialized in “Yucatecan” food—which, it must be said, receives dazzling reviews on different international travel websites—because, she said, the sauce she was served with her *papadzules* contained cream. While tourists, national and international, consume and enjoy these meals, Yucatecans, in general, tend to define the introduction of cheese and cream in “traditional” Yucatecan recipes as a disgusting development. This is not because Yucatecans dislike or do not eat cheese or cream; they do, at home and in Mexican and Italian restaurants; they enjoy these products, but tend to perceive them as incompatible with recipes that belong in the regional gastronomic canon. (2005, 346)

The author’s friend’s warning is a clear example of a cultural insider valuing the authenticity of her own cuisine for aesthetic reasons. Given the rave reviews Ayora-Díaz alludes to, the inauthentic

inclusion of dairy in Yucatecan recipes is not disgusting for everyone. As Carolyn Korsmeyer notes, otherwise palatable food can be experienced as disgusting in cases where it does not match the taster's expectations (1999, 90–91). Take a case where someone eats what they think is a chocolate mint but it is in fact a piece of chocolate-covered bacon. Even if this person normally likes chocolate-covered bacon, she would likely find it disgusting in this case, because she expects a burst of mouth-freshening mint and instead bites down on something salty, smoky, and fatty. Before she has the chance to think through what might be in her mouth, she may experience visceral revulsion and perceive the food as disgusting. Yucatecans find the inclusion of cream in the sauce for *papadzules* disgusting because it clashes with their expectations and habituated taste preferences.

In many contexts, cultural insiders encourage outsiders to try a dish the authentic way even if they are otherwise inclined. In Philadelphia, for instance, it is very popular to order a cheesesteak with Cheez Whiz, and many cultural insiders consider the most authentic way to order a cheesesteak to be “Whiz wit,” that is, with Cheez Whiz and onions. Other types of cheese are available, and many insiders prefer these other options, but it is typical to advise friends from out of town to try their cheesesteak “Whiz wit.” The texture and melting properties of Cheez Whiz work remarkably well in this particular sandwich, and, given the terrible reputation the product has with most people, it is a point of pride for Philadelphians that they have found such a delicious use for it. A typical recommendation might go, “I know, I know, it sounds weird. But trust me: the first time you order a Philly cheesesteak, try it Whiz wit.” Far from fetishizing the otherness of the Philly-style cheesesteak, an outsider may have to overcome a long-standing aversion to the familiar processed cheese sauce on the basis of trust in the testimony of cultural insiders in order to approach a “Whiz wit” sandwich with appropriate gusto.

In the two cases just discussed, authenticity is taken to be a desirable quality, but this is not always so. Traditional food preparations sometimes develop in undesirable circumstances, such as a dearth of fresh ingredients or a lack of time for cooking from scratch. An example that stands out for me is the classic Campbell's recipe for green bean casserole.⁴ This dish is a Thanksgiving

staple for many Americans, and—according to Lucy Long (2007)—has special significance for Midwestern culture. The recipe was originally meant to be convenient for people without access to fresh produce and includes canned green beans, canned cream of mushroom soup, and packaged French fried onions. Many people find it repellant, and I count myself among them. On the other hand, I certainly enjoy inauthentic versions of green bean casserole prepared from fresh ingredients. If I am invited to a friend's house for Thanksgiving and am offered green bean casserole, I might sensibly ask, “This is not authentic, is it?” I do not take the meaning of the term ‘authenticity’ here to be fundamentally different from other commonplace uses of the term. I mean the same thing when I ask whether a dish at a Chinese restaurant is authentic as I do when I ask whether a green bean casserole is authentic: I want to know if it is faithful to the relevant tradition. In Heldke's terms, I want to know if it is a good replication of a traditional preparation.

If the most basic notion of authenticity is simply category membership, then it stands to reason that it would be value-neutral; category membership may or may not be desirable. It may be the case that for some aesthetic media and genres, some form of authenticity is always *pro tanto* desirable. Stephen Davies claims that this is the case for Western classical music. He argues that given the practices surrounding the genre, our interest in works of Western classical music involves an interest in such works as being *of their composers* (2001, 247–252). We are not merely interested in a performance of Mozart as a collection of pleasing sounds, such that if it could be made more pleasing by deviating from the score, then our interest would be better satisfied. Rather, Davies argues, we are interested in the performance as being *of Mozart's composition*, such that the performance must aim to follow Mozart's work-determinative instructions if it is to satisfy our interest. Even if a work of Western classical music is poor, Davies claims that the nature of our interest in such music entails that we should prefer a more authentic performance that reveals the work's flaws over one that is more pleasing in virtue of deviating from the composer's work-determinative instructions (2001, 249).

Davies's argument depends on the premise that there are normative restrictions for how one should appreciate Western classical music. Surely,

some people enjoy listening to such music without taking an interest in works as being of their composers, and some of these people would rather hear a more pleasing performance than a more authentic one. There may be strong arguments that these people are making a mistake. There do not seem to be favorable prospects for analogous arguments for the case of food, however. I argue in Section III below that, depending on one's concerns, there are cases where one should prefer an authentic food preparation over a more pleasing one, but even the most authenticity-minded food enthusiast sometimes just wants to grab something to eat during a short airport layover and is right not to care *at all* whether pouring barbecue sauce all over a pizza slice to make it more palatable thereby renders it less authentic.⁵ Similarly, a modernist chef who prepares a traditionally braised recipe sous-vide may be right not to care *at all* that this renders the dish less authentic. Indeed, as I discuss in Section III, the special aesthetic properties of modernist food sometimes depend on inauthenticity. There are many contexts where we are clearly justified in not giving even *pro tanto* weight to considerations of culinary authenticity.

II. CULINARY AUTHENTICITY

The primary challenge in formulating a replicability theory of authenticity is that the strictness of requirements for authenticity is highly variable. In some cases, requirements for authenticity are very strict, whereas in other cases they are very flexible. The Reuben sandwich, for instance, is quite strict. An authentic Reuben must include all and only the following ingredients: rye bread with fat for the griddle, corned beef, sauerkraut, Swiss cheese, and Russian dressing. It is acceptable to vary the brand of cheese or dressing, or to cut the corned beef either quite thin or a little on the thicker side, but if any of these five ingredients is left out or if any other ingredient is added, it is not a Reuben. If you substitute pastrami for corned beef, it becomes a Rachel rather than a Reuben. If you put mustard on it or substitute a white roll for rye bread, it is most definitely not a Reuben.⁶ It might be a very good sandwich indeed, but not a Reuben. Compare the tuna melt, another beloved diner classic. The tuna melt is not a free-for-all: it has to have tuna salad and melted cheese served hot on grilled bread. But there are many ways of varying

the tuna melt within the bounds of authenticity: you could use either cheddar or American cheese, you could put diced celery or pickles in the tuna salad, and you could even serve it open-faced.

Kendall Walton's theory of the categories of art is helpful.⁷ He distinguishes between the features of a work that are *standard*, *variable*, and *contra-standard* for a category:

A feature of a work of art is *standard* with respect to a (perceptually distinguishable) category just in case it is among those in virtue of which works in that category belong to that category—that is, just in case the lack of that feature would disqualify, or tend to disqualify, a work from that category. A feature is *variable* with respect to a category just in case it has nothing to do with works' belonging to that category; the possession or lack of the feature is irrelevant to whether a work qualifies for the category. Finally, a *contra-standard* feature with respect to a category is the absence of a standard feature with respect to that category—that is, a feature whose presence tends to *disqualify* works as members of the category. (1970, 339)

For the Reuben, the five essential ingredients are standard features and all other ingredients are contra-standard. For the tuna melt, the standard features are tuna salad, melted cheese, and grilled bread. Beef jerky is contra-standard. It is variable whether the cheese is American or Cheddar, whether or not the tuna salad contains pickles or diced celery, and whether it is served open-faced or not. In this manner, Walton's theoretical apparatus can account for the variability of the strictness of requirements for authenticity.

I propose an analysis of *replication* in terms of Waltonian category membership. A dish *replicates* a given perceptibly distinguishable category if it possesses a combination of standard features that qualify it for the category in the relevant context and no combination of contra-standard features sufficient to disqualify it. I take this formulation to be equivalent:

Replication:

For some food token X, category Y, and context Z, X replicates Z-style Y if X would pass for Y in Z.

"X would pass for Y in Z" means that a reasonable judge possessed of the relevant perceptual capabilities who has sampled a representative range of members of category

Y in context Z would consider X to be a member of Y in Z.

I mean 'context' in a loose sense, as designating a milieu where a category is found. Replication must allow for context relativity, because food categories often vary from context to context, and one may be interested in the version found in a specific context. I use the construction 'Z-style' in connection with this notion of context to designate the variation of a category found in context Z. I take this formulation to be equivalent to Waltonian category membership because cases where a food token will pass for a category in a context are cases where the food token possesses a set of standard features sufficient to qualify it for that category in that context and no set of contra-standard features sufficient to disqualify it. Walton's theory allows for the possibility that a work can have features that are contra-standard for a category and yet still belong to that category. Contra-standard features *tend* to disqualify a work for membership in a category but may not be sufficient for such disqualification. Three-dimensional protrusions are contra-standard for paintings, but a work with a protrusion or two might still be considered a painting. Similarly, some food preparations might qualify for a category even while having one or more features that are contra-standard for that category. Flexibility with respect to standard and contra-standard features depends on practices surrounding a particular dish and can be relative to the basis of one's interest in authenticity. According to Fuchsia Dunlop, twice-cooked pork is standardly prepared in Chengdu with *suan miao*, a type of Chinese leek (2003, 194). This variety of leek is not readily available in the West, and so she suggests baby leeks as an acceptable substitute. Assuming that baby leeks are perceptually distinguishable from *suan miao* in the finished product, a reasonable judge thoroughly familiar with the dish as it is prepared in Chengdu would likely find that a preparation with baby leeks is recognizable as twice-cooked pork, but that the leeks are not quite right. Baby leeks are contra-standard for the dish, but if one's aim is just to experience the approximate taste and texture of twice-cooked pork as it is prepared in Chengdu, they might be a close enough approximation that one would consider a version made with them a successful replication, even though a version using *suan miao* would be even more successful. If, on the other hand, one's

primary interest were in exploring the subtle differences in taste and texture between Chinese and Western members of the leek family, the substitution of baby leeks for *suan miao* would render the preparation a failed replication.

Replication pertains only to the perceptible qualities of a dish. For this reason, replication cannot be all there is to authenticity. A perfectly successful imitation would count as a successful replication but might nevertheless be considered inauthentic. In addition to perceptual replication, an account of authenticity must therefore also reference causal history. This enables the account to rule out imitations from being authentic and also give it additional flexibility to countenance the wide variety of ways that the concept of authenticity is deployed. In some contexts, for a food token to be considered authentic, it must include an ingredient produced in a certain region, even if an ingredient produced in a neighboring region would be perceptually indistinguishable for most eaters. Or, in other contexts, for a food token to be considered authentic it must be cooked using no electric tools or baked in a clay oven (again, even supposing that most eaters could not tell the difference in the finished product). Call causal antecedents that are explicitly or implicitly considered requirements for authenticity *provenance requirements*.

I am now in a position to state my account:

Basic Culinary Authenticity: Replication plus the relevant provenance requirements

That is, a food token is authentic in the basic sense if it would pass for the relevant category in the relevant context and has the relevant causal antecedents. When someone says that a restaurant serves authentic Sichuan-style twice-cooked pork, they mean that they serve a dish that would be considered twice-cooked pork in Sichuan province and that it is not made with imitation ingredients. Or, if someone says that a restaurant serves authentic Texas-style barbecue, they mean that it serves food that would be considered barbecue in Texas, is not made with imitation ingredients, and is cooked with wood smoke. Sous-vide brisket cooked with liquid smoke and finished with a blow torch would not be authentic Texas-style barbecue, however convincing it might be in its perceptible qualities. If sous-vide brisket were to become popular in Texas, it might

generate a new category with its own standards of authenticity, and this category might even come to be known by the name “Texas-style barbecue,” but this would be a second category with a distinct extension from the original category (which might come to be known as “original Texas-style barbecue”).

Basic culinary authenticity, as I have defined it, is value-neutral. Stating that a food token is authentic in the basic sense does not necessarily imply that the speaker considers it desirable in this respect. Returning to my earlier example of sitting down to Thanksgiving dinner at a friend’s house and being offered green bean casserole. I ask, “This is not authentic, is it?” because low-quality ingredients are standard features for the authentic version of the dish, thanks to historical facts about the context in which it was developed. Fresh ingredients, which I take to be more desirable in the present context, are contra-standard. In this example, I am interested primarily in having a healthy and tasty side dish, not in having an authentic Thanksgiving staple. Under different circumstances—say, if I moved abroad and became nostalgic for traditional American Thanksgiving—I might come to consider authenticity a desirable quality in green bean casserole, but this would be contingent on my particular interests. In Section III below, I consider in greater depth why authenticity and inauthenticity might be desirable or undesirable. First, I respond to Heldke and Thomsen’s objections to replicability theories of authenticity, which were introduced in Section I above. They object, first, that such theories incorrectly imply that there is some one way that a cuisine is and, second, that such theories encourage rigidity and oppose culinary evolution.

I claim, in contrast to Heldke, that replicability theories *are* capable of accommodating the dynamic, flexible nature of cuisine. The account of basic authenticity that I propose accommodates her concerns in two ways. The first is that basic authenticity is taken to be relative to a category and a context. When a cuisine evolves—perhaps because members of a cultural group migrate in large numbers to a different country—new categories and contexts are generated. A large number of Vietnamese individuals migrated to the Gulf Coast during the twentieth century, and there exists as a result a hybrid cuisine of Viet-Cajun food, centered in Houston, Texas. One might worry, along

Heldke and Thomsen’s lines, that a replicability theory would necessarily consider such food inauthentic, because it does not reflect traditional Vietnamese cooking. On my view, however, we should simply say that such food is authentic Viet-Cajun. A plate of Houston-style Viet-Cajun crawfish would be judged as authentic or inauthentic according to whether it would pass for such among people thoroughly acquainted with Viet-Cajun crawfish preparations in the context of Houston. The same plate of food would not be considered an authentic preparation relative to any context within Vietnam, because it would not pass for a familiar dish. Viet-Cajun food is not intended to be authentic relative to any context within Vietnam, however, and anyone who expects it to be is making a mistake.

The second way my account of basic authenticity addresses Heldke and Thomsen’s concerns is by employing Walton’s apparatus to account for the flexibility of cuisine. Any features of a dish that are in fact flexible should be considered variable properties, and whether or not a given property is variable can change over time. It was not always the case that Philly cheesesteaks were served with Cheez Whiz. The cheesesteak was invented in the 1930s, but Whiz was not added until the 1960s. It is important to recognize, though, that however flexible a dish may be, in order for it to be *a dish*, it must at any given time have at least some standard and contra-standard properties. Take, for instance, the garbage omelet. The garbage omelet consists of an omelet filled with any assortment of stray ingredients and leftovers one happens to have on hand. The garbage omelet is eminently flexible. But this is not to say that it has no standard properties at all. It must include eggs (or at least a convincing egg substitute) and these eggs must be cooked in the style of an omelet. A pile of mixed leftovers with no eggs is not a garbage omelet, nor is a pile of mixed leftovers with a single, dainty, sunny-side-up quail egg placed on top. Heldke and Thomsen’s claim that cuisine is by nature flexible is clearly correct, but it does not follow that there is no way of specifying necessary and sufficient conditions for falling within a certain category. Only the clumsiest, coarsest version of a replicability theory would maintain that there is some single, absolute, inflexible way that any given dish must be prepared and that anything else is inauthentic.

Heldke has an additional objection to replicability theories. She writes:

Briefly stated, the idea that I can “really” taste the flavors of the Other is a simplistic reduction of the nature of taste of what it means to experience a flavor. If, with Carolyn Korsmeyer, we understand taste as a cognitive activity involving memory, experience, emotion, etc. then we must necessarily be dissatisfied with any thin notion of authenticity that reduces it to a purely sensory *and replicable* quality of the food itself. These taste-related difficulties would arise for such a conception of authenticity even *if* we could somehow settle the matter of what constitutes authentic preparation. Even if we could agree, unambiguously, that a dish was *prepared* authentically, there is no guarantee whatsoever that the eater will be equipped to *experience* it as authentic (where authentic is taken to mean “the way it would taste for an insider to the cuisine”). (2005, 389)

She goes on to suggest that we should be concerned with authentic *transactions* between cultures as opposed to assigning authenticity to the food itself. She argues that it does not necessarily render a dish inauthentic for the chef to consider the cultural background of diners and make adjustments based on assumptions about ways their preferences are likely to differ from those of typical insiders of the relevant culture (2005, 392).⁸ I do not find this line of objection worrisome. To begin with, the fact that it is possible for taste experiences to diverge because of differences in cultural background does not entail that they necessarily *will* diverge, and even if they do in fact diverge, I do not see any reason to assume that they could not be brought into alignment. But even granting that individuals from different cultural backgrounds will taste a dish differently, I do not see this as a problem for my view. By a similar pattern of reasoning, it is not possible for me to experience Roman architecture the way the Romans did or to experience Beethoven’s works the way his contemporaries did. Clearly, I can still distinguish authentic Roman architecture from later imitations, and I can distinguish between authentic and inauthentic performances of Beethoven, and I might have good reasons to want to engage with the authentic versions. Culinary authenticity is a matter of correctly classifying objects, not a matter of having a specific subjective experience of such objects. Even if I cannot have the same kind of subjective taste experience of twice-cooked pork that a person from Chengdu could have, I might still have legitimate reasons to want to try it with the level of spiciness that is standard for the dish in Chengdu,

and I might therefore have legitimate reasons for not wanting the chef to tone the spiciness down to what he or she expects Euro-American palates can handle. I might want authentic sensory input, even if that input will be processed differently than it would be for a cultural insider.

III. REASONS FOR VALUING CULINARY AUTHENTICITY

I have argued the most basic notion of culinary authenticity is value-neutral. I acknowledge that some uses of the term ‘authenticity’ are value-laden, but I claim that these value-laden uses are composite: they combine basic authenticity with a reason for valuing it. In this section, I consider reasons that one might have for caring about basic authenticity. By ‘reasons,’ I do not mean to narrowly refer to reasons that are consciously adopted for caring about authenticity. I rather mean explanations of why people care about authenticity, which they may or may not be consciously aware of.

Heldke thinks that the usual reason that Euro-Americans care about authenticity is fetishism of the ethnic Other. Surely she is correct that obnoxious prattling about the authenticity of some under-the-radar Northern Thai place that is not even on Yelp often reflects fetishistic attitudes and an impulse to impress others with one’s cultural sophistication. In such cases the term ‘authenticity’ can be construed as combining basic authenticity with Otherness fetishism as the reason for valuing it. What I disagree with Heldke about is the suggestion that we can know without empirical investigation that Otherness fetishism is the *primary* or *predominant* reason that people care about authenticity. There are lots of reasons that people might care about authenticity, and the question of the relative prominence of such reasons in explaining attitudes toward authenticity is the jurisdiction of the social sciences. All I attempt here is an incomplete taxonomy of such reasons.

There are at least five categories of reasons that people have for valuing culinary authenticity. Here is a list, with potentially objectionable reasons italicized:

- **Aesthetic reasons:** cultural taste preferences, alignment with cultural taste preferences, setting a baseline for comparison, using as a basis for creative deviation, category-dependent aesthetic features, *excessive rigidity*

- **Personal reasons:** nostalgia, personal attachment
- **Educational reasons:** curiosity, independent interest in the culture or context
- **Cultural reasons:** pride in distinctness, community bonding, tradition, *nativism*, *nationalism*
- **Social reasons:** social signaling, friendship, *Otherness fetishism*

I am most interested in discussing aesthetic reasons for valuing authenticity, but, first, I will briefly characterize the other categories. One sort of reason that one might take an interest in authenticity is a personal connection to a cuisine or culture. As a native of New York State, I have a nostalgic yearning for black and white cookies. I now live in another part of the country, and if a shop opened selling New York-style black and white cookies, I would be extremely disappointed if they made them extra fancy at the expense of authenticity. I want black and white cookies to be just the way I remember them from my childhood. Another sort of reason that one might take an interest in culinary authenticity is for its educational value. Suppose, for instance, that a student of the Renaissance comes across a recipe in a text they are studying. They might take an interest in trying to authentically reproduce the recipe for a number of reasons. It might give them a better sense of the daily lives of the people in the milieu they are studying or help them better understand a rapturous literary ode to the merits of the dish. Considering the case of culinary tourism, it seems clearly understandable that people who are interested in food would want to try authentic versions of dishes that are unfamiliar but well loved in their local setting as part of the broader project of learning about and experiencing a wide range of foods. If I am visiting Chengdu in part for the purpose of learning about Sichuan cuisine, I may want to try a representative version of twice-cooked pork as it is enjoyed locally, not a version that has been tailored to preconceptions about Western palates. Another sort of reason is cultural. Many food preparations have cultural significance, and we often value the authenticity of these preparations because we value their cultural importance. Traditional holiday foods are clear examples, including Christmas breads such as *rosca de reyes* and *panettone*, which are baked by many families in strict accordance with traditional recipes. Ghasan Hage describes the ways in which immigrant

populations prepare traditional recipes as a part of the larger project of home building (1997). Rebecca Sims suggests that pursuit of culinary authenticity is often motivated by dissatisfaction with the alienated character of modern life and a desire to connect with something meaningful (2009, 324–326). The dark flipside of the cultural importance of authenticity is the way it can be prized by nativists who wish to avert the influence of immigrant communities and nationalists who think of their national culture as superior to others.⁹ Lastly, there are social reasons for valuing authenticity. I enjoy introducing friends to authentic foods from my part of the world, and I enjoy trying foods that my friends grew up eating in other parts of the world. I care about authenticity in these cases in part because I am interested in trying the closest possible approximation of the food my friend has fond memories of. As Heldke argues, interest in culinary authenticity can also be a means of social signaling. Displaying the ability to discern culinary authenticity is a way of signaling worldliness and cultural sophistication. One might get social mileage out of knowledge of authentic foods in much the same way that one does out of tales of adventurous travel. When the foods in question are perceived as ethnic, Heldke's worries about Otherness fetishism become particularly relevant.

I turn now to aesthetic reasons for valuing culinary authenticity. I discussed cultural taste preferences in Section I above. Another aesthetic reason for valuing culinary authenticity is the role that category membership plays in grounding aesthetic properties. Returning to Walton's theory of the categories of art, he argues that perceiving a work as being in a certain category is part of what determines the work's aesthetic properties. A musical work perceived as being in sonata form, for instance, may have the aesthetic property of being suspenseful because its primary theme is particularly thunderous, and so a feeling of suspense is created as the development section approaches its conclusion and the listener expects the theme to be recapitulated. The same work might lack the property of being suspenseful if it were not perceived as being in sonata form (Walton 1970, 351–352). Similarly, a custard without a crisp top layer that is perceived as a *crème brûlée* might have the negative aesthetic property of lacking texture, whereas if the same dish is perceived as a flan, it might have the positive aesthetic property

of being silky. In some cases, prior familiarity with a category may be necessary to appreciate the aesthetic qualities of a particular instance of the category. Purple pu erh tea is considerably more bitter than most other types of pu erh. The first purple pu erh I ever tried was a particularly high quality version. For me at the time, its most striking quality was its bitterness. But aggressive bitterness is a standard feature for purple pu erh, and if I had prior familiarity with the category, I would have taken the bitterness for granted and instead focused on the tea's thick texture and subtle refinement, which are the primary respects in which it stands apart from lower quality versions of purple pu erh. Because I was not able to situate the tea in relation to its proper category, I was unable to appreciate its special aesthetic properties.¹⁰

This consideration also points to a way in which inauthenticity as such might be desirable in some contexts. In the progressive contemporary style of cooking known as "molecular gastronomy," familiar dishes are often presented in surprising ways. Consider, for example, the version of Eggs Benedict formerly served at NYC restaurant wd~50, where Hollandaise sauce was crusted with English muffin crumbs, fried, and served alongside cylinders of egg yolk and thin slices of crispy ham. The ingredients and flavors of the wd~50 version are standard for the category of Eggs Benedict, but the presentation, texture, and proportions are contra-standard. The aesthetic impact of such a dish depends on background familiarity with the category of Eggs Benedict and with authentic versions of the dish. The combination of a familiar flavor profile with surprising presentation, texture, and proportionality grounds the dish's special aesthetic qualities. The dish's distinctive aesthetic value depends on its inauthenticity as such; it is interesting precisely because of the ways in which it breaks with tradition.

There can even be aesthetic reasons to take an interest in provenance conditions that are not directly perceptible. Consider, for instance, a dish made from cultivated mushrooms as opposed to one made from foraged wild mushrooms. Even supposing that the two versions are perceptually indistinguishable, the thought of the different sources of the mushrooms might lead one to experience the two dishes differently. Awareness of the rarity of the wild mushrooms and the effort involved in gathering them might lead one to think of the dish as more of a delicacy, and thus to focus

more intently on the flavors so that one tastes the mushrooms as being more complex. Or, thoughts of the idyllic setting in which the wild mushrooms were harvested might lead one to experience the dish as more rustic and to attend more closely to its woody flavors. Many other sorts of provenance conditions can also function aesthetically. Matteo Ravasio gives an extensive account of ways that factors such as cultural heritage and ethical status bear upon aesthetic appreciation of food in his 2018 paper, "Food Landscapes: An Object-Centered Model of Food Appreciation."

In conclusion, I have presented in this article a replicability theory of culinary authenticity that can withstand Lisa Heldke's objections. On the picture I have suggested, culinary authenticity is taken to consist in a combination of perceptual replication and the relevant provenance requirements. I have shown that such a theory can accommodate the flexibility of cuisine and can account for a wide range of commonplace reasons for valuing authenticity. I do not deny the potency of social-justice-oriented critiques of *some* ways in which culinary authenticity is valued, but I hope I have shown that these worries should not lead us to abandon concern for the concept altogether.¹¹

MATTHEW STROHL

Department of Philosophy, University of Montana,
Missoula, Montana 59812

INTERNET: matthew.strohl@mso.umt.edu

REFERENCES

- Ayora-Diaz, Steffan Igor. 2005. "The Taste of Yucatecan Food: Negotiating Authenticity." *The Taste Culture Reader: Experiencing Food and Drink*, edited by Carolyn Korsmeyer, 346–353. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Davies, Stephen. 2001. *Musical Works and Performances: A Philosophical Exploration*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Dodd, Julian. 2015. "Performing Works of Music Authentically." *European Journal of Philosophy* 23: 485–508.
- Dunlop, Fuchsia. 2003. *Land of Plenty: A Treasure of Authentic Sichuan Cooking*. New York: Norton.
- Godoy, Maria. 2016. "Why Hunting Down 'Authentic Ethnic Food' Is a Loaded Proposition." NPR.org, April 9. <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2016/04/09/472568085/why-hunting-down-authentic-ethnic-food-is-a-loaded-proposition>.
- Goodman, Nelson. 1976. *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Hage, Ghassan. 1997. "At Home in the Entrails of the West: Multiculturalism, Ethnic Food and Migrant Home-Building." In *Home/World: Space, Community and Marginality in Sydney's West*, by Helen Grace, Ghassan Hage, Lesley Johnson, Julie Langsworth, and Michael Symonds, 99–153. Sydney: Pluto Press.

Heldke, Lisa. 2003. *Exotic Appetites: Ruminations of a Food Adventurer*. London: Routledge.

———. 2005. "But Is It Authentic? Culinary Travel and the Search for the 'Genuine Article.'" In *The Taste Culture Reader: Experiencing Food and Drink*, edited by Carolyn Korsmeyer, 384–394. New York: Bloomsbury.

———. 2008. "Let's Cook *Thai*: Recipes for Colonialism." In *Food and Culture: A Reader*, edited by Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, 2nd ed., 327–341. New York: Routledge.

Heldke, Lisa, and Jens Thomsen. 2014. "Two Concepts of Authenticity." *Social Philosophy Today* 30: 79–94.

Kivy, Peter. 1995. *Authenticities: Philosophical Reflections on Musical Performance*. Cornell University Press.

Korsmeyer, Carolyn. 1999. *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy*. Cornell University Press.

Long, Lucy. 2007. "Green Bean Casserole and Midwestern Identity: A Regional Foodways Aesthetic and Ethos." *Midwestern Folklore* 33: 29–44.

Molz, Jennie Germann. 2004. "Tasting an Imagined Thailand: Authenticity and Culinary Tourism in Thai Restaurants." In *Culinary Tourism*, edited by Lucy M. Long, 53–75. University Press of Kentucky.

Ravasio, Matteo. 2018. "Food Landscapes: An Object-Centered Model of Food Appreciation." *The Monist* 101(3): 1–15.

Ray, Krishnendu. 2016. *The Ethnic Restaurateur*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Simpson, Thomas W. 2012. "What Is Trust?" *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 93: 550–569.

Sims, Rebecca. 2009. "Food, Place and Authenticity: Local Food and the Sustainable Tourism Experience." *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 17: 321–336.

Todd, Cain. 2011. *The Philosophy of Wine: A Case of Truth, Beauty, and Intoxication*. McGill-Queen's University Press.

Walton, Kendall L. 1970. "Categories of Art." *Philosophical Review* 79: 334–367.

1. We sometimes also talk of the authenticity of restaurants. I take this sort of authenticity to be derivative: authentic restaurants are ones that serve authentic dishes. When nonculinary factors (such as décor) are considered markers of culinary authenticity, it is because these factors are thought to be predictors of authentic food. It is probably true that people sometimes value the authenticity of these factors in ways that do not relate to food, but then we are no longer talking about culinary authenticity. Compare Heldke and Thomsen (2014).

2. Compare Simpson (2012) on trust.

3. Jennie Germann Molz even claims that the concept of culinary authenticity is an invention of Western modernity (2004, 72). It might be true that a certain way of valuing authenticity is an invention of Western modernity, but it is surely false that the *concept* is such a recent invention. Chinese imperial cuisine, dating back to the Zhou dynasty, emerged when emperors started inviting to court chefs representing various regional cuisines to prepare dishes featuring the rarest and most expensive ingredients from their respective regions. This practice clearly involved prizing the authenticity of such dishes and ingredients: the emperor would not have been satisfied with an imitation bear paw.

4. A non-American example would be Korean Army-base soup, which is made with processed cheese and meat products.

5. See Molz (2004, 64).

6. I admit that I am a Reuben purist and that some philosophers, such as Aaron Meskin (personal communication), think that a Reuben can have mustard. But they are wrong.

7. Ravasio (2018) gives an account of food appreciation based on Allen Carlson's object-centered model for the appreciation of nature, which in turn employs Walton's apparatus. For an application of Walton's theory to wine, see Todd (2011, 101–133).

8. Compare Peter Kivy's (1995) distinction between sonic and sensible authenticity, discussed in chapters 3 and 7 of *Authenticities: Philosophical Reflections on Musical Performance*. For Davies's response, see Davies (2001, 233–234).

9. Thanks to Matteo Ravasio for this point.

10. See Todd (2011, 101–133) for a nuanced discussion of how to situate a wine with respect to its proper category. Many elements of Todd's discussion can be applied to the case of food.

11. I would like to thank Thi Nguyen, Aaron Meskin, Carolyn Korsmeyer, Matteo Ravasio, Juhani Yli-Vakkuri, Erich Hatala Matthes, Anthony Cross, Nick Riggle, Julian Dodd, Aleksey Balotskiy, Michael L. Thomas, Robert Stecker, Ted Gracyk, Gabriel Love, two anonymous referees, and audiences at Utah Valley University and the 2017 Annual Meeting of the American Society for Aesthetics in New Orleans for helpful commentary and discussion.