

Wine & Philosophy



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Wine & Philosophy



A Symposium on Thinking and Drinking

Edited by Fritz Allhoff

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Foreword

Paul Draper

In considering the thought-provoking essays that comprise this volume, I discern an important theme: they concern the “real” (or *terroir*) wines that many of us, as winemakers, strive to produce.¹ Though all of us may drink “beverage” wine on a weekly or daily basis, something else is being addressed here. As Fritz Allhoff states in his introduction: “there is an important difference between wine as a social lubricant and wine *itself* as an object worthy of philosophical study.”² To me, this is the idea of wine as the result of a natural rather than industrial process – a transformation of fresh grapes into something quite extraordinary, whose distinctive character and quality come directly from a place, from the specific *terroir* in which it is grown.

In our nomadic past, the culture of wine was a civilizing force. We settled to tend the vines. Unlike grain, which could be sowed in a new place each year and harvested at season’s end, the vines held us to one place. We had to wait four or five years before they produced even a small crop. Unlike grain, they required attention throughout the year – pruning in winter; shaping, or training to a tree or stake in spring; tasting for ripeness and harvesting in autumn. Once crushed, the berries met their “death,” were transformed by fermentation, and reborn as wine. Unseen yeasts worked their magic;

¹ Matt Kramer addresses the notion of *terroir* in more detail; see his “The Notion of *Terroir*,” Chapter 15, this volume. See also Randall Graham’s essay, “The Soul of Wine: Digging for Meaning,” Chapter 14, this volume.

² See Fritz Allhoff, “Planting the Vines: An Introduction to *Wine & Philosophy*,” p. 2.

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man added nothing, did nothing beyond crushing the fruit. His role was to watch and to tend, as a parent might a child. He was not the “maker,” as our modern term might imply. The process inspired awe and wonder, leading the ancients to consider wine sacred. As symbol and metaphor, it became part of Christian and Jewish ritual. The culture of wine spread, and so did its role as a catalyst for community, for bringing together family and friends.

In searching for today’s real wines, it is easy to assume that technological advances following World War II were responsible for separation into the categories of real and beverage wine. More likely, they have existed from the beginning. Grapes come from the earth, and depend on nature for their quality and consistency. Climate and soil determine where vines can successfully be cultivated, but each year’s weather determines if the wine will be good, or else if it will need intervention. The Romans added honey and spices to improve taste as freshness faded. The Greeks added pine resin to retard spoilage – we still taste that bit of history in their retsina.

With greater knowledge and understanding came better, more consistent, longer-lived wines. But vineyard sites that consistently produce distinctive character and high quality remain a very small part of the land planted to vines. In the Old World as in the New, the producer must hold yields to moderate levels for a number of years to determine whether his might be such a site. Such an investigation demands a clear vision of what wine, in its essence, is about. This essence is, I think, celebrated in this volume and in the essays that it contains.

Ridge Vineyards
Santa Cruz Mountains
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