

Donald Phillip Verene

# **The Science of Cookery and the Art of Eating Well**

Philosophical and Historical Reflections on  
Food and Dining in Culture

# STUDIES IN MEDICAL PHILOSOPHY

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In memory of  
Eleanor Grant Verene  
whose recipes first formed my culinary world



*A tavola non s'invecchia.*

At table one does not grow old.



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# Preface

In the second chapter of Ecclesiastes, the wisdom of Solomon is: “There is nothing better for mortals than to eat and drink, and find enjoyment in their toil.” Two things distinctive to human culture are the development of language and the cooking of food. These two abilities come together in the art of dining. The meal unites food and conversation. The pleasures of the table and of table-talk go back as far as the poems of Homer.

The science of cookery and the art of eating well are not medicine, but they are allied with medicine from its earliest conception. Galen, in discussing the importance of nutrition in the *Method of Medicine*, says: “In short, the chief point of nourishment is to let it be easily digested and nutritious” (7.6). Medicine is directly concerned with the prevention and healing of disease. In its broader sense, it is concerned with the well-being of human beings. In this concern, cooking and eating well play a role. Proper nutrition is essential to the health of the body and the conviviality of the meal and the institution of dining is of great value for promoting the tranquility of the psyche.

The theme of this book is the importance of home cooking and how it depends upon and maintains tradition. The art of eating well is enhanced by a knowledge of ingredients and an awareness of the history of dining. Such knowledge gives context to the daily event of the meal, an event that is present in every culture and as old as culture itself. The art of dining, like the art of living of which it is a part, is a way to order the self and its place in the world.

Chapter 1 is a general view of cooking and dining, as begun by the ancient Greeks and Romans, and progressing to the famous text of Brillat-Savarin, *The Physiology of Taste*. Chapter 2 is an interpretation of Plutarch’s *Dinner of the Seven Wise Men*, his imaginative account of the gathering at