

Brillat-Savarin's *Physiology of Taste* and the Intellectual Revolution of the Ideologues

~ Gastronomy as the New Anthropology ~

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This thesis focuses on Brillat-Savarin's *Physiology of Taste* (1755-1826), which has been predominantly interpreted within the context of French gastronomic culture since it was published in 1825 and aims at analyzing it from a more global perspective by examining the social and philosophical currents of thought of the time. This research will demonstrate that this book is not simply a treatise on food culture but represents an innovative and theoretical extension of the ideas expressed by the *Ideologues*, who inherited the ideals of the Enlightenment and played an active political role in the reconstruction of society during the French Revolution. *Physiology of Taste* offers a unique and remarkably harmonious synthesis of extensive knowledge of mankind, which has hitherto been studied in a fragmented manner, including the most advanced knowledge of the *sciences of man* of the Ideologues. As such, it is fair to consider that Brillat-Savarin's intellectual pursuit aimed at nothing less than the establishment of a new anthropological science.

In the middle of the 18th century, in France, the dual influence of Locke's empiricism and Newton's experimental science gave rise to resounding studies such as Buffon's *Natural History* and Condillac's sensualism and analytical methodology. Inheriting their ideas and methods, Brillat-Savarin also set out to examine man from a scientific point of view, incorporating into his analysis various elements of the *sciences of man* brought to light by the Ideologues, developing a brand-new anthropology which he called *gastronomy*. Like the other Ideologues, for Brillat-Savarin, there are no innate ideas, and the senses are therefore the only source of knowledge. The particularity of this science is that it is based on the *pleasures of taste* and *physical desire* ([*génésiq*ue], more commonly known as sexual sensations), i.e., on the senses, which were hitherto despised both by religion and by the philosophical tradition. In human being, these two most fundamental senses have common *power* [*puissance*] for generating creativity and civilizing progress, with the decisive difference that the physical desire is more *tyrannical* while taste has a *more moderate* effect. For this precise reason, the sense of taste can guide humanity towards sustainable perfection. While in the Christian tradition, *gluttony* is considered a *sin* because it desires beyond the essential, Brillat-Savarin proposes to distinguish between *gluttony* and *gourmandise*, and values the latter as a *virtue* for this very reason. In the *pleasure of the table*, which does not depend solely on appetite, our reflections, conversations, and civilizations naturally arise, and these gradually develop various sciences that lead humanity towards greater perfection while ensuring generational continuity through its reproductive dimensions. *Gourmandise* is the manifestation of this natural desire.

In the *Natural History of Man*, Buffon fundamentally reversed theological anthropology. Turgot, for his part, had replaced the theological view of history with the philosophical history of man and was the first to state that the human mind was inevitably heading towards perfection. Subsequently, Condorcet argued for the infinite perfection of the human mind and the Ideologues passionately defended it. Brillat-Savarin's progressive thinking is an extension of this lineage, but with the particular vision that articulates the reciprocal stimulation of *taste* and the *instinct of perfection*, in contrast to the Enlightenment thinkers who made it a matter of *reason*. Cooking which calls for this interaction of body and mind is therefore the science that has contributed most to human civilization. Questions of political economy, discussed by the Ideologues, are also considered an essential element of the science of man by Brillat-Savarin: the distribution of wealth, the theory of value, trade and industry, money and taxation, are examined with a particular focus on their relation to our daily needs [*besoins*], especially to *the pleasure of the table* [*gourmandise*]. The relationship between natural *desire* and *order*, which could be summarized by the expression *leave it to the taste* [*laisser-faire le goût*], an original reinterpretation of the physiocratic view, not only dominates the economic system but also shapes the entire architecture of the *Physiology of Taste*.

Brillat-Savarin develops an innovative theory of evolution according to an original vision of the interaction of the physical and the intellectual which reinterprets the fundamental role of *language* [*langue*] in human progress by playing on the double meaning of the word in French (organ of taste and language). *Gourmandise*, an *acquired quality* that belongs exclusively to humans, represents this vision of progress. To understand this close relationship between physical materiality and the mind, it is necessary to understand Cabanis' physiological ideology, particularly his theory of *internal impressions*. According to this theory, the stomach has a significant influence on the mind because of its effect on the entire nervous system and brain. Under the direct influence of Cabanis, Brillat-Savarin shows that digestion affects not only mood but also intellectual faculties. But the subsequent development about dreams and sleep owes much more to Maine de Biran, who was more interested in the gap between consciousness and non-consciousness and the junction of physiology and psychology. Brillat-Savarin teaches the art of transforming dreams into creative human pleasures by exercising our own intellectual capacities, notably through the way we eat.

To establish this unique anthropology, Brillat-Savarin applied Condillac's analytical method to Buffon's *Natural History of Man*. He observes the various necessities of life (birth, action, eating, sleep, reproduction, and death) in relation to the specifically human perspective of the *pleasures of the table*. By introducing, in imitation of Condillac, this Newtonian scientific process of unifying diverse phenomena under a single fundamental principle, he successfully managed to show the complex duality of mankind, comprising both animality and constant humanity, while presenting a comprehensive, all-encompassing science of the human being.

These are the characteristics of Brillat-Savarin's gastronomy, defined as *the rational knowledge of all that relates to man as he eats* (*la connaissance raisonnée de tout ce qui a rapport à l'homme, en tant qu'il*

se nourrit.). He understood that to improve our understanding of man, it was necessary to adopt an approach that differed from the purely physiological "anthropology" of Cabanis and took into consideration the more psychological aspect of human habits and customs, which would become a future counterpart to Buffon's *Natural History of Man*. That is *anthroponomy*, a term created by Brillat-Savarin and which prefigures what later generations would call *cultural anthropology*. Based on man's most everyday habits, this anthroponomy necessarily had gastronomy at its core.

Brillat-Savarin's gastronomy is constituted as a science in close relation with all human sciences. Here we find the concept common to ideologues of *unity of knowledge*. The science of man, which until then had only been studied in a fragmentary way, was unified for the first time in 1825, in Brillat-Savarin's *Physiology of Taste*. The *Meditation on Transcendental Gastronomy* which encompasses all human knowledge based on universal human needs and pleasures, aims to heal and make the individual, and by extension society and humanity, happy. Brillat-Savarin was a gourmet [*gourmand*] precisely because he aimed to understand nature and the human beings that are part of it.