

Food Is Money: The Origin of Money in the Sacrificial Meal and the Egalitarian Ideal

Will Kiblinger

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies

Winthrop University

The paper identifies the origin of money in the sacred rites of ancient cultures, specifically the sacrificial meal and the communal rituals appertaining to the distribution of its sacred power. After surveying the development of money as a form of food in various cultures, the paper then asks whether and how the sacred value of food might inform current discourse about the value of food and related moral questions about its distribution. In particular, the paper addresses a contemporary question in philosophy regarding distributive justice: what principle should we follow in distributing food—an egalitarian principle (i.e., the goal of eliminating inequality) or a sufficiency principle (i.e., the goal of eliminating insufficiency)? The paper argues that there are good reasons to support the egalitarian principle, but it will be shown that the demands of the sufficiency principle can be met in doing so. Furthermore, it will be shown that the ancient practice of treating food as a bearer of sacred value grounded the egalitarian principle in their societies and may serve as a model for contemporary egalitarianism.

This paper could fit together with other papers in the following range of topics: the social justice implications of food production and consumption; food in religion and religious practices; the ethical and philosophical aspects of food distribution.