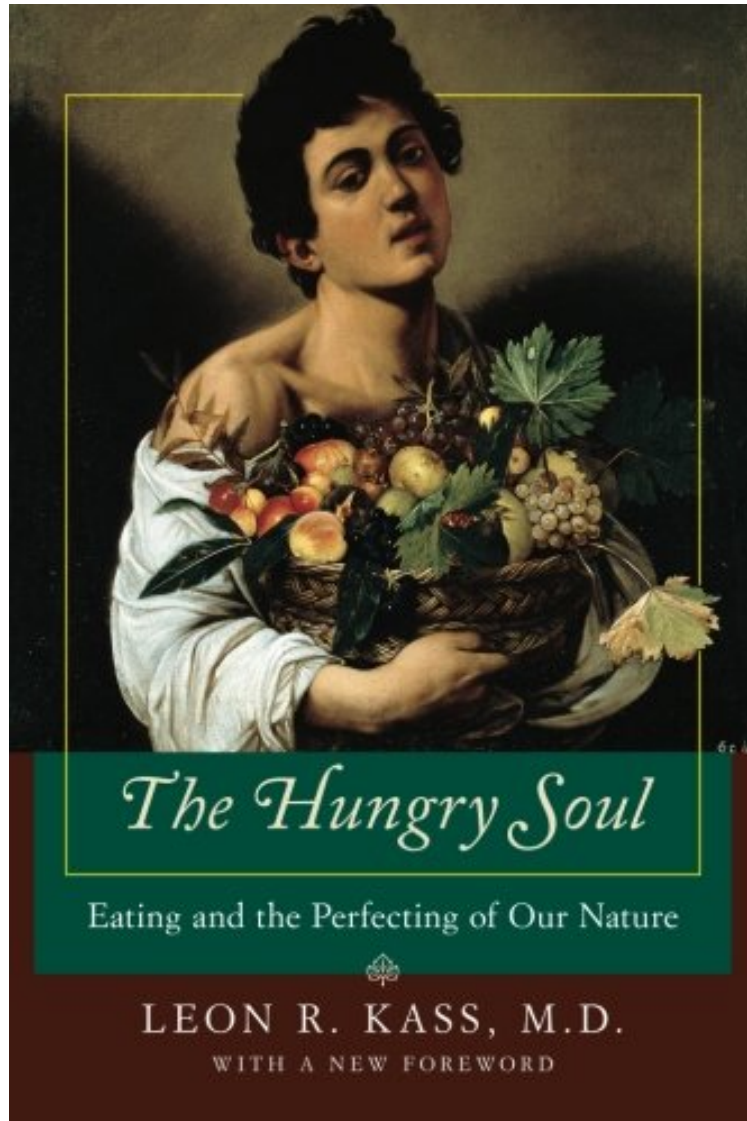


[Read now] The Hungry Soul: Eating and the Perfecting of Our Nature

The Hungry Soul: Eating and the Perfecting of Our Nature

Leon R. Kass

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Leon R. Kass : The Hungry Soul: Eating and the Perfecting of Our Nature before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Hungry Soul: Eating and the Perfecting of Our Nature:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A look at "the good life."By Ben DouglasKass presents a profound, thought-provoking look at the human condition, where we are and where we may be going. I found the reading somewhat tedious and the use of the many parentheses distracting. That said, it is a scholarly work.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Maura Kellyvery interesting and informative book0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Jacqueline SteinGreat book. Just as advertised. Thanks!

The Hungry Soul is a fascinating exploration of the natural and cultural act of eating. Kass brilliantly reveals how the various aspects of this phenomenon, and the customs, rituals, and taboos surrounding it, relate to universal and profound truths about the human animal and its deepest yearnings. "Kass is a distinguished and graceful writer. . . . It is astonishing to discover how different is our world from that of the animals, even in that which most evidently betrays that we too are animalsour need and desire for food." Roger Scruton, Times Literary Supplement "Yum." Miss Manners

From Publishers Weekly Eating, observes Kass, a physician and biochemist who teaches literature and philosophy at the University of Chicago, is a "great paradox." To preserve life, individuals necessarily destroy life. Yet, he argues, if this urgent, most basic animal necessity is humanized through table manners, hospitality, sharing, good conversation and ritual, eating becomes a means to celebrate and broaden human community, friendship and values. This stimulating, original philosophical inquiry views eating among humans as a key to our place in the natural order and as a manifestation of the "hungry soul" that seeks satisfaction in activities motivated by ambition, curiosity, affection and awe. Kass concludes by arguing that Jewish dietary laws are one example of a code that embodies an understanding of the ethics of eating and a reverence for life. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist Eating can be a serious business, and in his wide-ranging explorations of it, Kass moves from metabolism to mortality and from digestion to divinity. The variety of dining forms, he discloses, includes feeding the stranger at our hearth, the well-mannered family supper, the convivial and witty dinner party, the inspiring fictional feast of Dinesen's *Babette*, the wisdom-seeking symposium of Plato, and the reverent ritual meal. To Kass, the preparation for, the arrangement of, and the intellectual and social atmosphere surrounding a dinner should make it not only a satisfying affair for both giver and receiver but an epitome of the best in social intercourse. Modern eating, with its concomitant incivility, insensitivity, and ingratitude, has already infected other activities of life, he says. At first, much in this fairly heavy book appears to be about things other than eating, but the perceptive reader discovers that Kass hasn't missed his subject but woven an intricate, thought-provoking tapestry around it. William Beatty From Kirkus s Doctor-turned-teacher Kass (Committee on Social Thought/Univ. of Chicago) serves up a stimulating treatise on the anthropology and ethics of eating. In the tradition of ancient philosophers of the good life, Kass suggests how rituals of eating bring the wisdom, friendship, and transcendence that our hungry souls desire. He spices his book with episodes and advice from the Greek and Hebrew classics, topped off with a recounting of Isak Dinesen's *Babette's Feast*. Gourmands will enjoy browsing for gustatory lore, but Kass has a specific argument to make. With a charmingly eccentric scholasticism, he proposes a model of the human being as the animal that eats, rather than simply feeds. Philosophical meditations on the nature of form, although they take a while to develop fully, lead to a consideration of human omnivorousness and the ethical controls that it requires. Thus, Kass surveys conventions of eating, from taboos against cannibalism to dinner-party rituals. Championing civilized eating, he sees dietary laws, as exemplified by the Book of Leviticus, as reflections of our place in the universe and in relation to nature. Alongside such grand ideas come cantankerous complaints about young people today not covering their mouths when they yawn and about eating on the street--the public licking of ice cream comes in for criticism. Such discriminations of value, however, lie at the heart of Kass's enterprise; even when they appear silly, they enrich his book. One warms to him as one would to an odd, but ultimately good-hearted dinner companion. By the end of the book, one can enjoy the pithy truths even in apparently bland remarks like "life, as has been observed, is not just a bowl of cherries." An agreeable repast, one that will ethically inform even those ill-mannered readers who prefer to help themselves buffet-style rather than wait for the various courses of the argument to be served. -- Copyright 1994, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.