

**Daniel J. Philippon**

**Ideal Meals: Ecology, Morality, and Pleasure in the Sustainable Food Movement**

My current book project, “Ideal Meals: Ecology, Morality, and Pleasure in the Sustainable Food Movement,” examines how the discourses of ecological science, human and animal welfare, and gastronomic pleasure are manifested in the sustainable food movement, how those discourses overlap and compete with one another, and how their US variants affect and have been affected by similar concerns in other countries. It explores how these discourses take shape in a variety of cultural forms—including books, films, speeches, blogs, images, and television programs—but its central focus remains on the tradition of popular writing practiced by Rachel Carson: personal writing that engages scientific and ethical issues with the intent to move an audience. The book also investigates whether and how these discourses have had social and material effects: not merely in terms of cultural politics but also in terms of changes in individual behavior, social structures, and public policy.

As a rhetorical ecocritic, I am primarily concerned with the work that words do in the world. My approach has therefore been informed not only by ecocriticism and food studies but also by a wide range of scholarship in environmental rhetoric and communication that examines the relationship of environmental discourse to politics. For this reason, my focus in “Ideal Meals” is on the literary and cultural foundations of the sustainable food movement, particularly works that have had a visible influence on public discourse about food production, distribution, and consumption in the United States. In practice, this means identifying the major discursive themes present in the movement, tracing their origins in longstanding literary and cultural tropes (such as the pastoral, georgic, and apocalyptic), examining the rhetorical strategies through which these discourses are deployed (such as appeals to emotion, scientific authority, and environmental values), and historicizing their appearance in particular texts, public debates, and individual, community, and institutional priorities.

Chapters will likely explore the tension between the “spiritual ecology” of sustainable agriculture and its more scientific aspect, which seeks to maximize the health of agroecological systems; the relationship of the problem of global hunger to contemporary theories of posthumanism; and the popularization of gastronomic pleasure that began in the 1960s and has since been redeployed in the service of the varied “locavore” movements that arose in the early twenty-first century. While at the Carson Center, I plan to spend most of my time on the subject of animals, biotechnology, and posthumanism, but I also hope to make progress on other aspects of the book as well.

Overall, I hope that “Ideal Meals” will play a constructive role in ongoing debates about how to achieve a more socially, ecologically, and economically sustainable food system: both by looking critically at the rhetoric, history, and ethics of the sustainable food movement and by helping to identify a “usable past” for the movement that takes seriously the contemporary desire to achieve food justice and food security for individuals and communities around the world.