

Eating Right: The Ethics of Food Choices and Food Policy
Philosophy 252
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Instructor

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Overview

Our choices about what to eat are, more or less universally, expressive of some sort of value. Some are expressive of our aesthetic values: of our judgments about which foods are or are not tasty, appealing, delicious, revolting, etc. Some are expressive of our moral values: of our judgments about which foods we are permitted, obligated, or forbidden to eat. Some are expressive of cultural or religious values: of our judgments about which foods are culturally or religiously permitted or forbidden, high- or low-status, the sorts of things that *we* eat or the sorts of things that *they* eat, etc. All of these sorts of values are tremendously important to the ways we live our lives, and it's worth having a careful look at the sorts of values that inform our food choices.

This will involve us in a number of important moral issues. We'll investigate such questions as: Which sorts of entities are deserving of moral consideration? What sorts of harms is it permissible to cause, to which sorts of entities, and for what sorts of reasons? What sorts of moral obligations, if any, do we have toward non-human animals? What are the environmental and social consequences of various sorts of eating habits? To what extent does the presence of those sorts of consequences generate moral obligations to adopt (or to abandon) the relevant eating habits? What's the moral (and policy) significance of the cultural importance of particular culinary traditions, and the importance of cultural group membership to individual well-being?

We'll look at questions both about individual food choices and about food policy – at questions both about what we should, as individuals, decide to eat, and at what actions we, as a society,

ought to take in order to influence how our food is grown, processed, marketed, sold, and consumed.

Course Goals and Structure

One aim of this class is to give you the opportunity to think carefully about the arguments for and against a variety of different views about what kinds of food choices to make. One part of this is acquiring some familiarity with the arguments for and against positions such as vegetarianism or veganism, or restricting one's diet to locally or organically produced foods. Another part of this is subjecting these arguments to careful critical scrutiny, and seeing how they stand up.

More generally, we'll be looking at how to go about reasoning about difficult moral issues. You'll learn about some of the different theoretical frameworks in which moral questions standardly get addressed in philosophy, and apply them to particular questions about food choices and food policy.

Still more generally, we'll be practicing some philosophical critical thinking skills: getting clear on what argument someone's making, how it works and what its moving parts are, where the potential weak spots are, and whether it's likely to succeed in establishing its conclusion. These are the sorts of skills that are useful for reasoning carefully about any sort of difficult issue, moral or otherwise.

Core Learning Goals for this course:

21st Century Challenges:

- (a) Human Difference
- (d) Social Justice

Areas of Inquiry – Arts and Humanities:

- (o) Student is able to: Examine critically philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production.

Writing and Communication:

- (s-1) Student is able to: Communicate complex ideas effectively, in standard written English, to a general audience.
- (t) Student is able to: Communicate effectively in modes appropriate to a discipline or area of inquiry.
- (u) Student is able to: Evaluate and critically assess sources and use the conventions of attribution and citation correctly.
- (v) Student is able to: Analyze and synthesize information and ideas from multiple sources to generate new insights.

Grading:

I consider grades to be an unfortunate necessity – it's easy for striving for grades to crowd out actual thinking and learning, which is a Very Bad Thing. So I aim to take grades off of the table as much as possible, by giving you a lot of opportunities to control what grade you get in the course. This is done by offering lots of opportunities to do extra work for extra credit (about which more as we go on), and by structuring the grading so that the things you do best in count the most in the determination of your final grade.

There will also be a number of opportunities for extra credit, and optional assignments, which will allow you to improve your grade. More detail on these later on.

Summary of major grades for the term:

1. Recitation section participation: 10%

Here is the grading scale for clicker points:

- A: 75% of available points
- B: 65% of available points
- C: 50% of available points
- D: 35% of available points

2. In-class micro-quizzes with iclickers: 10%

After the first week, there will be clicker questions every day during lecture. 10% of your grade will be based on them.

3. Short assignments: 25%

These will vary from week to week. Each will be the equivalent of about 1-2 pages of writing.

4. Research Poster: Between 10% and 35%

A poster and presentation on some empirical aspect of food production. Poster presentations will happen in sections.

5. Argumentative Paper: Between 10% and 35%

A 6-7 page argumentative paper.

6. Optional final exam: Between 10% and 35%

How much assignments 4 – 6 count toward your grade will vary, with the weights being assigned in order to give the most weight to the assignments you do best on.

If you don't take the final exam, whichever of the research paper and the poster you do better on will count 35%, the other will count 20%.

If you do take the final, the best of the three grades (final, paper, poster) will count 25%, the second best 20%, and the lowest grade will count for 10% of your final grade.

Attendance

Students are expected to attend all classes; if you expect to miss one or two classes, please use the University absence reporting website: <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me.

Cheating and Plagiarism

Short version: Don't cheat. Don't plagiarize. It cheapens and diminishes everybody's academic experience, and it's a violation of the trust that's required for successful learning and teaching. You're also very likely to be caught, and the penalties can be extremely severe, including suspension or expulsion from the university.

Longer version: The university's policy on Academic Integrity is available at <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/integrity.shtml>. I strongly advise you to familiarize yourself with this document, both for this class and for your other classes and future work.

To help protect you, and future students, from plagiarism, we require all papers to be submitted through Turnitin.com. Every semester so far, somebody has wound up getting busted by turnitin, and the resulting process of formal inquiry, penalties, etc. is no fun for anybody. Please help me make this the first term when this doesn't happen by (a) not doing anything that you know is a violation of the university's Academic Integrity policy, and (b) asking your TA, or me, if you're unsure about just what the policy requires or forbids. Judgments about plagiarism can be subtle. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask for guidance from your TA.

Sakai Site

There's a Sakai site for this class. You can find it by going to <http://sakai.rutgers.edu> and looking for the "Ethics of Food Sp11" site. That's the site for the class as a whole. There will also be sites for your sections, so that your TAs can post things that are relevant to your section, but not necessarily to everybody else.

Two very important things about the Sakai site:

- 1) Make sure that you can get on it. Required readings will be posted there, as will a number of supplementary materials.
- 2) I'll be posting critical announcements – about changes to the schedule, due dates for assignments, etc. – to the "Announcements" section of the Sakai site. I'll set it so that it also sends email alerts when these announcements are posted. Make sure that (a) your preferences on Sakai are set so that you receive these notifications, and (b) the Rutgers

email account that these notifications go to is one you regularly check, or forwards to one you regularly check.

Texts:

A number of the readings for the course will be articles, which can be found on the course's Sakai site. Others will come from the following books, which are available at the usual bookstores:

Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*

Peter Singer and Jim Mason, *The Ethics of What We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter*

Research Resources

Tom Izbicki's page: <http://libguides.rutgers.edu/content.php?pid=132991&sid=2011282>

Schedule:

What follows is a tentative schedule, subject to revision over the course of the term. There is a 0% chance that we'll do *exactly* this, in *exactly* this order. When there are changes, an announcement will be posted to the course's Sakai site.

Week 1:

Tuesday, September 4: Introduction – Food and Value

Friday, September 7: Guest Speaker – William Hallman, Director, Rutgers Food Policy Institute

- Watch *Food, Inc.*
- Start reading *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, part 1

Week 2:

Tuesday, September 11: Overview of issues, and some initial arguments

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- Finish *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Part 1

Friday, September 14: Animal Welfare Overview - Arguments about individual food choices

- *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Chapter 17
- James Rachels, "The Basic Argument for Vegetarianism"
- Optional: David Foster Wallace, "Consider the Lobster"

Week 3:

Tuesday, September 18: **Screening: King Corn and Big River**

Friday, September 21: Environment Overview – Arguments about public policy

- Union of Concerned Scientists, “Industrial Agriculture: Features and Policy”
- *Omnivore’s Dilemma*, Chapters 8 and 9

Week 4:

Tuesday, September 25: Workers and Social Systems Overview – Individual choices and public policy

- Barry Estabrook, “The Price of Tomatoes”
- Singer and Mason, *The Ethics of What We Eat*, chapters 6 and 11

Friday, September 28: **Guest Speaker: Christopher Robichaud, Harvard Kennedy School of Government**

- Sarah Kliff, “A Big Mac has 550 calories. McDonald’s customers say: So what?”
- Paul Raeburn, “Stanford authors of organic food study face petition drive for retraction of their ‘fatally flawed’ study”
- Lawrence Lessig, “Of By 4” TEDx talk
- Eli Pariser, “Beware Online ‘Filter Bubbles’”

In sections: Divide into poster groups, receive poster topics.

Week 5:

Tuesday, October 2: Public Health Overview

- Brownell and Horgen, *Food Fight*, Chapter 2
- World Health Organization: Obesity and Overweight Fact Sheet

Friday, October 5: Moral theory & Animal Welfare

- Alastair Norcross, “Puppies, Pigs and People”
- Tom Regan, “The Case for Animal Rights”

Week 6:

Tuesday, October 9: Norcross and Regan Continued

Friday, October 12: **Guest Speaker: Mark Robson, Dean of Agricultural and Urban Programs**

MEET AT KIRKPATRICK CHAPEL

Week 7:

Tuesday, October 16: Moral theory 1

- Russ Shafer-Landau, *Normative Ethics*, Chapter 9
- Optional: From J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*

Friday, October 19: Moral theory 2

- Shafer-Landau, *Normative Ethics*, Chapter 10

Week 8:

Tuesday, October 23: Guest Speaker: Stuart Shapiro, RU Public Policy

- Policy and Economics
- Soda Ban:
 - http://todayhealth.today.com/_news/2012/06/01/11994213-bloomberg-defends-soda-ban-plan-were-not-taking-away-your-freedoms?lite
 - http://abcnews.go.com/ABC_Univision/News/bloomberg-soda-ban-favors-eleven-local-bodegas/story?id=17333138#.UHxP2VHcf8
- School Lunches:
 - <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/06/nyregion/healthier-school-lunches-face-student-rejection.html?pagewanted=all>

Friday, October 26: Public Health, Policy and Paternalism

- Richard Thaler, Cass Sunstein & John Balz, “Choice Architecture”
- Gerald Dworkin, “Paternalism”, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/paternalism/>)
- Will Wilkinson, <http://www.willwilkinson.net/flybottle/2008/04/02/the-hazards-of-libertarian-paternalism-and-political-choice-architecture/>

Week 9:

Tuesday, October 30: **CANCELLED Due to hurricane Sandy**

Friday, November 2: **CANCELLED Due to hurricane Sandy**

Poster Presentations in Section— Poster presentations moved to 11/9 on account of Hurricane Sandy.

Week 10:

Tuesday, November 6: Guest Speaker: Peter Gillies, Director, New Jersey Institute for Food, Nutrition and Health

Friday, November 9: **CANCELLED due to hurricane and plague**

Poster presentations in section

Week 11:

Tuesday, November 13: **Xenia Morin: GMO**

- Suzie Key, "Genetically Modified Plants and Human Health".

Friday, November 16: Food and Culture

- The Omnivore's Dilemma, Introduction (pp1-11)
- Matthew Brown, "Picky Eating is a Moral Failing"

Week 12:

Tuesday, November 20: NO CLASS (Thursday classes meet today)

Wednesday, November 21: (Friday classes meet today)

Screening of *American Meat* (extra credit)

Friday, November 23: Thanksgiving recess

Paper Drafts Due [Optional]

Week 13:

Tuesday, November 27: Organic, Conventional, Local, Fairtrade, and GMO

- *The Ethics of What We Eat*, chapter 10 (and you might look back at chapter 11)
- Samuel Fromartz, "Backlash: The Meaning of Organic", from *Organic, Inc*

Friday, November 30: **Guest Speaker - Tyler Doggett, University of Vermont Life, Death, and the Ethics of Killing**

Week 14:

Tuesday, December 4: **Guest Speaker: Joe Charette, RU Food Service**

Friday, December 7: Individual food policies, out clauses, and choosing the second best

Final Papers Due

Week 15:

Tuesday, December 11: Wrapup

Optional Final Exam:
Time and location TBA