Eating Right: The Ethics of Food Choices and Food Policy
Philosophy 252
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TAs
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Core Curriculum Learning Goals
21st Century Challenges:
a. Analyze the degree to which forms of human difference shape a person’s experiences of and perspective on the world.
d. Analyze issues of social justice across local and global contexts.

Arts and Humanities:
o. Examine critically philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production

Writing and Communication:
s. Communicate complex ideas effectively, in standard written English, to a general audience.
u. Evaluate and critically assess sources and use the conventions of attribution and citation correctly.
v. Analyze and synthesize information and ideas from multiple sources to generate new insights.

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.
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.

There are six grades that everyone will have: A grade on their midterm presentation, a grade on their midterm paper, two grades for the almost-weekly writing assignments – one the average of the assignments in the first half of the term, and one the average of the assignments in the second half, and a grade on the final exam. Finally, 20% of your grade will be determined by participation in discussion sections.

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 Required Assignments:
1. Almost-weekly short assignments (two grades)
   These will vary from week to week. Each will be the equivalent of about 1-2 pages of writing.

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

3. Argumentative Paper:
   A 6-7 page argumentative paper, typically following up on poster research, tracing moral consequences of empirical facts from presentation. Drafts of papers will be due in section the week of March 28. Final versions of papers, revised in light of comments on your draft, will be due in section the last week of classes.

4. Final Exam

In the usual case, your grade will be computed based on your discussion grade, plus the five highest grades earned over the term. The proportions are as follows:

- 20% for section
- Best assignment grade: 25%
- 2nd, 3rd and 4th: 15% each
- 5th: 10%

Cheating and Plagiarism
Short version: Don’t cheat. Don’t plagiarize.

Longer version: Cheating on tests or plagiarizing materials in your papers deprives you of the educational benefits of preparing these materials appropriately. It is personally dishonest to cheat on a test or to hand in a paper based on unacknowledged words or ideas that someone else originated. It is also unfair, since it gives you an undeserved advantage over your fellow students who are graded on the basis of their own work. In this class we will take cheating very seriously. All suspected cases of cheating and plagiarism will be automatically referred to the Office of Judicial Affairs, and we will recommend penalties appropriate to the gravity of the infraction. The university’s policy on Academic Integrity is available at [http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/integrity.shtml](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.

Since what counts as plagiarism is not always clear, I quote the definition given in Rutgers’ policy:

"Plagiarism is the representation of the words or ideas of another as one's own in any academic exercise. To avoid plagiarism, every direct quotation must be identified by quotation marks or by appropriate indentation and must be properly cited in the text or in a footnote. Acknowledgment is required when material from another source stored in print, electronic or other medium is paraphrased or summarized in whole or in part in one's own words. To acknowledge a paraphrase properly, one might state: "to paraphrase Plato's comment..." and conclude with a footnote identifying the exact reference. A footnote acknowledging only a directly quoted statement does not suffice to notify the reader of any preceding or succeeding paraphrased material. Information which is common knowledge such as names of leaders of prominent nations, basic scientific laws, etc, need not be footnoted; however, all facts or information obtained in reading or research that are not common knowledge among students in the course must be acknowledged. In addition to materials specifically cited in the text, other materials that contribute to one’s general understanding of the subject may be acknowledged in the bibliography."
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](http://sakai.rutgers.edu) and looking for the “. 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 ctools 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*

**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:**
- Wednesday, January 19: Introduction – Food and Value Overview – what we’re going to talk about.

**Friday, January 21:** Guest Speaker: William Hallman – Food System, Overview
  - Read *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, Part 1

**Week 2:**
Wednesday, January 26: Survey of moral issues about food
  • Watch Food, Inc
  • Finish The Omnivore’s Dilemma, Part 1

Friday, January 28: First arguments about meat
  • Read: James Rachels, “The Basic Argument for Vegetarianism”
  • Read: David Foster Wallace, “Consider the Lobster”

Week 3: In sections – receive poster topics
  Wednesday, February 2: Meat - Overview of Positions and Issues
  • Read: The Omnivore’s Dilemma, Chapter 17 (pp. 304-333)
  • Read: The Ethics of What We Eat, Chapter 17 (pp. 241-269)

Friday, February 4: Moral Status and the Relevance of Species
  • Peter Singer, “All Animals are Equal”
  • Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, “Meat and Right” (from The River Cottage Meat Book)

Week 4:
  Wednesday, February 9: Guest speaker - Randy Gallistel, Animal Cognition
  • Read: The Ethics of What We Eat, chapters 2 – 4 (pp. 21-68)

Friday, February 11: Two Kinds of Arguments for Vegetarianism
  • Tom Regan, “The Case for Animal Rights”
  • Alastair Norcross, “Puppies, Pigs and People: Eating Meat and Marginal Cases”

Week 5:
  Wednesday, February 16: Moral Theory: Consequentialism, Deontology, Rights
  • Shelly Kagan, selections from Normative Ethics:
    o Chapter 2, “The Good”, Sections 2.1 and 2.6 (pp. 25-29 and 59-69).
    o Chapter 3, “Doing Harm”, Section 3.1 (pp. 70-78).
    o Chapter 5, “Further Factors”, Section 5.1 (pp. 153-161).

  Friday, February 18: Moral theory continued

Week 6: In sections – poster presentations
  Wednesday, February 23: Poster presentations

  Friday, February 25: Stronger and Weaker Constraints than Vegetarianism: Veganism and Conscientious Omnivory
  • Hare, “Why I am only a Demi-Vegetarian”
  • The Ethics of What We Eat, Chapters 6-8 (pp. 83-110)
Week 7:
Wednesday, March 2: Concerns about animal products based on effects on workers & the environment
  • Reading from Fast Food Nation

Friday, March 4: Survey of Non-Animal-Related Issues
  • The Omnivore’s Dilemma, Part 2

Week 8: In sections – peer editing of paper outlines
  Wednesday, March 9: Movie Screening – King Corn
    • The Ethics of What We Eat, chapter 14 (organic)
  
  Friday, March 11: Organic, Local, and Fair Trade.
    • The Ethics of What We Eat, Chapters 10 & 11

MARCH 12-20: SPRING BREAK

Week 9:
  Wednesday, March 23: Food Policy and Public Health
    • Reading from Marion Nestle, Food Politics
  
  Friday, March 25: Guest Speaker: Don Schaffner, Food Safety

Week 10: In sections - Paper drafts due
  Wednesday, March 30: Food Policy and Economics, part 1
  
  Friday, April 1: Guest Speaker – Mary Rigdon, Economics

Week 11:
  Wednesday, April 6: Food Policy, Economics and Public Health
    • Excerpt from Nudge
  
  Friday, April 8: Food Policy and Public Health

Week 12:
  Wednesday, April 13: Famine and Global Justice
    • Singer, “Famine Affluence and Morality”
  
  Friday, April 15: Food and Culture
    • Readings from Food and Culture
Week 13:
  Wednesday, April 20: Guest Speaker: - Ethel Brooks, Sociology

  Friday, April 22: Aesthetic and Moral Values
  • Matthew Brown, “Picky Eating is a Moral Failing”

Week 14: **In sections – final versions of papers due**
  Wednesday, April 27: Personal food policies, out-clauses, and choosing the second best

  Friday, April 29: Wrapup

Final Exam:
  TBD

**Addendum for curriculum committee on writing requirements:**

Students will do quite a lot of writing for this class, and will get quite a lot of feedback on it, which they’ll have opportunities to incorporate.

1) They’ll be writing, in probably 10 out of the 14 weeks of the term, a 1-2 page short assignment. These will serve a number of different purposes – some are intended to tie the work from the class into the students’ day-to-day lives (by, for example, having them look at some of their actual food choices), some are intended to get the students to attend to some particular argument or idea from the readings, some are intended to teach a particular writing skill (such as extracting the central argument from an article as concisely and clearly as possible), and some are intended to give the students the experience of independently researching a food-relevant issue (such as researching the requirements for a particular food labeling scheme). They’ll get feedback on these assignments from their TAs, and they’ll have the opportunity to choose several of them to rewrite in order to improve their grade.

2) They’ll be creating and presenting a research poster, in which they explain the potentially-morally-relevant facts about the ways in which a certain type of food is produced. Preparation of the poster and presentation will require them to examine a number of different sources, assess their reliability and/or bias, and synthesize the results of their research into a form that they can then present to their peers. In preparation for this, we’ll have a library research session in which an RU librarian gives them instruction & guidance in finding and evaluating candidate sources.
3) They’ll write a final argumentative paper, following up on the results of their poster research. These papers will be 6-7 pages in length. Drafts of the papers will be submitted several weeks before the final versions are due, and they’ll be required to rewrite the papers in light of comments on the drafts. We’ll also do some peer editing of paper outlines in discussion sections prior to drafts being due.

Addendum on assessment of core curriculum learning goals:
(a), (d) and (o) will be assessed in several of the short writing assignments over the course of the term, as well as in the students’ final research papers. We’ll use the CRC’s generic core rubrics and reporting form.

(s) will be assessed in all of the writing assignments over the course of the term, and in particular in the final version of the research paper. We’ll use the CRC’s generic core rubrics and reporting form.

(u) will be assessed in the poster presentations and the research paper. We’ll use the CRC’s generic core rubrics and reporting form.

(v) will be assessed in the poster presentations and the research paper, as well as in many of the short writing assignments. We’ll use the CRC’s generic core rubrics and reporting form.