

Eating Right: The Ethics of Food Choices and Food Policy

Philosophy 252

Spring 2010

(Version of January 20)

Instructor

Andy Egan

andyegan@philosophy.rutgers.edu

Office & Office Hours:

1 Seminary Place (College Ave Campus)

Office 001

Office hours Mondays 3-5pm and by appointment

TAs

Joshua Armstrong (Sections 01 and 04)

jda.rutgers@gmail.com

Jonathan Winterbottom (Sections 02 and 05)

jwinterb@eden.rutgers.edu

Karen Lewis (Sections 03 and 06)

kalewis@philosophy.rutgers.edu

Lectures and Discussion Sections

This class has a somewhat non-standard lecture/discussion format. So it's worth reading the following to make sure you're clear about how it works:

The class meets twice a week, on Monday and Wednesday evenings. Every Monday meeting is a lecture, held in the Food Science Auditorium, from 7:15-8:35pm. Wednesday meetings will alternate between lectures in the Food Science Auditorium, from 7:15-8:35, and discussion sections, meeting either from 5:35-6:55, or 7:15-8:35, depending on your section, with different sections meeting in different rooms.

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.

We'll start with, and focus primarily on, issues about the ethics of food. In particular, we'll begin by considering the arguments for and against a variety of views about which foods it is permissible to eat. We'll examine arguments for vegetarian and vegan diets, for eating organic, for eating local, and for restricting oneself to only humanely raised and slaughtered meat.

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 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 five grades that everyone will have: A grade on their midterm presentation, a grade on their midterm paper, and two grades for the almost-weekly 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. 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 (including an optional final exam) which will allow you to improve your grade. More detail on these later on.

Summary of Required Assignments:

1. Almost-weekly short assignments

These will vary from week to week. Each will be the equivalent of about one page of writing.

2. Research Poster:

A poster presentation on some empirical aspect of food production. This will be a group project, and 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. Each student will write their own paper (i.e., the papers won't be group projects).

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

20% for section

Best assignment grade: 30%

2nd and 3rd: 20% each

4th: 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>. 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. "

A SPECIAL NOTE: Students often assume that because information is available on the Web it is public information, does not need to be formally referenced, and can be used without attribution. This is a mistake. *All* information and ideas that you derive from other sources, whether written, spoken, or electronic, must be attributed to their original source. Such sources include not just written or electronic materials, but people with whom you

may discuss your ideas, such as your roommate, friends, or family members. They deserve credit for their contributions too!

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" course website. 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 20: Introduction – Food and Value
Overview – what we're going to talk about.

Week 2:

Monday, January 25:

- James Rachels, "The Basic Argument for Vegetarianism"
- David Foster Wallace, "Consider the Lobster"

Wednesday, January 27: SECTIONS

Week 3:

Monday, February 1: Guest Speaker: William Hallman – Food System, Overview

- *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Part 1

Wednesday, February 3: Meat - Overview of Positions and Issues

- *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Chapter 17
- *The Ethics of What We Eat*, Chapter 17

Week 4:

Monday, February 8: Two Kinds of Arguments for Vegetarianism

- Tom Regan, "The Case for Animal Rights"
- Alastair Norcross, "Puppies, Pigs and People: Eating Meat and Marginal Cases"

Wednesday, February 10: SECTIONS

Week 5:

Monday, February 15: Moral Theory: Consequentialism, Deontology, Rights

- Shelly Kagan, selections from *Normative Ethics*

Wednesday, February 17: Moral Theory Continued

- Selection from John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*
- Selection from Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*

Week 6:

Monday, February 22: Moral Theory Continued: Moral Status

- Carl Cohen, "Do Animals Have Rights?"
- Peter Singer, "All Animals are Equal"

Wednesday, February 24: SECTIONS

Week 7:

Monday, March 1: Arguments for Veganism

- *The Ethics of What We Eat*, chapters 2 and 4

Wednesday, March 3: Conscientious Omnivory

- Hare, "Why I am only a Demi-Vegetarian"
- *The Ethics of What We Eat*, Chapters 6-8

Week 8:

Monday, March 8: Death and Harm

- Thomas Nagel, “Death”
- Epicurus, “Letter to Menoecus”
<http://classics.mit.edu/Epicurus/menoec.html>

Wednesday, March 10: SECTIONS

MARCH 13-21: SPRING BREAK

Week 9:

Monday, March 22: Survey of Non-Animal-Related Issues

- *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, Part 2

Wednesday, March 24: Guest Speaker: Mary Rigdon,

- *The Ethics of What We Eat*, Part 1

Week 10:

Monday, March 29: Guest Speaker: Don Shaffner - Food Safety

Wednesday, March 31: SECTIONS

- *Ethics of What We Eat* chapter 14 (organic)

Week 11:

Monday, April 5: Food Policy

- Michael Pollan, *Farmer in Chief*, from NYT Magazine
- Excerpt from *Food Politics*

Wednesday, April 7: Local, Fair Trade, etc.

- *The Ethics of What We Eat*, Chapters 10 & 11
- *The Economist*,
 - “Good Food? Ethical Food.”
 - “Voting with Your Trolley: Special Report Food Politics”

Week 12:

Monday, April 12: Famine and Global Justice

- Singer, “Famine Affluence and Morality”

Wednesday, April 14: SECTIONS

Week 13:

Monday, April 19: Guest Speaker: - Ethel Brooks

Wednesday, April 21: Aesthetic and Moral Values:

- Matthew Brown, “Picky Eating is a Moral Failing”

Week 14:

Monday, April 26: Cultural and Moral Values: Food, Culture and Group Membership

Wednesday, April 28: SECTIONS

Week 15:

Monday, May 3: WRAPUP