

# PHIL 1185: The Ethics of Food– Summer-1 2023

|                      |                      |                |                          |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Professor:</b>    | Benjamin Yelle       | <b>Email:</b>  | b.yelle@northeastern.edu |
| <b>Office Hours:</b> | Mon & Tues 3:20-4:20 | <b>Office:</b> | Renaissance Park 412     |

---

## Course Description

This course aims to provide students with a comprehensive and rigorous introduction to the ethical and philosophical aspects of the production, consumption, culture and values surrounding our food. As I'm sure you are all aware, there is very high public interest in "food issues". One reason, of course, is that everybody must eat. But, increasingly, people are seeing food choices as political, social and ethical choices - not just "matters of taste". A wide variety of food movements and food categories have emerged as a result—e.g. veganism, vegetarianism, organic, locavore, fair trade, slow food, food justice, etc. Each of these has important ethical aspects to them. The aim of this course is to explore the full range of ethical issues associated with food production, processing, distribution and consumption, as well as develop skills in ethical analysis that can be applied to and evaluate food-related practices and policies.

## Required Texts

- *Food, Ethics, and Society* Barnhill, Budolfson, and Doggett

## Learning Outcomes (Objectives and Course Goals)

This course has two main learning goals.

1. First, you will become familiar with the ethical and philosophical concerns associated with various "food systems" and what trained professionals and experts have had to say about these issues.
2. Second, you will develop certain "philosophical skills" – general purpose tools – that you can use to think through these issues and many others. Put broadly, these are "critical thinking/analysis" skills which you will apply to specific philosophical issues that arise when considering issues in the production, distribution, consumption, and the culture and values surrounding food.

Importantly, however, this course does not assume that you have some background studying philosophy. My hope is that throughout the course of the semester you will develop the intellectual tools central to the study of philosophy and add them to your intellectual toolkit.

## The Sort of Knowledge You'll Develop

*By the end of this course students will know how to:*

- **Summarize** arguments (identify their premises, assumptions, empirical basis, and philosophical claims), **critique** them (i.e. critically analyze their premises, reasoning, etc., and raise objections to them), and **anticipate** responses to your objections.
- **Clearly explain** in speech, discussion, and writing your own *well-defended* position on an issue in a cogent and clear fashion (i.e. offer strong reasons, arguments, and evidence for your position which are written clearly)
- **Critically analyze** the strengths, weaknesses, implications, and assumptions of specific arguments for consistency and credibility
- Accurately **summarize**, **describe**, and **distinguish** between a variety of central concepts and positions in ethical and social issues involving food systems such as *food justice*, *paternalism*, *well-being*, *moral permissibility*, etc.
- **Demonstrate** your understanding of the philosophical problems and questions in areas such as food justice, animal welfare and rights, paternalism, public health, etc.

## *Course Requirements (What You Need To Do) – YOUR ASSIGNMENTS*

### (1) **Class Discussion Board - General Interest/Cool and Relevant Food Issues** (5% of final grade)

- One of the great things about this class is that there are **constantly** interesting and/or important food ethics issues in the news (e.g. people hoarding toilet paper, the federal government changing food stamp regulations, new animal welfare standards being implemented in some state, etc.). Accordingly, on this discussion board I'd like you to do **ONE POST A WEEK** where you either post an interesting story/video/etc. and offer your own "take" (thoughts/assessment/etc.) on it OR reply to someone else.
  - **Your posts should be APPROX. 300 WORDS and should include links to whatever story/issue/etc. you are engaging with or discussing. *These will be graded pass/fail and cannot be made up if they are late*— if you make a good faith effort to make a SUBSTANTIAL contribution you will get credit. If you do not you**

will either not get credit or get significantly reduced credit. I will be posting an example of what a “substantial” post looks like on the discussion board. I would like your posts to be one of the following sorts:

- *Conversation Starter*: In this type of post, you begin a new thread with your thoughts on a news article, opinion piece, research which is relevant to food ethics, etc. (*you should post a link to this!*)
- *Extension*: In this type of post, the you should respond to another student’s post by extending, expanding, or otherwise adding to that student’s ideas or offering your own thoughts on what they posted.

## **(2) Class Presentation Assignments (2 Presentations each worth 7% of your grade = 14% of your final grade)**

Groups of students will together prepare a presentation on the week’s reading. This presentation is an *exploration* and *analysis* of the moral and philosophical questions raised by the readings. The objective is NOT to tell a story about what happened – i.e. simply summarize the reading (though that is most likely necessary in order to set the stage for your analysis) - you are instead offering your own analysis of a paper/reading, posing critique(s) to it, and raising questions for us all to consider about it.

Each presentation is expected to be approximately 5 minutes per student in the group (e.g., a 4-person group is expected to give a 20-minute presentation). The presentation should be given during class time. This can be as simple as a slide show that you all talk over. But feel free to be as creative as you’d like with your slides – audio/video/etc.

***It is always better to say a lot about a little instead of a little about a lot.***

Every presentation should conclude with a set of discussion questions that explore the ethical and philosophical issues raised in the texts. In some cases we will then break into discussion groups.

The group will receive the same grade. ***CONTACT ME IMMEDIATELY if you have a presentation group member who is non-responsive or does not contribute to the presentation***

## **Guidelines for Good Work in Presentations and Papers (Some Tips!)**

Here are baseline requirements for a good paper or presentation. Most apply to both forms, but some apply only to presentations and others only to papers.

### *General:*

- **\*\*Try to say a lot about a little instead of a little about a lot.\*\***
- Use the simplest language possible (Use short sentences. Use simple terms.)
- Avoid unnecessary technical language.
- Explicitly define technical terms (often simple terms are used technically, so you must define them).
- Use *examples* to *illustrate* key concepts, themes, or arguments.
- Explicitly summarize the theme and aim of any text under consideration.
- Develop *your own* clear, compelling examples to illustrate key concepts, arguments, and theses.
- Be charitable and generous when interpreting others.
- Focus on other assigned materials we have covered so as to make connections.
- Try to explore contemporary issues using tools and concepts developed in class.

### *Presentations*

- Presentations are performances engaging at least two senses. Feel free to use visuals and audio.
- Use texts sparingly on slides. So, as a defeasible rule, the more slides the better.
- Slides are a visual medium. Use images. (Cite sources of images.)
- Video incorporated into slides is also ok – just not very long and the video must not be a talking head but instead an actual illustration of a point.

### **(3) End of the Semester Debate** (*1 presentation/debate & preparation - 10% of your grade*)

At the end of the semester we will dedicate several class sessions to debating the “big” ideas we’ve discussed throughout the semester – e.g. pro vs. anti GMO, the moral permissibility of eating meat, etc.

For these assignments I will break students up into Pro vs. Con groups. You will then work together as a group, using the readings we’ve discussed in class as well as any others you find in your independent research, to make the most compelling case you can in favor of your position. At the end of the semester we will have in class debates in which you will square off against the other side of the debate for an in class debate where your colleagues will be the judges and audience for your debate.

You will submit your presentation materials to me and be graded on them and on your presentation/debate performance

#### **(4) Class Research Projects**

Through the semester you will have three research assignments.

The *first* is **15% of your final grade**

The *second* is **25% of your finals grade**

The *third* is **30% of your final grade**

Your assignments will all be submitted through *Canvas*

**Grade Scale:** Your final course letter grade will be based on the following scale:

A: 94-100, A-: 90-93, B+: 87-89, B: 84-86, B-: 80-83, C+: 77-79, C: 74-76, C-: 70-73, D+: 67-69, D: 64-66, D-: 60-63, F: Anything below 60

An “A” grade reflects superior work; the “B” range reflects good work (**THIS IS WHERE MOST PEOPLE FALL**); the “C” range average quality; the “D” range below average; and, finally, the “F” grade reflects poor performance.

**Get out of jail free policy.** You get one get out of jail free card. Each is good for a three-day extension (from the original due date). The only constraints are: (1) you must submit the card on or before the assignment due date, (2) you cannot use these for class presentations or for the final paper

*To use a card:* email me *at least 12 hours* before the assignment you are using the jailcard for is due letting me know that you are using a jailcard.

## ***Super Secret Assignment!!!***

For your “super secret assignment” do the following (This is the “hidden” assignment mentioned in the course reading scheduled mentioned below) – *this is 1% of your grade*

*Do the following:*

- **Read** Concepcion, “Reading Philosophy with Metacognition” (on Canvas) p. 358-367
- **Read** Boey’s “Eating Animals and Personal Guilt: The Individualization of Responsibility for Factory Farming”
  - o Write up the following:
    - Identify Boey’s **thesis** in this article
    - What are the main **reasons** that she offers in favor of this thesis?
    - Write up one question about something that you either thought was unclear or offer a critique/objection to some part of her argument
      - After this write up a “**reflection piece**”:
      - In this piece you should explain how you approached the Boey’s piece differently from the Nozick we read in class after having read Concepcion – i.e. how did you apply what you learned
        - o Describe how reading Concepcion gave you any new ideas, strategies, etc. that you will use as you read for the rest of the semester
- **Copy** the following statement, inserting your name: “I, <insert name here>, have read the entire of the syllabus for Food Ethics and agree to follow its dictates while enrolled in the course” (That is, type this up and sign it)
- **Turn in** a copy of all of the above which following formatting described later in the syllabus on Canvas under “Super Secret Assignment”

## **Class Format**

*This is not a memorize and regurgitate course.* You will be required to understand the significance of the questions and issues being discussed, and you will be encouraged to think critically about the material. At the same time, we must all be open to the possibility that our views could be mistaken, and we should all be receptive to new ideas and new points of view. However, you should not believe something just because someone else (a professor included) says so. You should believe whatever has the best evidence, reasons, arguments or justification in its favor.

**Canvas:** This course will make use of Canvas to, among other things: post announcements; facilitate class communications; provide access to course materials; suggest external resources and items of interest; and receive and return assignments. All students are required to be active users of Canvas. For example, each student must use Canvas to check regularly for announcements and turn in assignments. For technical support and training on blackboard consult the user's manual, which is in the tools section of blackboard courses, or contact the NU Help Desk.

**Academic Honesty:** Failing to indicate when material is taken from someone else is academically dishonest and intolerable. All work you hand in must be your own and the proper attribution of ideas and language must be done with care. A copy of Northeastern University's Academic Honesty and Integrity Policy can be found at <http://www.northeastern.edu/osccr/academic-integrity-policy/>. Any instance of plagiarism, cheating, or the like, could result in the perpetrator's receiving a failing grade for the course and will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution. I will make use of the plagiarism detection services available through Blackboard, and your papers will be archived in the Blackboard database. If you have any questions about this policy please come talk to me.

**NU Writing Center:** For assistance with your writing, please access services at the NU Writing Center: <http://www.northeastern.edu/writingcenter/>

**Disabilities/Special Needs:** I will make every effort to accommodate students with disabilities or special needs that may affect learning or performance. Any student who requires special arrangements for attending class or doing assignments please speak with me as soon as possible. Please view the Northeastern University Disability Center's website for information regarding requests for academic accommodations: <http://www.northeastern.edu/drc/>

**Support Services:** If you or someone you know would like to discuss confidential information about health or mental health care, please contact Northeastern University Health and Counseling Services or WeCare. Title IX: Northeastern's Title IX Policy prohibits Prohibited Offenses, which are defined as sexual harassment, sexual assault, relationship or domestic violence, and stalking. The Title IX Policy applies to the entire community, including male, female, transgender students, and faculty and staff. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, confidential

support and guidance can be found through University Health and Counseling Services staff (<http://www.northeastern.edu/uahcs/>) and the Center for Spiritual Dialogue and Service clergy members (<http://www.northeastern.edu/spirituallife/>). Alleged violations can be reported non-confidentially to the Title IX Coordinator within The Office for Gender Equity and Compliance ([titleix@northeastern.edu](mailto:titleix@northeastern.edu)) and/or through NUPD (Emergency 617.373.3333; Non-Emergency 617.373.2121). Reporting Prohibited Offenses to NUPD does not commit the victim/affected party to future legal action. Faculty members are considered “responsible employees” at Northeastern University, meaning they are required to report all allegations of sex or gender-based discrimination to the Title IX Coordinator. A complete list of reporting options and resources both on- and off-campus can be found at [www.northeastern.edu/titleix](http://www.northeastern.edu/titleix).

**Recording and Dissemination:** Recording and disseminating class lectures, discussions and materials is prohibited without my prior permission.

### **Communication**

Important announcements and assignments will be communicated to you via email, in class, or via Blackboard. It is your responsibility to make sure you are up to date with the latest news. So check your email often and don’t miss class. If you do, check with another student in class. Write their names and contact information in a place where you will be able to find it later.

Of course, you are always welcome to email me. But please keep in mind:

- I do not check my email after business hours (i.e. outside 9 am – 5pm) this includes weekends.
- I respond promptly, but not always on the same day.
- **I do not answer questions that are clearly answered by the syllabus or assignment instructions.** I just delete those emails. If you’re not hearing back from me, that may be a hint to double-check the relevant materials. That said, after you’ve carefully examined the assignment *and* checked with your email buddies, you shouldn’t hesitate to ask me to clarify anything.

### **Writing**

**This course involves a lot of writing.** This being a philosophy class, a major goal of this course is to improve your writing skills. Now, there is a good chance that you haven’t written papers which require you to be as precise, careful, and concise as you will need to be for the papers in this course. That being said, I believe that if you put **a lot** of effort into this course you will emerge as a stronger writer capable of producing clear and convincing prose and arguments (which, while that might not sound fancy, is *really* important).

Further, writing philosophy is NOT a talent. That is, it is not something that some people happen



to be good at while others simply lack the natural ability. **It is a skill** and, like any skill, it can be improved. That being said, it requires a lot of practice and patience and acquiring it is difficult and requires a lot of writing and rewriting. I am here to help you develop this skill and I thoroughly believe that you have the ability to think critically and express your ideas in clear crisp prose that will serve you well in life.

Borrowing from another philosopher (who borrowed it from a famous writer), when it comes to **my expectations**, David Foster Wallace said it best in his own syllabus:

If you want to improve your academic writing and are willing to put extra time and effort into it, I am a good teacher to have. But if you're used to whipping off papers the night before they're due, running them quickly through the computer's spellchecker, handing them in full of high-school errors and sentences that make no sense, and having the professor accept them "because the ideas are good" or something, please be informed that I draw no distinction between the quality of one's ideas and the quality of those ideas' verbal expression, and that I will not accept sloppy, rough-draftish, or semiliterate college writing. Again, I am absolutely not kidding. If you won't or can't devote significant time and attention to your written work, I urge you to drop... and save us both a lot of grief.-

I agree and I will not accept sloppy work. On that note...

**Presentation and Formatting.** Presenting your assignments in a professional manner is important. It demonstrates respect for yourself and for your audience. Don't waste your reader's time with easy to fix mistakes, like typos, and don't distract them with crazy fonts or weird formatting. Please use the following guidelines. Not using these guidelines will negatively affect your grade.

1. *Double space* (except block quotes which should be single spaced and indented).
2. *Standard* margins (1 inch), font size (12pt), style (Times New Roman), etc.
3. *Cite sources* in a clear, consistent way. MLA, Chicago Style, I don't care. Just be consistent. Citations should have the author's name and a page number)
4. *Electronic copies* should be in **PDF** format and named as follows: *assignment\_MMDDYY.pdf* for example: *paper01\_022814.pdf*

Why PDFs? PDFs are more professional than docs and allow you to control how your work looks to your audience. If you don't know how to convert a document into PDF format, figure it out: ask Google, the help desk, or your email buddies. I am not tech support.

**You are responsible for making sure that your assignment is correctly and successfully submitted on time TRIPLE CHECK TURNITIN** I will penalize late papers one letter grade

(i.e. ten points) for each day late)

## Course Readings

After week one, course readings are divided into two types: *background* readings and *argumentative* readings. *Background readings* will provide you with important information concerning some pressing food issues (the state of world hunger, the living conditions of animals in CAFOs, etc.). *Argumentative readings* will mainly argue for and defend a particular position on some issue. As you might imagine, several readings will feature both background and arguments (got to have evidence to back up your arguments!). Our discussions in class will be focusing most on the argumentative readings but *you need to do the background readings to put these arguments in their proper context* they will also be essential for the discussion board prompts and questions.

***You must also read each section's INTRODUCTION in which the authors discuss the important philosophical concepts and ideas which are relevant to that section's readings***

### Course Reading/Assignment Schedule<sup>1</sup>

| Date | Topic   | Reading Assignment & Assignments Due  |
|------|---|---|
| 5/8  | Introduction to Food Ethics & How to Read/Do Philosophy | Food Ethics and Society (1-7)<br><br>Concepcion, "Reading Philosophy with Metacognition and Background Knowledge"<br>Appendix (358-367)   |
| 5/9  | The Ethically Troubling Food System                     | Weiss, "As the World's Population Grows, Hunger Persists on a Massive Scale"<br><br>Foer, "The Truth About Eating Animals"  |
| 5/10 | The Ethically Troubling Food System cont.               | Boey, "Eating Animals and Personal Guilt: The Individuation of Responsibility for Factory Farming"<br><br>Patel, "Stuffed and Starved"<br><br>Pollan, "The Food Movement, Rising" |
| 5/11 | Global Hunger   | Introduction (36-63)  |

---

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated assignments are due by class on the date indicated, readings are subject to change at my discretion.

|      |                       |  |
|------|-----------------------|--|
|      |                       | <i>Background</i><br>Ehrlich, “Overpopulation and the Collapse of Civilization”<br><br><i>Argumentative</i><br>Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”                                       |
| 5/15 | Global Hunger cont.   | <i>Argumentative</i><br>Deaton, “Response to Deaton”<br>Sen, “Hunger and Entitlements”   |
| 5/16 | Food Justice          | Introduction 92-114<br><br>Whyte, “Food Justice and Collective Food Relations”<br><br>Guthman, “If They Only Knew: The Unbearable Whiteness of Alternative Food”                               |
| 5/17 | Food Justice cont.    | <i>Argumentative</i><br>Young, “Five Faces of Oppression”<br>Thompson, “Food Security and Food Sovereignty”  |
| 5/18 | Consumer Ethics       | Introduction (165-188)<br>McPherson, “How to Argue for (and against) Ethical Veganism”   |
| 5/22 | Consumer Ethics cont. | Budolfson, “The Inefficacy Objection to Utilitarian Theories of Ethics of the Marketplace”<br><br>Michaelson, “Act Consequentialism and Inefficacy” & “A Kantian Response to Futility Worries” |
| 5/23 | Food and Identity     | Introduction (226-237)<br><br><i>Background</i><br>Guptill, Copelton, Lucal, “Food and Identity: Fitting in and Standing Out”  |

|      |  |  |
|------|--|--|
|      |  | <p>Weiner, “Consumer Culture and Participatory Democracy: The Story of Coca-Cola”</p> <p>Vantrease, “Common Bods, and Frybread Power: Government Food Aid in American Indian Culture”</p> <p><i>Argumentative</i></p> <p>Adams, “The Sexual Politics of Meat”</p> <p>Deck, ““Now Then – Who Said Biscuits?” The Black Woman Cook as Fetish in American Advertising”</p> <p>Heldke, “Cultural Food Colonialism”</p>   |
| 5/24 | Food and Identity – Cultural Appropriation | <p>Matthes, “Cultural Appropriation and Oppression” (<i>Posted on Canvas</i>)</p>  |
| 5/25 | Industrial Animal Agriculture              | <p>Introduction (322-341)</p> <p><i>Background</i></p> <p>Pew, “Pew Commission Says Industrial Scale Farm Animals Production Poses “Unacceptable” Risks to Public Health, Environment”</p> <p>Nestle, “Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production: Update”</p> <p>Humane Society of the USA, “The Welfare of Animals in the Meat, Egg, and Dairy Industries”</p> <p><i>Argumentative</i></p> <p>Singer, “All Animals Are Equal”</p> <p>Telfar, ““Animals Do It Too!” The Franklin Defense of Meat Eating” (<i>Posted on Canvas</i>)</p> |
| 5/30 | Industrial Animal Agriculture cont.        | <p>Tannsjö, “It’s Getting Better All the Time”</p> <p>Korsgaard, “Getting Animals in View”</p>   |

|      |   |  |
|------|---|--|
| 5/31 | Alternatives to Industrial Animal Agriculture       | <p>Introduction (373-385)</p> <p><i>Argumentative</i></p> <p>Salatin, “Animal Welfare”</p> <p>Scruton, “Eating Our Friends”</p> <p>Hsiao, “In Defense of Eating Meat” (<i>Canvas</i>)</p>  |
| 6/1  | Alternatives to Industrial Animal Agriculture cont. | <p>Harman, “The Moral Significance of Animal Pain and Animal Death”</p> <p>Norcross, “Puppies, Pigs, and People,” (<i>Posted on Canvas</i>)</p>  |
| 6/5  | Aquaculture   | <p>Kaiser, “The Ethics and Sustainability of Aquaculture” (<i>Posted on Canvas</i>)</p> <p>Ostrom et al., “Revisiting the Commons,” (<i>Posted on Canvas</i>)</p> <p>Michaelson &amp; Reisner, “Ethics for Fish”</p>   |
| 6/6  | Class Presentations on First Class Project          |  |
| 6/7  | Industrial Plant Agriculture                        | <p><b>Industrial Plant Agriculture</b></p> <p>Introduction (407-433)</p> <p><i>Background</i></p> <p>Borlaug, “Feeding a World of 10 Billion People”</p> <p><i>Argumentative</i></p> <p>Ronald, “The Truth about GMOs”</p> <p>Naylor, “GMOs and Preventing Hunger”</p> <p>Philpott, “Why I’m Still Skeptical of GMOs”</p> <p>Comstock, “Ethics and Genetically Modified Food,” (<i>Posted on Canvas</i>)</p> |
| 6/8  | Alternatives to Industrial Plant Agriculture        | <p>Introduction (459-479)</p>  |

|      |                             |   |
|------|-----------------------------|---|
|      |                             | <p><i>Background</i></p> <p>Kirschenmann, “Can Organic Agriculture Feed the World? And Is That the Right Question”</p> <p><i>Argumentative</i></p> <p>McKibben, “A Grand Experiment”</p> <p>De Bres, “Local Food: The Moral Case”</p>   |
| 6/12 | Workers                     | <p>Introduction (519-531)</p> <p><i>Background</i></p> <p>Holmes, “Farm Workers”</p> <p>Pachirat, “Slaughterhouse Workers”</p> <p>Jayaraman, “Restaurant Workers”</p> <p><i>Argumentative</i></p> <p>Wertheimer, “The Value of Consent”</p> <p>Liberto, “Exploitation and the Vulnerability Clause”</p>   |
| 6/13 | Overconsumption and Obesity | <p>Introduction (573-585)</p> <p><i>Background</i></p> <p>Wansink, “The Mindless Margin”</p> <p>Kessler, “The End of Overeating”</p> <p>Nestle, “The Politics of Food Choice”</p> <p><i>Argumentative</i></p> <p>Callahan, “Obesity: Chasing an Elusive Epidemic”</p> <p>Goldberg and Puhl, “Obesity Stigma: A Failed and Ethically Dubious Strategy”</p> <p>Guthman, “Can’t Stomach It: How Much Michael Pollan et. Al. Made Me Want to Eat Cheetos”</p> |

|      |                                     |   |
|------|-------------------------------------|---|
| 6/14 | Paternalism and Public Health       | <p>Introduction (623-633)</p> <p><i>Argumentative</i></p> <p>Dworkin, “Paternalism”</p> <p>Thaler and Sustein, “Selections from <i>Nudge</i>”</p> |
| 6/15 | Paternalism and Public Health Cont. | <p>Sustein, “Soft Paternalism and Its Discontents”</p> <p>Conly, “Coercive Paternalism”</p> <p>Noe, “The Value in Sweet Drinks”</p>               |
| 6/20 | Tell Us About Your Meals            |   |
| 6/21 | In Class Debates                    |   |
| 6/22 | Paper Writing Workshop              |   |