

Philosophy of Food



“Food is a central activity of mankind, and one of the single most significant trademarks of a culture.”

**—Mark Kurlansky,
American writer**

Course Description:

Eating is much more than a physical act of satisfying hunger and gaining nourishment. Our choices about what to eat can express aesthetic values such as taste and disgust. They can also express moral values, especially in relation to the sources of our food. Furthermore, eating can be a significant social and cultural act, one that is both formed by culture and that forms one’s culture.

This course introduces students to a variety of issues in the philosophy of food, focusing in particular on the aesthetics of eating and the ethics of food production and consumption, with a brief foray into some metaphysics. We will not assume any previous background in philosophy, but you can expect that we will be doing some serious philosophy as we proceed. For example, we will be discussing objectivity and subjectivity in taste, the tension between the aesthetic appreciation of food and the practicality of food consumption, and morality of various food sources (both individually and socially). We will be finishing off the course by considering how our choices about what and how to eat play an important role in influencing who we are, both as individuals and in society.

Students who take this class can expect to learn about some of the key issues in the philosophy of food and to begin to develop their own view of what and how we ought to eat.

Contact Information

- Office Hours: M/W, 1-3pm in SY009, and by appointment
- Email: masonse@indiana.edu

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Menu:

Appetizer..... Unit 1: Aesthetics: Objectivity and Subjectivity of Taste
Food as Art

Main Course..... Unit 2: Ethics: Food Sources,
Exploitation & Inequality,
Food and the Virtuous Life

Dessert..... Unit 3: Identity: Functional Foods,
Food & Culture

Course Texts

- ◇ Kaplan, David, ed. *The Philosophy of Food*. University of California Press, 2012. (K)
- ◇ Allhoff, Fritz and Dave Monroe, eds. *Food & Philosophy*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2007. (AM)
- ◇ Additional readings will be available online through the course website

Grading Scheme

Attendance/Participation	15%
Reading Summaries	30%
Essay	30%
Group Project	25%



Attendance/Participation (15%)

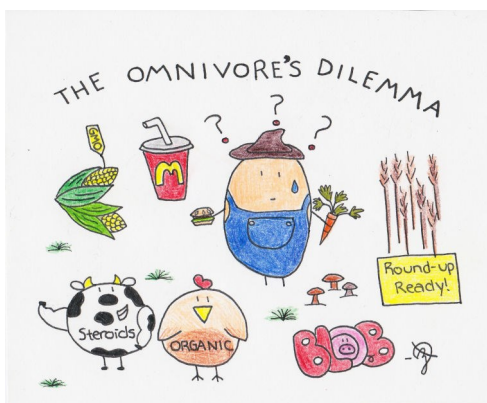
Students who do not attend class regularly will not benefit from the course as much as those who attend regularly. Attendance and active participation in the class are, therefore, required.

Attendance (10%): Each student may take up to 2 excused absences for any reason. Absences in excess of 2 will result in a deduction of 10% from your attendance/participation grade per absence. In cases of an emergency, sickness, death in the family, or other unforeseen event, I may grant additional excused absences provided that the student notifies me right away and provides appropriate documentation.

Participation (5%): Participation is more elusive to assess, but it refers to your active involvement in the class through being prepared for class and engaging in classroom discussion. Visits to my office hours will also count toward your participation grade. Distracting behavior (chronic tardiness, surfing the web on a laptop or mobile device, etc.) will result in points off your participation grade.

“...the way we eat represents our most profound engagement with the natural world. Daily, our eating turns nature into culture, transforming the body of the world into our bodies and minds.”

– Michael Pollan,
The Omnivore’s Dilemma



Classroom Culture Statement

This course will involve thinking deeply about controversial issues, and as we go along you will almost certainly encounter viewpoints that challenge your own beliefs. I encourage you to view these challenges as opportunities to learn about perspectives that may differ widely from your own and to practice the skill of interacting respectfully and sympathetically with someone, despite the fact that you may strongly disagree with their point of view. Although debate and critical analysis are encouraged, it should be clear that we will not discriminate against or criticize members of this classroom community based on gender, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disability, or religion. Everyone is welcome here.

Reading Summaries (30%)

You will need to complete five reading summaries during the semester. Reading summaries are short 1-2 page essays in which you critically engage one of the course readings. In the summary, you should 1) identify the author’s thesis, 2) articulate the basic argument the author provides for that thesis, and 3) provide at least one question or critical comment.

Readings eligible for summaries have been marked with an asterisk (*) on the reading schedule; the choice of which five to complete is up to you. (Keep in mind that shorter is not always easier.) Your reading summary should be turned in on the day that reading is assigned. Expect to be called upon at some point during the semester to present one of your questions or critical comments to the class for that day’s discussion.

“Eating with the fullest pleasure—pleasure, that is, that does not depend on ignorance—is perhaps the profoundest enactment of our connection with the world. In this pleasure we experience and celebrate our dependence and gratitude, for we are living from mystery, from creatures we did not make and powers we cannot comprehend.”
—Wendell Berry

Essay (30%)

In your essay you should critically engage one of the issues we have covered in the lecture or in the course readings. It may be based on one of your reading summaries or you may choose from a list which I will provide. Either way, the goal is for you to interact with a particular issue in more depth. All essays should be 1500-2000 words and will be submitted electronically.

A rough draft of the essay will be due two weeks before your final draft is due. I will be providing detailed comments on your drafts so that you can benefit from those as you write your final draft.

Plagiarism Statement

In the *Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct*, the Indiana University Faculty Council indicates that students may be disciplined for several different kinds of academic misconduct, which include: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, interference, and violation of course rules. The penalty for cheating or plagiarism in this class is automatic failure of the course. Consider yourself warned. For more information about what plagiarism is and how to avoid it, go to <https://www.indiana.edu/~tedfrick/plagiarism/index2.html>

Group Project (25%)

The group project gives you the opportunity to engage in the practical activity of producing and eating food together. Your group will be responsible for creating a dish and bringing it to share with the class on an assigned date. You will also be responsible for offering a brief presentation that explains how what you bring in connects to a particular topic in the course. For example, you may choose to bring in a regional dish and discuss its

importance in a particular culture when we are discussing the importance of food and culture. Or you may choose to bring in a food that emphasizes a particular kind of aesthetic experience, or that was sourced in a particular way. I will provide more detailed instructions and a sign-up sheet for specific topics that correspond with our progress through the course material.





Course Schedule

* Indicates eligible for reading summary

Readings should be completed before the beginning of class on the date assigned.

Unit 1 (first 4 weeks): Gustatory Aesthetics

Objectivity/Subjectivity of taste

Exerpts from Kant's Critique of Judgment
Hume, David. "Of the Standard of Taste"

*Barry C. Smith "The Objectivity of Tastes and Tasting" in *Questions of Taste: The Philosophy of Wine*

*Shaffer, Michael. "Taste, Gastronomic Expertise, and Objectivity." (AM, p.73-87)

Food as Art

*Sweeny, Kevin W. "Can a Soup be Beautiful? The Rise of Gastronomy and the Aesthetics of Food" (AM, p. 117-32)

*Elizabeth Telfer, "Food as Art" in *Food for Thought: Philosophy and Food*

*Monroe, Dave. "Can Food Be Art? The Problem of Consumption." (AM, p.133-44)

Unit 2 (second 8 weeks): Ethics

Food Sources

Pollan, Michael. *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*. Ch. 1-4

*King, Roger J. H. "Eating Well: Thinking Ethically About Food." (AM, p. 177-91)

*Heldke, Lisa. "Down-Home Global Cooking: A Third Option Between Cosmopolitanism and Localism" (K, p.33-51)

*Fraser, David. "Animal Ethics and Food Production in the Twenty-First Century." (K, p.190-213)

Exploitation and Inequality

Estabrook, Barry. "Politics of the Plate: The Price of Tomatoes." *Gourmet*, March 2009.
<http://www.gourmet.com/magazine/2000s/2009/03/politics-of-the-plate-the-price-of-tomatoes.html>

Wendell Berry "How We Grow Our Food Reflects Our Virtues and Vices"

*Singer, Peter. "All Animals Are Equal."

*Steinbock, Bonnie. "Speciesism and the Idea of Equality."

*Korthals, Michael. "Two Evils in Food Country: Hunger and Lack of Representation." (K, p. 103-121)

*Fitchen, Janet M. "Hunger, Malnutrition, and Poverty in the Contemporary United States: Some Observations on Their Social and Cultural Context."

Food and the Virtuous Life

*Zepeda, Lydia. "Carving Values with a Spoon." (AM, p. 31-44)

*Korsmeyer, Carolyn. "Ethical Gourmandism," in *The Philosophy of Food*, ed. David M. Kaplan. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012, pp. 87-102.

See also Telfer's chapters on hospitableness and temperance

Unit 3 (last 4 weeks): Eating and Identity

Functional Food

Pollan, Michael. "Unhappy Meals" in the New York Times, Jan 29, 2007.

*Scrinis, Gyorgy. "Nutritionism and Functional Foods" (Kaplan, p. 269-91)

Food & Culture

Menzel, Peter. "What The World Eats, Part 1." Photo gallery, time.com.

*Murcott, Anne. "The Cultural Significance of Food and Eating." *Proceedings for the Nutrition Society* 41, no. 2 (1982): 203-10.

*Scruton, Roger. "Real Men Have Manners." (K, p.24-32)

Pollan, Michael. Excerpt from Ch. 4 of *The Omnivore's Dilemma*.

*Tafoya, Mark. "Diplomacy of the Dish: Cultural Understanding Through Taste." (AM, p.264-75)

*Bailey, Cathryn. "We Are What We Eat: Feminist Vegetarianism and the Reproduction of Racial Identity." *Hypatia* 22, no. 2 (Spring 2007), p. 39-59.

