



## Food, Animals, and the Environment

ENVST-440 / ANST-440  
NYU – Summer 2016

### Summary

This course explores how different food systems affect animals and the environment. We will first examine general questions in ethics: do we have moral obligations to animals, plants, species, ecosystems, and nature; are our obligations directly owed to nonhumans or only a function of what we owe each other as humans; are these individual or collective obligations? We will then survey the structure of industrial animal agriculture and its impacts on humans, nonhumans, health, and the environment. We will next consider alternatives to the industrial food system (local food, organic food, GMOs, synthetic food) and ask whether they are truly consistent with our obligations to humans and nonhumans, especially in the context of global hunger and climate change. Throughout the course, we will address issues in the ethics of eating meat, culture, environmental impact, and food justice.

The **goals of the course** are to provide students with 1) the intellectual tools to make, grasp and evaluate ethical arguments across a variety of domains and practical contexts and to foster their critical reflection on pressing environmental and ethical issues; 2) a solid and comprehensive theoretical and empirical background on these issues; and 3) an overview of both classical and recent essential readings. There are **no prior requirements** in philosophy or environmental studies, but students are expected to be willing to confront with a variety of views, concepts, arguments, and controversies. Debates around the issues covered in this course demand rigor, clarity, and critical self-reflection on both conceptual and empirical matters. Class will alternate between lectures, discussion, group exercises and workshops. It is intended to be as interactive as can be reasonably done while providing comprehensive content. Active participation is therefore required, based on careful analysis and respectful appreciation of others' views. The course will also feature guest speakers, one field trip, and oral presentations.

### General Information

Time: M/W 9:00-11:55am – Place: 25 W4, C-18

Instructor: Nicolas Delon

Email: [nicolas.delon@nyu.edu](mailto:nicolas.delon@nyu.edu)

Office: 285 Mercer, #1006 – Office hours by appointment here: [goo.gl/0tl38l](https://goo.gl/0tl38l)

## Readings

### Required books

Pdfs copies of all readings will be posted on NYU classes on available on NYU Ebrary. The following book is strongly recommended as the textbook for this class, but you're not formally required to purchase it.

- **Paul B. Thompson, *From Field to Fork: Food Ethics for Everyone*, 2015**
  - **available online through NYU; email me to receive a 30% discount on the print**

### Further recommended reading

- Peter Singer & Jim Mason, *The Ethics of What We Eat*, 2006
- James McWilliams, *Just Food*, 2009
- Ronald Sandler, *Food Ethics: The Basics*, 2015
- Lori Gruen, *Ethics and Animals*, 2009 (available online through NYU)
- Dale Jamieson, *Ethics and the Environment*, 2008 (available online through NYU)

## Grades

- **Papers (40%):** You will be assigned two 2,000-word take-home papers. The first paper will be due at 5:00pm on **June 10**; the second paper will be due on **June 26**.
  - A preliminary outline is due **June 3rd** (first paper) / **June 17** (second paper). Your grade will depend in part on your ability to incorporate feedback. I will gladly answer all your methodological questions (either briefly by email or more substantially during office hours).
  - Students can choose their own topic but need to consult with me and have it approved early on, or they can choose one of the suggested prompts. All students will be required to peer-review two anonymous classmates' outlines online. Dates and details TBA.
  - *Recommended:* Jim Pryor's guides to philosophical terms and methods, reading philosophy, and writing a philosophy paper, available here:
    - <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/vocab/index.html>
    - <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>
    - <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>
  - Criteria of assessment:
    - Structure, organization, coherence (25%).
    - Grasp of references and course materials: how you locate and report theses, arguments and concepts used in the texts (25%).
    - Critical skills and originality: grasp of criticisms made by others and ability to formulate personal criticisms based on valid arguments and accurate facts (25%).
    - Writing: grammar, spelling, clarity, terminological accuracy (25%).
- **Presentation (40%):** Pairs of students will give a 15-20 minute presentation (20%) investigating and discussing (the accuracy, importance, and impact of) EITHER a recent debate in the press or

the media surrounding a particular food product, diet, or agricultural system or method; OR an advocacy campaign for a particular diet, food type, or food system, whether from a government agency, a public health actor, a private company, or an activist organization. Each student will also be required to submit a short report (1000 words, plus references) presenting their own contribution to the project (20%).

- Groups will meet have a mid-course meeting in class and will present their project to the rest of the class; feedback is encouraged. The mid-course meeting will not be graded.
- Criteria of assessment mirror those for papers with oral presentation substituted for writing. Creative, innovative, multimedia formats are encouraged.
- **Attendance and participation** (20%):
  - Missing more than one class without permission will negatively impact your grade (you are required to **email me in advance** and bring a note to class). You must arrive on time, consult with me promptly to make up for missed assignments, and you are solely responsible for catching up with missed materials and information.
  - **Active participation** is critical (weekly discussion on course website and class participation). Class activities (debates, policy-making, advocacy, journalism simulations) will be organized.
    - Students will be assessed according to their demonstrated capacity to engage with arguments, verify assertions, research facts, unpack implicit assumptions, and critically examine their own positions.
    - Students must come prepared with their copies of the weekly readings and textbook, personal notes and questions.
- **Extra credit**: write a 1,000-word book review of
  - either James McWilliams, *The Modern Savage*,
  - or Ben Bramble & Bob Fischer (eds.), *The Moral Complexities of Eating Meat*
  - To be submitted by email by the last day of classes
- **Grading scale**: Your final letter grades will be computed according to the following scale. Grades that fall exactly on the upper threshold are awarded the higher grade:

94-100 A	73<77 C
90<94 A-	70<73 C-
87<90 B+	67<70 D+
83<87 B	63<67 D
80<83 B-	60<63 D-
77<80 C+	0 <60 F

## Policies

- **Laptops** are allowed **only for note taking**. Please disable your internet connection during class time. **Cell phones** must be silenced and left in your bag. Laptops and other electronic devices will be banned for everyone if they cause any distraction.
- **Academic honesty**: plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will be checked for electronically and may result in failure for the class and referral to an academic dean. They include: copying fragments from any source without quotes or references; not citing every source used in your papers; citing internet information without proper citation; presenting someone else's work as your own; or copying verbatim from any source. See NYU College of Arts and Science policy on Academic Integrity: <http://cas.nyu.edu/page/ug.academicintegrity> and take advantage of the University's writing and research support and tutoring.
- **Lateness/Extensions**: Out of fairness to other students, extensions can only be given in exceptional circumstances AND if requested at least a week in advance. Without extension or past the extended deadline, late papers will lose 10 grade points (/100) per day.
- If you need **special accommodations** of any sort, please advise me early in the semester.
- The University provides reasonable accommodations to students **who document their disability**. These are adjustments to policy, practice, and programs for students with disabilities and provide equal access to the University's programs and activities. Accommodation plans and other related services are individualized based on each student's disability-related needs, disability documentation and program requirements.

## Schedule<sup>1</sup>

### UNIT 1: BACKGROUND

- 1. Introduction: Welcome to class!**
  - Ethical reasoning. Food, animals, the environment and ethics: what, how, why. Outline
  - Recommended reading:* \*Thompson, chapter 1: “You are NOT what you eat”
- 2. Ethics and the Environment**
  - \*Jamieson, chapters 1 and 6
- 3. Ethics and Animals [NO CLASS -> slides and discussion online]**
  - Singer, “All animals are equal”
  - \*Jamieson, chapter 5, pp. 102-120

### UNIT 2: ANIMAL AGRICULTURE

- 4. Eating animals: part 1**
  - \*Gruen, chapter 3
  - \*Thompson, chapter 5
  - Optional: \*Singer and Mason, chapters 2, 3, 4

**Projects starters**
- 5. Animal agriculture and climate change**
  - Skim through FAO and Worldwatch reports
  - Lappé, “The climate crisis at the end of our fork”
  - Niman “The climate change case against cattle: sorting fact from fiction”

**GUEST SPEAKER: Sonali McDermid (NYU)**
- 6. Industrial agriculture and its discontents**
  - Berry, “The ecological crisis as a crisis of agriculture”
  - Lipscomb, “Agrarianism and meat”

**SCREENING: *Cowspiracy***
- 7. Eating animals: part 2**
  - Pollan, “The ethics of eating meat”
  - Kheel, “Vegetarianism and ecofeminism”
  - Optional: \*Singer and Mason, chapters 6, 7, 8

**FIELD TRIP: Farmers' market & Whole Foods (TBC)**

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<sup>1</sup> Readings marked by a ‘\*’ refer to texts listed in the recommended readings above.

8. **Seafood**

- Jacquet, “Silent water”
- Jacquet, Sebo & Elder, “Bivalves are better”

**GUEST SPEAKER: Jennifer Jacquet (NYU)**

**Projects midway report**

**UNIT 2: FOOD AND SOCIETY**

9. **Social issues**

- \*Thompson, chapter 2
- Pachirat, “Kill floor”
- Harper, “Food deserts 101”
- Optional: Estabrook, “Slavery in the tomato fields”; Pachirat, “Politics of sight”

**SCREENING: *What’s for dinner?***

10. **Producing locally, producing naturally and the future of food**

- \*Thompson, chapter 6
- Matheny, “Environmental impacts of cultured meat”
- Optional: Thompson, chapter 7

**GUEST SPEAKER: Brian Kateman (The Reducetarian Foundation)**

11. **The psychology of eating animals**

- Herzog, selections
- Loughnan and Haslam, “The psychology of eating animals”

**FIELD TRIP to Governor’s Island**

12. **Project presentations**