



Food, Animals, and the Environment (Spring 2022)¹

Prof. Nicolas Delon - ndelon@ncf.edu

Tues & Thurs, 10:30 - 11:50am, ACE 201

Office ACE 303 / Book me: <https://ndelon.youcanbook.me/>

Course description and Objectives

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.

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 ethics and the food system; and 3) an overview of both classical and contemporary readings. There are **no prerequisites**, but students are expected to be willing to confront with a variety of views, concepts, arguments, and controversies. Background in philosophy or environmental studies can help. 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.

Attributes and requirements fulfilled: CYC Breadth - Humanities, CYC Critical Thinking, CYC Ethical Reasoning & Action, CYC Teamwork, Diverse Perspectives, Environmental Studies, First-Year Appropriate, Health, Culture, and Societies, Philosophy Value Theory

Materials

The textbook is [available for free](#) on Taylor & Francis via electronic resources: Christopher Schlottmann and Jeff Sebo, *Food, Animals, and the Environment: An Ethical Approach*, Routledge, 2018

All other readings will be made available through Canvas.

¹ This syllabus is subject to change. Please refer to the latest version on Canvas and check your emails regularly.

Helpful resources

- Anne Barnhill, Mark Budolfson and Tyler Doggett, eds., *Food, Ethics, and Society*
- Anne Barnhill, Mark Budolfson and Tyler Doggett, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Food Ethics*
- I am happy to recommend further readings. Don't hesitate to consult with me if you're unsure where to look/whether something is worth reading/trustworthy

Course Evaluation

Please refer to Canvas for deadlines and announcements. You are expected to complete all assignments unless they are marked as optional. Most of the assignments should be submitted to Canvas. Don't wait until the last minute to submit in case you face technical issues, and always save and back up your drafts. Don't write in Canvas first; draft, save, and back up on your own device and ideally cloud-based storage, then copy to Canvas. Check your email daily and Canvas frequently. I will communicate with you via your New College Gmail account and Canvas announcements, so make sure it is up and running and that you receive notifications for new Canvas announcements.

For reading and writing purposes, Jim Pryor (NYU) offers valuable guidance on his website.

- Philosophical terms and methods (<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/vocab/index.html>)
- Reading philosophy (<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>)
- Writing a philosophy paper (<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>)

One of the goals of this class is to develop **critical thinking** about the intersections of animal agriculture, the food system, and environmental issues. Critical thinking is a habit of mind consisting in the systematic engagement with a topic, idea, issue, or argument from a disposition to assess its presuppositions, merits, and limits. A critical thinker does not accept a claim or conclusion without first assessing what justifies or leads to it. A critical thinker can distinguish valid arguments from fallacies, diagnose insufficient or ambiguous evidence, and unpack assumptions and implications of a specific claims. The purpose of critical thinking is to construct and deploy an intellectual toolkit to think and reason about complex issues—e.g., about food in context and across contexts. This skill will serve you in other classes and beyond philosophy and environmental studies. It will also equip you to approach news and practical problems of public importance with an open mind and the disposition to ask questions and evaluate support (arguments and/or evidence) before taking claims at face value. Here, critical thinking will illuminate your relationship to food and its impacts as a complex practical issue instead of a matter of personal preference. Critically thinking about an issue means that it will look more complicated than it initially seems after a careful assessment. The toolkit will illuminate its various aspects, tensions, the values involved, and the practical obstacles to its resolution.

Another goal is to learn about and cultivate **ethical reasoning** concerning the intersections of animal agriculture, the food system, and environmental issues. Ethical reasoning concerns ethical concepts (good/bad, just/unjust, right/wrong, value, obligation) as they are deployed in theories, arguments, and choices. Ethical reasoning straddles theory and practice and helps students apply their intellectual skills to matters of moral significance and appreciate a plurality of values. In this class we take fundamental ethical ideas and apply them to food choices and policies at the levels of production, distribution, and consumption. We compare the verdicts of different ethical theories, assess the merits of various arguments, and bring evidence to make on our decision-making. The purpose of ethical reasoning is to develop an intellectual toolkit to think and reason about ethical issues in context and across contexts, to illuminate unquestioned practices from an ethical perspective. Rather than teaching how to act ethically, we aim to think about ethical issues (critically, considering various perspectives and arguments) and integrate abstract theories, case studies, and perhaps look at ways of living ethically.

Finally, this class will have you **work in teams** to collectively explore a topic of public importance concerning the intersections of animal agriculture, the food system, and environmental issues. Teamwork consists in the coordination of individual team members to achieve a joint goal and is assessed in terms of three main components: the collective process, its outcome, and each individual's contribution (timely completion of assigned tasks, communication with the group, participation in integrated efforts, and written reflection). Teamwork involves meetings, coordination, distribution of tasks, constructive contributions, and independent work outside of team meetings. In this class you will deploy course materials *and* research to present to the class an issue related to food choices and policies at the level of production, distribution, and/or consumption. The purpose of teamwork is to train students to work together and to achieve collective outcomes that would be infeasible or harder individually. It seeks to foster valuable dispositions to coordinate action, distribute tasks, integrate content from multiple sources, contribute to joint projects, and respond to conflict and challenges. These sub-skills are essential to a lot of jobs as well as academic research and administration.

You will develop these CYC skills through a series of readings, discussions, and assignments. Activities will include balanced, constructive class discussions; debates after video/recent event; essay questions; field observation/ interviews for the group project.

Evaluation criteria: a balance of structure, rigor and clarity; a solid command of references and course-related materials; critical thinking; originality. Most specifically, and in relation to CYC skills:

- Clear writing and effective and competent oral communication
- Clearly laid out arguments and evidence
- A demonstrated effort to unpack and explicate assumptions
- The consideration of objections and of multiple theories and values
- The application of such theories and their implications to the case at hand
- Contributing respectfully and constructively to discussions and group meetings
- Timely completion of assigned tasks

Tests are graded on a numerical basis. Papers and presentations are graded on a qualitative (SAT) scale.

Tests

3 short quizzes (multiple-choice questions) (5% each) and **1 midterm** (take-home, essay questions) (15%). Quizzes will help you assess your command of course materials (central concepts, theories, and facts), which are essential for doing well on other assignments and for applying the course materials to real-world problems. You will receive detailed instructions for the exam, which will test your reasoning and analytical skills rather than your command of content. You will be asked to apply ethical theories, arguments, and, if possible, facts, to a new case study (real or fictional) to illuminate the ethical issues at hand and offer possible approaches.

Tests cover all materials up to test day. SAT \geq 60% avg.

CYC skills: Ethical Reasoning and Critical Thinking.

Term paper

Around 1,500 words. You can choose your own topic but you must have it approved first, or you can choose from suggested prompts. A **preliminary outline** will be required and go through **peer review**. A complete paper must include a title, a question and a thesis statement, a structured argument, and at

least four academic references drawn from course materials and personal research. At least two distinct ethical theories must be discussed and applied to the cases at hand. Use Chicago or APA citations.

CYC skills: Ethical Reasoning and Critical Thinking.

Collaborative project

The project seeks to offer a valuable experience researching in depth a practical, everyday aspect of their life from an ethical, empirically informed perspective, along with classmates who may share an interest in the topic but not necessarily their ethical or political beliefs. The topic will not have been extensively discussed in class, to allow students to apply and transfer learning to a new context: it can be any specific issue of public and/or ethical concern involving the food system and its impact on animals, the environment, and human beings. Students will deploy and critically assess concepts, theories, arguments, and data presented in class and enhanced by collective research. The project includes a proposal, periodic check-ins, an oral presentation with slides and/or another deliverable, and individual reflection essays. Creative, innovative, multimedia-based, field-based projects are welcome.

CYC skills: Ethical Reasoning, Teamwork, and Critical Thinking.

Discussions

Based on the textbook and further readings will assess the merits of multiple positions on a given aspect of the food system. Students are encouraged to adopt and defend positions at odds with their personal opinions. When disagreeing, they will specify which part of an argument they are objecting to. You will lead ONE discussion in the semester (I will circulate a sign up sheet): this consists in extensively commenting on a reading on Perusall, synthesizing the main argument in class, and leading a discussion. Prior to class, *all* students will annotate readings on Perusall, preferably by (i) asking questions/raising objections *and* (ii) responding to other students' annotations.

SAT => completion of at least 75% of the annotations and completing leading one discussion.

CYC skills: Ethical Reasoning and Critical Thinking.

Participation

I will assess your demonstrated capacity to engage with arguments, verify assertions, research facts, unpack implicit assumptions, critically examine your positions, and work with the class with mutual respect, concern and dedication. Most importantly, we're all here to learn what can make our lives better, so be an active participant and help others achieve this goal. Missing classes mechanically affects your participation, and therefore your evaluation. That said, there may always be good reasons to miss a class, in which case your performance will not be negatively affected. It's understandable that some of you are shyer than others, and less willing to speak their mind in class. You should not. There is no such thing as a silly question (unless it's clearly answered in the syllabus), a view not worth sharing because it's not popular, or an authorized point of view that students should take. Please feel welcome to express yourself as long as you do so respectfully, in good faith, and following course policies.

Policies

Laptop use is strongly discouraged. **Cell phones** must be silenced and left in your bag. Electronic devices cause serious distractions for yourself and others and are normally not needed for class meetings, except, again, if they are necessary for note taking. Handouts will be provided regularly, and slides made available after class. You will need a computer or smartphone for some class activities. I will notify you in advance in such cases.

Lateness/Extensions: Out of fairness to other students and out of concern for my schedule, plan ahead and advise early if you anticipate that you will be unable to complete an assignment in time. Extensions will only be granted in exceptional circumstances **and** if requested with a minimum of a week's notice. As a rule, do not count on extensions as they will only be granted on a case-by-case basis. "Technical issues" will not normally be accepted as excuses (again, plan ahead).

Attendance is mandatory. Missing more than three classes without permission will normally result in an UNSAT and any unjustified absence will affect your evaluation. I will keep track of absences. Please email me **before missing class whenever possible (or ASAP after class)**. You are solely responsible for catching up with missed materials and pertinent information. Ask your classmates for notes.

You are responsible for knowing material covered in the assigned readings even if the material is not presented during class. Likewise, you are responsible for material covered during class (including discussions and activities) even if it is not covered in the assigned readings. Please seek help from me or your classmates and never hesitate to ask questions, consult resource centers (writing resource center, library, quantitative reasoning). Really, needing help is expected and there are no silly questions. Silly is not asking questions when you need.

Disability services and accommodation: I am committed to providing an inclusive and effective learning environment for all students regardless of ability status. I will do my best to provide alternatives for materials and tests when applicable. Students in need of academic accommodations for a disability may consult with the office of Student Disability Services (SDS) to arrange appropriate accommodations (<https://www.ncf.edu/disability-services-ncf>, HCL3, (941) 487-4496, disabilityservices@ncf.edu). To ensure that I can work with Student Disability Services to provide the resources that you need, please alert me of your accommodation eligibility as early as possible and request testing accommodation in writing at least 10 days before scheduled date of the exam listed on the syllabus. If obtaining accommodations from the SDS is itself challenging for you, let me know so I can help you. To increase accessibility, especially in the event of students having to stay home for illness or COVID-19 symptoms, I will attempt to record class meetings (audio of lecture and discussion; video of whiteboard). I will maintain records for at least the entire academic year. I will not use the recordings for purposes not related to teaching. Students reserve the right to access the recordings.

Academic honesty: Students are expected to be familiar with the college's [academic dishonesty policy](#). Any violation of this policy, including plagiarism and cheating, may result in academic sanctions, up to and including, dismissal.

Religious observance: Please alert me as soon as possible if an assignment is due at a day or time when you are prohibited from participating by your religious beliefs. I will gladly accommodate any missed day for religious reasons.

Title IX: New College of Florida is committed to equal access to education pursuant to Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972. The law protects all individuals on our campus from gender-based discrimination or exclusion or instances of sexual misconduct. All full-time faculty, full-time staff, and

resident advisors are Responsible Employees required to report any known instances of sexual misconduct or gender discrimination to the Title IX Coordinator. Please contact our Title IX coordinator (titleix@ncf.edu) or visit the [website](#) for more information. Sexual assault awareness is important for our community to be vibrant and to have free exchange of ideas in a safe environment. The Victim Advocate number is (941) 504-8599; with 24-hour availability for assistance with crime, sexual assault, and partner violence. Sexual Assault does not discriminate between age, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, ethnicity, or race. It is important to have a clear understanding of what sexual assault is and is not, as well as the resources available for sexual assault prevention and survivor support. More information is at www.ncf.edu/sexual-assault-awareness.

Equity, Diversity, and Equal Opportunity: New College's commitment to academic excellence can only be realized in a learning environment that is inclusive, characterized by openness to diverse perspectives, and marked by mutual respect. Anything short of this aspiration is inconsistent with our commitment. Equal access, and the opportunity to participate fully in all of our programs and facilities, without regard to race, color, creed, religion, political ideology, national origin, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation, is essential to that commitment and will be the standard to which we expect all members of our learning community to adhere.

HB 233 ("Viewpoint Diversity" bill): Students may record classroom lectures without a requirement for prior notice and without the faculty member's consent, with specific limitations on where and how those recordings can be used. In particular, "a recorded lecture may not be published without the consent of the lecturer," and it may be employed only "for a student's own personal educational use", "in connection with a complaint to the public institution of higher education where the recording was made", and/or "as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding". Recorded lectures used for other purposes may allow the faculty member to seek "damages plus court costs and reasonable attorney fees, with the total recovery not to exceed \$200,000." A class lecture does not include student presentations, academic exercises involving student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), or private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the instructor during a class session.

COVID-19 guidelines: The success of this class depends on mutual trust. Please refer to campus regarding vaccines, masks, and testing. I will fully accommodate students who miss class for medical reasons. If you feel symptoms before class, you may be excused. If you are sick, please stay home and email me. Most importantly, **please be respectful, considerate, and kind to each other.**

Schedule

UNIT 1: Background

- **Week 1: Introduction: Welcome to class!**
 - Food, animals, the environment and ethics: what, how, why.
 - Attitudinal survey
- **Week 1: Ethics and Food I**
 - Catch up on FAE, 1-3
- **Week 2: Ethics and Food II**
 - FAE, 4
- **Week 3: The psychology of eating animals**
 - Herzog, interview
 - Loughnan and Haslam, The psychology of eating animals
 - Piazza et al., Rationalizing meat consumption: The 4 Ns

UNIT 2: Animal agriculture and the environment

- **Week 4-5: Empirical impacts: General and Industrial**
 - FAE, 5-6
- **Week 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
- **Week 6: Empirical impacts: Alternatives**
 - FAE, 7
 - Singer and Mason, chapters 6-7
 - Berry, The ecological crisis as a crisis of agriculture
- **Week 7: Food and technology**
 - Sandler, chapter 4
 - Selections on plant-based and cultured meat

[QUIZ 1](#)

[MIDTERM](#)

SPRING BREAK (week 8)

- **Week 9: Ethical questions: Production**
 - FAE, 8
 - Delon, The replaceability argument in the ethics of animal husbandry
 - Jacquet, Sebo & Elder, Bivalves are better
- **Week 10: Ethical questions: Consumption I**
 - FAE, 9

[QUIZ 2](#)

- Pollan, The ethics of eating meat
- Barnhill, Does locavorism keep it too simple?
- **Week 11: Ethical questions: Consumption II**
 - Nefsky, Consumer choice and collective impact
 - Fischer, Arguments for consuming animal products
 - Bruckner, Strict vegetarianism is immoral

[PAPER OUTLINE](#)

UNIT 3: food and society

- **Week 12: Labor issues**

[QUIZ 3](#)

- Pachirat, 'Kill floor' and 'Politics of Sight'
- Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation* (excerpts)
- Estabrook, Slavery in the tomato fields
- Singer and Mason, chapter 11
- **Week 13: Activism and politics**
 - FAE, 10-11
 - Kheel, Vegetarianism and ecofeminism
 - Sullivan and Wolfson, Foxes in the Henhouse
 - Shiva, Women and the gendered politics of food
- **Week 14: Food justice**
 - Harper, Food deserts 101
 - Budolfson, Food, the environment, and global justice
 - Whyte, Food justice and collective food relations
 - Attitudinal survey

[GROUP PRESENTATIONS](#)
[TERM PAPER](#)