

**PHILOSOPHY 103**  
**SPECIAL TOPICS IN ETHICS AND VALUES**

**BULLETIN INFORMATION**

PHIL 103: Special Topics in Ethics and Values (3 credit hours)

**Course Description:**

A study of the moral principles of conduct and the basic concepts underlying these principles, such as good, evil, right, wrong, justice, value, duty, and obligation, as they relate to specific issues or areas of life. May be repeated as content varies by title.

**Sample Special Topic**

PHIL 103A: Ethics of Food

Examination of ethical and societal issues associated with the production and consumption of food.

**SAMPLE COURSE OVERVIEW**

Eating is one of the central aspects of our everyday lives. Moreover, food is constantly in the news, for a variety of reasons: local food movements have been flourishing, people are desperately looking for strategies to lose weight and control “obesity epidemics,” food prices have fluctuated dramatically, world trade summits have highlighted concerns about agricultural subsidies, and many activists have rallied against genetically modified foods. This course provides an opportunity to think about a number of pressing ethical issues associated with food production and consumption. The course will be organized in three units:

1. Growing Food: We will consider whether we should be trying to change our agricultural practices to be more socially and environmentally friendly (e.g., using less fertilizers and pesticides, pursuing—or not pursuing—biofuel production, or altering farm subsidies). We will also consider whether we could make these sorts of changes while producing enough food for the world population and keeping prices affordable.
2. Food Processing, Consumption, and Marketing: We will examine ethical concerns about the treatment of workers in the food processing system, the problem of hunger around the world, and the treatment of animals in agriculture. This unit will also explore concerns about food advertising that may contribute to rising obesity rates, especially among children. On the flip side, we will consider whether our society has developed standards for beauty, especially for women that raise ethical concerns because of their focus on being overly thin.
3. Genetically Modified Foods: We will examine the major arguments for and against producing genetically modified foods. We will also reflect on debates about the patenting of these genetically modified organisms, the merits of labeling food that contains them, and the effects that they might have on developing countries.

## ITEMIZED LEARNING OUTCOMES

### Upon successful completion of Philosophy 103, students will be able to:

1. Identify the sources and functions of values in personal and social reflection about the consumption and production of food, and the relationship between them;
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the importance of values and ethics for citizens and policy-makers engages in reflection about the consumption and production of food
3. Reflect on how personal values shape personal and community ethics and decision making about food policy as it relates to health, personal rights, social welfare, and social justice.

### SAMPLE REQUIRED TEXTS/SUGGESTED READINGS/MATERIALS

1. Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. Penguin, 2006. [OD]
2. Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*. Perennial (HarperCollins), 2002. [FFN]
3. Gregory Pence (ed.), *The Ethics of Food*. Rowman and Littlefield, 2002. [EF]
4. Course Packet (available electronically, listed in order of reading):
  - a. Paul Thompson, "The Agricultural Ethics of Biofuels: A First Look", *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* (2008) 21:183–198
  - b. Tyler Cowen, "Can You Really Save the Planet at the Dinner Table? An economist's critique of The Omnivore's Dilemma", [www.slate.com](http://www.slate.com) (Nov. 1, 2006).
  - c. Blake Hurst, "The Omnivore's Delusion: Against the Agri-intellectuals", *The American*, July 30, 2009.
  - d. Food Ethics Council, "'Food Miles' Or 'Food Minutes': Is sustainability all in the timing?", 2007.
  - e. Food Ethics Council, 'Food Distribution: An Ethical Agenda', 2008.
  - f. Singer, Peter. "Famine, Affluence, and Morality." *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1972: 229-243.
  - g. Lawrence O. Gostin and Madison Powers, "What Does Social Justice Require For The Public's Health? Public Health Ethics And Policy Imperatives", *Health Aff.* 2006, vol. 25:1053-1060.
  - h. Ingeborg Grønning, "From fatness to badness: The modern morality of obesity", *Health (London)* July 16, 2012.
  - i. Emma Rich and John Evans, "'Fat Ethics' – The Obesity Discourse and Body Politics", *Social Theory & Health*, Volume 3, Number 4, November 2005, 341-358.
  - j. John N Burry, "Obesity and virtue. Is staying lean a matter of ethics?", *Med J Aust* 1999, 171: 609-610.
  - k. Sheldon Rampton, John Stauber, "Attack of the Killer Potatoes", ch. 7 in *Trust Us We're Experts: How Industry Manipulates Science and Gambles with Your Future*. Tarcher Press, 2002.
  - l. Philip G. Peters and Thomas A. Lambert, "Regulatory Barriers to Consumer Information", ch. 9 in Paul Weirich, ed., *Labeling Genetically Modified Food: The Philosophical and Legal Debate*. Oxford University Press, 2008.
  - m. Carl Cranor, "Different Conceptions of Food Labels and Acceptable Risks: Some Contingent/Institutional Considerations in Favor of Labeling" ch. 11 in Paul

Weirich, ed., *Labeling Genetically Modified Food: The Philosophical and Legal Debate*. Oxford University Press, 2008.

### **SAMPLE ASSIGNMENTS AND/OR EXAMS**

1. Two Exams: Mid-term and Final (non-cumulative)
2. Two Reflection Papers
3. Instructions for Reflection Papers:
  - a. Each paper should be about 6 pages (and no longer than 8 pages), double spaced, 12 point font. It should contain the following four parts, with each part clearly numbered or labeled.
    - i. Provide a quotation from the book that you're supposed to be writing about. Choose a quotation that reflects a fairly central theme or an important issue in the book. I'd suggest that the quotation not be much more than two sentences. It should be focused on the basic ethical case that is being made by the author, an issue of what is right or wrong, or what ethical principles should be brought to bear on our deliberations about what is right or wrong.
    - ii. Explain in your own words what the author is expressing in the quotation. Your explanation might include some discussion of the context in which it occurs. The explanation should be about 1 page.
    - iii. Discuss the relationship between the quotation and the rest of the book (or however much of the book you were assigned to read for this class). You should use this section to showcase your understanding of the book as a whole, especially the source and function that the author sees for values and ethical principles in our deliberations about the best ways to pursue the consumption and production of food. For example, does the quotation provide a summary of the book's main argument on this point? If so, clarify what that argument is and how it is defended or elaborated throughout the book. Or does the quotation reflect just one of several related arguments? If so, state what those arguments are and how they relate to one another. Or is there tension between the passage that you quoted and much of the book? If so, discuss that tension. It would be particularly impressive if you could also highlight any interesting connections between your quotation and any of our other course readings. This section should be about 2-3 pages.
    - iv. Reflect on your quotation. Clarify whether you agree with the author's position, whether you would accept a somewhat modified view, or whether you disagree. Provide good reasons in support of your own position. Your reasons should be specifically related to basic ethical principles and values (such as justice, fairness, liberty, and so on) that you deem to be particularly relevant to the issue at hand, and the specific

nature of that relevance should be clearly explained. You should also mention at least one objection that others (perhaps with different ethical backgrounds or theories) might have to your position and how you would respond to that objection. This section should be about 2-3 pages.

4. Service learning
  - a. Each student is required to volunteer at the Food Bank for at least four hours. There will be two opportunities in the semester for members of the class volunteer together but you can also volunteer individually, if necessary. Additional information and forms will be made available in class.

## **SAMPLE COURSE OUTLINE WITH TIMELINE OF TOPICS, READINGS/ASSIGNMENTS, EXAMS/PROJECTS**

### **Unit 1: Growing Food**

**Week 1:** Industrial Agriculture – Grain. (OD, 1-64)  
What values are driving the level of grain production in the U.S., and the world?  
Are the methods of production consistent with the social goals of health and well-being?  
Are the uses to which grain is put responsive to the most important social needs?

**Week 2:** Industrial Agriculture – Meat. (OD, 65-119)  
What values are driving the level of meat production in the U.S., and the world?  
Are the methods of production consistent with the social goals of health and well-being?  
Might the resources used for the production of meat be used for more important social needs? Ought they be?

**Week 3:** Industrial Agriculture – Potential Benefits. (Thompson, Cowen, Hurst, FFN, 193-222)  
Is industrial agriculture an effective way to meet our growing energy needs?  
How do we balance the need for energy with other needs, such as good food or clean air?  
Is industrial agriculture required to feed the world? If so, does that fact dictate that we continue farming in this way?

**Week 4:** Organic Agriculture. (EF, Ch. 11, 12, OD, 123-151)  
What values are driving the organic food revolution?  
How could farming practices exhibit social or ethical values?  
Does organic agriculture forsake the need to feed the hungry?

**Week 5:** Local/Innovative Agriculture. (OD, 151-207, Food Ethics Council)  
Does personal freedom to consume (and to provide to consumers) outweigh public interests (concerning energy, pollution, freedom from hunger)?

Are the values of the free market economy in conflict with the social value of a lack of wastefulness of energy for the purpose of transporting food?  
What role, if any, should government play in policies regarding food transportation?

- Week 6:** Summary and Review. (OD, 208-273)  
General reflection on the material to this point, with a focus on the role that ethical principles and value play in decision-making about food policy.

## **MID-TERM EXAM**

### **Unit 2: Food Processing, Consumption, and Marketing**

- Week 7:** Food Industry Workers. (FFN, 59-88, 149-190)  
What obligations, if any, do consumers owe those who produce our goods?  
Are these obligations any different in the food industry?  
Reflections on OD Due
- Week 8:** Eating Animals. (OD, 304-333, EF Ch. 3, 4)  
What are the ethical or moral reasons that people give against or for eating animals?  
Do health considerations play a role in the ethics of animal consumption?
- Week 9:** Famine/Hunger. (Singer, EF Ch. 5, FFN 31-57)  
What obligations do we have to those who do not have enough to eat?  
How is the social good of freedom from hunger to be balanced with other social goods, such as liberty?
- Week 10:** Obesity as a Public Health Issue. (FFN, 225-288, Gostin and Powers)  
What obligations do we have, as individuals or as society, to prevent obesity?  
How is the promotion or prevention of obesity related to other ethical decisions that we make about food, such as the decision to eat organically, or to eat certain foods, or to eat local foods?
- Week 11:** Obesity and Society. (Grønning, Rich and Evans, Burry)  
How should the obese be treated?  
Are obese people responsible for their condition? What would such responsibility entail?  
Reflections on FFN

### **Unit 3: Genetically Modified Foods**

- Week 12:** For and Against. (EF, Ch. 10, 15, Rampton and Stauber)  
What are the moral and ethical considerations for and against the production of genetically modified foods?

What ethical or moral principles are at stake (for example, autonomy and freedom)?

**Week 13:** Labeling. (Peters and Lambert, Cranor)

Do citizens have a right to know what is in their food?

What knowledge is granted by labeling?

How do we balance the rights of citizens with the protection of proprietary information?

**Week 14:** The Developing World. (EF 6,7,13)

Do those in the developed world have a duty to feed those in the developing world? If so, what form ought such aid take?

What, if any, obligation do citizens of a developed country have to adopt policies and practices with regard to the importing and exporting of food that promote various effects in developing countries?

**Week 15:** Review

General reflection on the material to this point, with a focus on the role that ethical principles and value play in decision-making about food policy.

**Final Exam according to University exam schedule**

