Epicurus writes, “…even as men choose of food not merely and simply the larger portion, but the more pleasant, so the wise seek to enjoy the time which is most pleasant and not merely that which longest.” (“Letter to Menoeceus”)

Emmanuel Levinas says, “It is interesting to observe that Heidegger [the arch-philosopher of the twentieth-century] does not take the relation of enjoyment into consideration. The implement has entirely masked the usage and the issuance at the term-the satisfaction. [The human] in [philosophy] is never hungry. Food can be interpreted as an implement only in a world of exploitation.”

Rousseau says, “…the most suitable means for governing children is to lead them by their mouths.”

Overview: This class is designed to provoke, over the course of a semester, a conceptual and practical inversion: a movement from a “philosophy of food” to “eating as philosophy.” We begin the traditional genres and themes passed down
and established by the history of philosophy. Often, philosophy is seen as a tool or instrument that is used in order to interpret, analyze, elucidate, the philosophical themes contained in other things. Philosophy is “applied” to other things. To do this, philosophy must remain external to the objects it engages. We will begin this class in line with the tradition by using various categories, concepts, arguments, positions, schools of thought, etc. that are circulated and popularized in the philosophical canon. While we will begin in the domain of the classic model of philosophy, we will not stay there. The whole aim of beginning squarely within the discipline and history of philosophy is to try to take the concepts you all have learned over the course of your career at Elon and push them as closely as possible to food. This is more than mere application. This is an attempt to force an encounter between two seemingly opposed things: thought and matter, food and concepts. As we hoist concepts onto objects, there is no telling what we may find, and we must remain open to the results of our experiment. We may find that, in the face of the food, the concept simply breaks down; perhaps the concept simply does not fit the food object. Or we may find that the concept overwhelms the food, over-determining it such that the materiality of the food seems to spread out and disappear beneath the weight and breadth of the concept. The hope is that as concepts and food continue to approach each other, where we will try to actually jam a concept inside an apple or filet of fish, a productive tension will emerge that will transform how we do philosophy and how we eat.

Through this encounter between thought and things, we will, if successful, invert the order of priority so that we are not applying philosophy to food and eating. Instead, we will begin with the concrete practice of eating and try to engage the philosophy within, or perhaps to force the philosophical to emerge out of the act of eating. We can phrase this like a question: What if we try to overcome the philosophy of food and instead make eating itself a philosophical act, akin to any other work of philosophy? What if a food held as much philosophical value as we find in, say, Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason or Plato’s Republic? What if we erase the distance between philosophy and food such that philosophy is no longer an external tool applied to a problematized object but is instead a re-conception of food as itself a philosophy object and philosophy as something you grow, harvest, eat, and expel? Just as not every book is a philosophy book, but only some; just as not every discussion is a philosophical discussion, but only some; what if some meals, but not all, could themselves be ways of doing philosophy? It is one thing to philosophize about food, to do the philosophy of food, but it seems like a very different thing to think about the act of eating as itself a philosophical act and of philosophy as a kind of eating. Is there a way, we asked, for us to eat together so that it became an act of philosophy akin to reading or discussing Kant or Plato? If philosophy truly is a way of living, then eating, an undeniable element in living, must also be philosophical. The is our claim: it is not a matter of doing a philosophy of food but of actualizing the philosophical potential in our ordinary lives. Our task is thus this: How do we make eating itself, in every essential dimension, a philosophical act? Now, in the last year of your philosophy major at Elon, we will make this claim and take up this task. As we do so, remember the words of the wonderful Ralph Waldo Emerson, “I cannot remember the books I’ve read any more than the meals I have eaten; even so, they have made me.”

Learning goals of the class:
1) To reflect on your time as a philosophy major at Elon and articulate what it means to do philosophy.
2) To pose and answer the fundamental philosophical question – What is philosophy? – through the theme and practice of food and eating
3) To see what it means to prepare and eat a meal in full consciousness of what was involved in its production and consumption
4) To look as far into the food systems that support us as we can look in order to recover, if possible, the fundamental realities (material, biological, ethical, political, etc.) that are obscured by modern practices of eating
5) To collectively and personally track down and interrogate the vast web of relations with other species that we collect under the verb “eating,” dig up the essential elements and structures, and look at it directly in order to see whatever there is to see

1 This is another way to think of it: To put it in the form of the old cliché, we will first take seriously what it means for food to be for thought, a concept is inspired by Nietzsche’s observation that language and grammar shape our most foundational and meaningful ideas. Given a grammar that emphasizes the role of the grammatical subject, such as English, there is a corresponding emphasis, or overemphasis, on the function of human subjectivity or selfhood. Similarly, Nietzsche notices, the stresses in cuisine or diet of a person or culture shapes what is stressed in thought. The second half will then flip this formula on its head and ask what it means for thought to be for food.
ASSIGNMENTS

1) Food and Reading Journal (20% of grade)
You must write one journal entry per class, with two parts each:

Part I: The first entry should list of the meals you have eaten since your last entry/class. This means that you should keep track of every meal you eat this semester (or if we are being realistic, as many as you can; please do your best). Each entry should include the following:
1) The name or contents of the dish (e.g., trout, tomatoes, toast, etc.)
2) When it was eaten
3) Where it was eaten
4) With whom (if anyone) you dined

Part II: A reflection on the reading.
(1) Select a passage that is relevant to your project
   a. While reading our texts, try to remain sensitive to those elements of these philosophies that speak to your project. Gather them together and then copy down the one or two passages into your journal, including a citation (page number, author, title), that truly strike your interest, passion, curiosity, anger, etc.

(2) Next, ruminate on the passage
   a. Let’s strive to practice reading as a kind of eating: reading as rumination. Nietzsche puts it this way: a text “has not been deciphered when it has simply been read; rather, one has then to begin its exegesis, for which is required an art of exegesis…To be sure, one thing is necessary above all if one is to practice reading as an art in this way, something that has been unlearned most thoroughly – nowadays – and therefore it will be some time before my writings are ‘readable’ – something for which one has almost to be a cow and in any case not a ‘modern man’: rumination.” (Preface to Genealogy of Morals)
   b. Etymologically, to ‘ruminate’ means “to chew the cud.” Cud is a portion of food that returns from a chewer’s stomach to the mouth in order to be chewed a second time. Like chewing on a cud, I ask you to “chew” on a passage until it becomes soft enough for you to swallow and digest. Record this process in writing.

(3) Finally, formulate insights
   a. Once you have ‘chewed on’ a poignant passage for a while, you should distill your ruminations into precise, sophisticated, and insightful bites. Give the class a taste of what you cooked up. Impress us all with the high-level of your thinking. Sometimes you will want to zoom in on the details of a single concept or phrase (we might call this “analysis”), other times you will want to zoom out and gather together large sets of concepts (we could call this “synthesis”). But always produce at least one insightful, informed, philosophically interesting question that you can share with our class.

2) Two Philosophical Meals (10% each; 20% total)
As a class, we will gather, make, and eat two meals together, each with the same goal: To do philosophy in the form of eating; or: To eat philosophically. We can think of it as a sort of “philosophagy.” Or if you appreciate a little more word play, we will act as “philosovores.”

The goal of these meals is to make and test various rules of philosophical eating. There are three steps:
1) Prior to the meal, each person will construct a philosophical rule for eating. You will write a 2-page essay on this rule in which you explain why it is philosophical and how it might change how we do and think about philosophy. Your essay should be informed and inspired by the texts we
have read and conversations we have had during the semester. You must use at least two philosophical ideas, concepts, or arguments in your short essay. Bring this short essay to the meal.

2) During the meal, each person must present the rule he or she formulated to the rest of the class. Teach us to follow your rule. Make us see the philosophical power contained therein. Tell us why it is philosophical and not just another rule for eating. Help us critically evaluate your rule.

3) After the meal, you should write a 1-page reflection on your rule, in light of the conversation during the meal. Submit this before the beginning of the next class meeting.

3) Seminar Project (40% of grade)
As this is a senior seminar, you are required to write a formal seminar paper. This can be on any topic of your choosing. There are so many ways to engage food, and our class will only be able to touch upon a few of these. Your seminar paper is then your opportunity to either extend a class focus or take up another one; it should act as your own personal lens, whatever that may be, into the philosophy of food and eating. One key requirement: Whatever lens you choose, it must remain distinctly philosophical. This paper will be due on the last day of class, on the day of the final meal. The goal of the paper is to show that you have made progress in thinking philosophically about food and of eating as a way of philosophizing.

This work should be written as if it were to be presented to an audience of faculty members, made up of both philosophers and non-philosophers. This means that it needs to be very well crafted and that it needs to carefully use technical terms and names of philosophers — and where these are used, the technical language/philosophers’ names need to be explained in a way that intelligent non-philosophers will be able to make sense both of what you are saying and why you are using the technical language/philosophers’ names. It also needs to be tightly argued, “acceptable” to the most critical of audience members. (By the way, I am using the term “acceptable” here technically to mean that it is something worth taking up and discussing, including to argue against; the goal is not merely to convince others that you are right, but to engage them in a way that they would want to take up the issues/interpretations as presented to agree with or to disagree with or something else. 2)

In order to ensure that you are making progress, you are required to consult with one other member of the philosophy department or the visiting speaker for the Reynolds Lecture Series. I strongly advise you to take full advantage of the visit from other faculty members to our class. Engage these visits fully, and follow up afterwards. This other philosopher will must be able to perform the following roles:

1) This philosopher must be available to help you as you formulate your topic, write early drafts, and think through the issues involved, and consult with you through the revision process (other than an initial meeting, this is all up to you to determine; you can use this philosopher more or less, depending on your needs);

2) This philosophy must read your draft and will consult with me as I make the determination that your paper is “philosophically significant and informed”;

3) This philosopher will consult with me as I determine the final grade for your paper.

4) You must share a meal with this philosopher. It could be a cup of coffee, lunch, dinner, ice cream, whatever. But you must engage your paper while eating or cooking.

(Note: Throughout, while you will be getting help from another member of the department and I will be consulting with person, I as the instructor of record, am the one who ultimately will determine your grade based on the criteria we discuss in class.)

4) A Seven Course Philosophical Meal (20% of grade)

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We will end the course with one final meal together, which will also be your final project. For this, we will prepare a seven course philosophical meal. Why seven? Because there are seven students in our class. Each student will design, present, and guide one course. Together, we will conduct a full philosophical meal. We will invite the whole Philosophy Department, and any other special guests we might want to include, to this event. We will teach all those present how to eat as a philosophical act.

There is a writing assignment attached to this, of course. But rather than a usual final paper, we will write a menu. Each person will be in charge of the section that corresponds to his, her, or their section, but you will all write the introduction and conclusion to the meal together, along with the organization or ordering of the meal. But let’s use menu language. A different person will be in charge of one course – e.g., hors d’oeuvres, plat principal, dessert, etc. – but you will co-write the entrée (as in, “entrance into the meal”) and the sortie (or “exit from the meal”). It will be a sort of gastronomical deduction, physiological inference, or a degustation of philosophy, wherein we will guide our table partners through a philosophical movement through food.

**Nietzsche on eating**

“The belly is the reason man does not so easily take himself for a god.”

“That which translates worst from one language to another is the tempo of its style, which has its origin in the character of the race, or, expressed more physiologically, in the average tempo of its ‘metabolism.’”

**Required text**


**Some decent philosophy texts on food and eating**

Raymond Boisvert, *I eat, therefore I think*

Raymond Boisvert and Lisa Heldke, *Philosophers at Table: On Food and Being Human* (Reaktion Books, 2016)

Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, *The Physiology of Taste: Or Meditations on Transcendental Gastronomy*

Michel de Certeau and Luce Girard, *The Practice of Everyday Life, Volume II: Living and Cooking*

Alix Cohen, “The Ultimate Kantian Experience: Kant on Dinner Parties”

*Collapse: Volume VII* (a volume of a philosophy-art journal on “Culinary Materialism”)

*Cooking, Eating, Thinking*, Deane W. Curtin and Lisa Heldke (eds.) (Indiana UP, 1992)

Epicurus, *The Epicurus Reader*

*Food and Culture: A Reader*, Carol Coulihan (ed.) (NY: Routledge, 1977)

*Food and Philosophy*, Fritz Alhoff and Dave Monroe (eds.) (Blackwell Publishing, 2007)

Michel Foucault, “Dietetics,” in *The Use of Pleasure*


Claude Levi-Strauss, *Raw and the Cooked*

Michel Onfray, *Appetites for Thought: Philosophers and Food*


Robert Valgenti (*http://www.lvc.edu/religion-philosophy/valgenti.aspx*)


**Some (supposedly) “Nonphilosophy” texts on food and eating**

Honoré de Balzac, *The Belly of Paris*, “The pleasures and pains of coffee,”

Dan Barber, *The Third Plate*


Arite Cuisine, *Jailhouse Cookbook: The Prisoner’s Recipe Bible* (GoodReadBooks, 2013)

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3 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, section 141.

“Edible Geographies,” a blog written by Nicola Twilley
M.F.K. Fisher, *The Art of Eating*
Jean-Louis Flandrin, *Food: A Culinary History from Antiquity to the Present*, 1999
Peter Gamsey, *Food and Society in Classical Antiquity*
Marvin Harris, *Cows, Pigs, Wars, and Witches: The Riddles of Culture*
Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast*
Mark Kurlansky, *Salt: A World History*
Laura Shapiro, *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century* (Modern Library, 2001)
*Thug Kitchen Cookbook*, (Rodale Books, 2014)
John Wilkins and Shaun Hill, *Food in the Ancient World*
Bee Wilson, *Consider the Fork*

**Class Schedule**

**Aug. 31:** What kind of thing is food? What kind of act is eating?
READ for this class:
Wendell Berry, “The Pleasures of Eating”

**Sept. 5:** Food and the History of Philosophy, Part I
READ for this class:
Epicurus, “Letter to Menoeceus”
Michael Symons, “Epicurus, the Foodie’s Philosopher”
Wendell Berry, “Nature as Measure”

1. ________________ is bringing the food!

**Sept. 7:** Food and the History of Philosophy, Part II
READ for this class:
- Robert Valgenti, “Nietzsche and Food”
- Chloe Taylor, “Foucault and the Ethics of Eating”

2. _______________ is bringing the food!

Sept. 12: Subnature and a Skype conversation with Thomas Parker
READ for this class:
- Thomas Parker, “Subnature and Culinary Culture”
- Book IX of Homer’s *Odyssey*
- From Book IV from Plato’s *Republic*

*Bring in a subnatural object for us to eat*

Sept. 14: Disgust
READ for this class:
- Paul Rozin’s “Disgust” and “Perspective of Disgust”
- Carolyn Korsmeyer, “Introduction” to *Savoring Disgust*

*Bring in a disgusting object and make us eat it*

Sept. 19: Food and the History of Philosophy, Part III
READ for this class:
- Rick Dolphijn, *Foodscapes: Towards a Deleuzian Ethics of Consumption* (all)

3. _______________ is bringing the food!

Sept. 21: Food and the History of Philosophy, Part III
READ for this class: Dorothée Legrand, “Ex-nihilo: Forming a Body out of Nothing,” *Collapse VII*, 499-560

*First Stage of Seminar Paper Due: Memory Thesis*

4. _______________ is bringing the food!

Sept. 26: Loy Farm visit:
1) Work and think on the farm (30 minutes)
2) Break (5 minutes)
3) Talk and tour with Jessica Bilecki (20 minutes)
4) Map one thing and imagine the coincidence of systems (30 minutes)

Sept. 28: FIRST MEAL: TBD

*Second Stage of Seminar Paper Due.* Print off 7 copies of your one-page abstract and list of resources.

Oct. 3: Martin Fowler’s Iceland Course (meet in Alamance 206)

Oct. 5: Stephen Bloch-Schulman and Felicia…

Oct. 10: Nim Batchelor

Oct. 12: Ann Cahill on breastfeeding & (breast)milkshakes
READ: “Intro” & “Ch.1” of Alison Bartlett’s *Breastwork: Rethinking Breastfeeding*
Oct. 17: No class (Fall Break)

Oct. 19: Anthony Weston and Sukkot

Oct. 24: Yoram Lubling on the health of an idea

Third Stage of Seminar Paper Due: By this date you should share your 5-6 page draft with the philosopher with whom you will be working on your seminar paper. **Do not be late**, as it will greatly inconvenience the person who so generously agreed to work with you.

Oct. 26: Rebecca Scott

Oct. 31: READ Robert Valgenti’s work

OPTION: Should we all read two or three essays and focus only on those (such as “On the Gastronomic Event,” “Why Food Matters,” & one more) or should we distribute all (11) of them amongst the all of us so that we cover everything?

Nov. 1: Robert Valgenti’s Reynolds Lecture: *Cooking as Interpretation* (7pm)

Nov. 2: Robert Valgenti’s class visit (EXTRA LONG CLASS: 1:40pm-4:40pm)

Fourth Stage of Seminar Paper Due: Present your A 5-page draft in class. At this point in the semester, most of your research should be completed and you should be able to articulate your findings, arguments, and position. You are highly encouraged to use this time to cook, share food, etc. in order to fully present your paper ideas. Your philosophical interlocutor will respond (in whatever fashion you two deem fitting for your project) in class, in front of all attendees.

Nov. 7: SECOND MEAL: TBD

Nov. 9: No class

Nov. 14:

The Temporality of Food

READ for this class:

- Slow Food manifesto “The Central Role of Food”
- “Food” from *Deep History: The Architecture of Past and Present*, eds, Andrew Shryock and Daneial Smail
- Rules for the Perfect Meal (from *The Futurist Cookbook*, pp. 36-40)

or

Birth of Cooking

READ for this class:

- Brillat-Savarin “Philosophical History of Cooking” from *The Physiology of Taste: Or Meditations on Transcendental Gastronomy*

- Richard Wrangham “Introduction: The Cooking Hypothesis” and “When Cooking Began” from *Catching Fire: How Cooking Made us Human*

5. ______________ is bringing the food!

Nov. 16: Aramark and Eating at Elon: Meal with chefs of Aramark

Nov. 18-27: No class (Thanksgiving)
Nov. 28: Waste and the end of food
READ for this class:

6. _______________ is bringing the food!

Dec. 5: Philosophy as foodmaking and recipes
READ for this class:
   Lisa M. Heldke, “Foodmaking as a Thoughtful Practice” and “Recipes for Theory Making,” from Cooking, Eating, Thinking

7. _______________ is bringing the food!

Dec. 7: Prepare for final project
READ for this class:
   “David Chang’s Unified Theory of Deliciousness”

8. _______________ is bringing the food!

Final Project: A Seven Course Philosophical Meal

THIS MIGHT HAPPEN: Possible Skype class with Jonathan Saffran Foer, author of Eating Animals.