GASTROSOPHIA: A Philosophy of Food

Dr. Ryan J. Johnson

**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.

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

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.