

Business Ethics

Syllabus

Philosophy 232A Advent 2017
TR 8-9:15 Walsh-Ellett 202

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Office Hours: TWR 1-3
 And by appointment

Course Description

The first part of the course addresses the question of whether it makes sense to talk about “business ethics” and provides an overview of how a number of leading ethical theories respond to the question. The second and third parts of the course are practical, examining key questions in the fields of, respectively, the ethical obligations of corporations and ethical issues pertaining to the employer-employee relationship. The final section of the course is concerned with the ethical status of the free-market capitalist system in which we live and assessing several alternatives.

Course Goals

This course is not, nor could it be, a comprehensive overview of all the important and interesting topics in the field of business ethics. Its aim is instead to introduce you both to some of the key topics of business ethics and to the discipline of philosophy more generally. In helping you learn to read closely, to think critically, and to articulate your views clearly and compellingly in both writing and speaking this course aims to give you the skills necessary both for thinking through novel ethical dilemmas in business contexts and for further work in philosophy more generally.

Breakdown of Grade

10% ----- Participation
10% ----- Discussion Questions
40% ----- Response papers (x8 – ca. 150-300 words/each)
20%----- Essay (ca. 1000-1500 words)
20% ----- Final Exam

Scale: A=92.5+, A- = 89.5-92.4, B+ = 86.5-89.4, B=82.5-86.4, etc.

Required Texts

None! Readings freely available or to be distributed.

Assignments

Response papers: Response papers are short (no longer than about one double spaced page) written responses to readings. Each response paper has 3 parts: 1) a brief summary of the author's argument, or a particular part of the author's argument; 2) an objection to the argument; 3) an assessment of whether the author has a plausible response to the objection. Readings marked with a * are eligible for response papers. Response papers are due by the beginning of the class period covering the reading about which the paper is written. Response papers cannot be turned in late but you have 12 opportunities and are required to write 8 papers.

Discussion questions: For non-discussion days for which you are not turning in a response paper you must submit 2-3 discussion questions to me by email. Discussion questions are due 1 hour before class. Questions might be points that you think could use clarification or objections to particular aspects of one of the readings.

Expectations

Honesty: I encourage you to study the University honor code (sewanee.edu/academics/about/the-honor-code). Ignorance of the rules is not a legitimate excuse for violations. The library has information and resources concerning plagiarism here: library.sewanee.edu/plagiarism. If you are *ever* in doubt as to whether something is problematic you are highly encouraged to ask me.

Attendance: Philosophy is a fundamentally social enterprise, both because you are tasked with evaluating things *other* people say and write, and because *you* are in turn tasked with articulating your views to others in a way that is clear and compelling. Neither of these things can be done in isolation. Hence, class attendance is essential. You may have up to two unexcused absences with no questions asked. The third unexcused absence will result in a loss of 1/3 of your class participation grade. A fourth and fifth absence would each count for a loss of an additional 1/3. For an absence to be excused you must clear it with me in advance. Exceptions will be made only in extraordinary circumstances. For an absence to be excused I will generally also ask you to do a small make-up assignment that demonstrates that you have done the reading.

Participation: Good participation does not mean talking constantly. In fact, talking constantly is often a bad idea. The primary metric is *good* participation: this can mean thoughtful comments or questions that reflect engagement with the material. It is important that you at least *sometimes* engage in the class but I also recognize that some people are more comfortable doing so than others—if you were particularly struck by something that came up in class you can also email me comments/questions/reflections afterward, which I consider to be itself a kind of participation.

Technology: You may not use any technology in class. Cell phones, laptops, tablets, etc. must be kept out of sight and out of use. If you require accommodations then please let me know and we will work something out.

Respect: In doing philosophy we often touch on topics that are both among the most important and engaging there are, but also among the most difficult and contentious. As such it is vitally important that, even while passionately disagreeing with one another, you remain respectful of your classmates.

Please also familiarize yourself with the University's policies on harassment and discrimination: <http://e-catalog.sewanee.edu/arts-sciences/student-life/grievance-procedures-discrimination/>.

Due diligence: You are responsible for knowing the contents of this syllabus and for abiding by the rules above.

Official ADA Statement

The University of the South is committed to fostering respect for the diversity of the University community and the individual rights of each member of that community. In this spirit, and in accordance with the provisions of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the University seeks to provide students with disabilities with the reasonable accommodations needed to ensure equal access to the programs and activities of the University. Any student with a documented disability needing academic adjustments is requested to speak with Student Accessibility Services and the instructor, as early in the semester as possible. If you have already requested accommodations, it is your responsibility to present your instructor with a copy of your academic accommodations letter from Student Accessibility Services which is located in the University Wellness Center (931.598.1270). *Accommodations will not be provided without this documentation, and accommodations cannot be applied retroactively.* Additional information about accommodations can be found at <http://www.sewanee.edu/student-life/university-wellness-center/student-accessibility-services/>. If you have questions about physical accessibility, please inform your instructor so that we can ensure an accessible, safe, and effective environment.

Learning Goals

This course satisfies the University requirement for learning objective 3, "Seeking Meaning: Wisdom, Truth, and Inquiry"

"The quest to answer fundamental questions of human existence has always been central to living the examined life. Through this learning objective, students examine how people in diverse times and places have addressed basic human questions about the meaning of life, the source of moral value, the nature of reality and possibility of transcendence, and to what or whom persons owe their ultimate allegiance. Courses that explore texts and traditions dedicated to philosophic questions and ethical inquiry, or that examine religious belief and practice as a pervasive expression of human culture, encourage students to develop a deeper understanding of what it means to be human."

Course Schedule

Unit 1: Introduction: Ethics and the Coherence of "Business Ethics"

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| 8/31 | Thursday | Introduction
Plato, Ring of Gyges selection from <i>Republic</i> II
Matt Levine, "Uber's Board and the Fiduciary Rule" |
| 9/5 | Tuesday | Against "Business Ethics"
Milton Friedman, "The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase Its Profit" |
| 9/7 | Thursday | Discussion |

- Supplementary reading:
Thomas Mulligan, "A Critique of Milton Friedman's Essay "The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase Its Profits""
- 9/12 Tuesday **Rule-based ethics**
Heather Salazar, "Kantian Business Ethics"
- 9/14 Thursday **Results-based ethics**
David Meeler, "Utilitarianism"
- 9/19 Tuesday **Discussion**
Supplementary reading:
Cory Weinberg, "When Tiny Fibs Create Big Risks for Businesses"
Matt Levine, "Martin Shkreli Accused of Being Surprisingly Good at Fraud"
- 9/21 Thursday **Overview of Approaches to Business Ethics**
John Hasnas, "The Normative Theories of Business Ethics: Guide for the Perplexed"

Unit 2: Corporate Ethics

- 9/26 Tuesday **Bluffing**
*Albert Z. Carr, "Is Business Bluffing Ethical?"
- 9/28 Thursday **Discussion**
Supplementary Reading:
Daryl Koehn, "Business and Game-Playing: The False Analogy"
- 10/3 Tuesday **Price Gouging**
*Jeremy Snyder, "What's the Matter with Price Gouging?"
Jeffrey Dorfman, "Price Gouging Laws are Good Politics but Bad Business"
- 10/5 Thursday **Discussion**
Supplementary Reading:
Andrew Pollack, "Drug Goes From \$13.50 a Tablet to \$750, Overnight"
Julie Creswell et al, "The Company Behind Many Surprise Emergency Room Bills"
- 10/10 Tuesday **Advertising**
*Daniel Attas, "What's Wrong With Deceptive Advertising?"
*Roger Crisp, "Persuasive Advertising, Autonomy, and the Creation of Desire"
- 10/12 Thursday **Advertising continued**
*Lynn Sharp Paine, "Children as Consumers: An Ethical Evaluation of Children's Television"
*George G Brenkert, "Marketing to Inner-City Blacks: PowerMaster and Moral Responsibility"
- 10/17 Tuesday **Discussion**
- 10/19 Thursday **Product Safety**
*John Hasnas, "The Mirage of Product Safety"

== FALL BREAK ==

- 10/26 Thursday **Discussion**
Supplementary Reading:
Curtis C. Verschoor, "Ethics Missteps Damage Brand Value"
"The Ford Pinto"
Rana Fotoohar, "Here's Who Is Really to Blame for the Epic GM Scandal"

Unit 3: Employer/Employee Ethics

- 10/31 Tuesday **Affirmative Action**
*Edwin Hettinger, "What is Wrong With Reverse Discrimination?"

- *Louis Pojman, “The Moral Status of Affirmative Action”
- 11/2 Thursday **Discussion**
Supplementary reading TBA.
- 11/7 Tuesday **Globalization and labor**
*Ian Maitland, “The Great Non-Debate Over International Sweatshops”
*Denis G. Arnold and Norman E. Bowie, “Sweatshops and Respect for Persons”
- 11/9 Thursday **Discussion**
Supplementary reading TBA.
- 11/14 Tuesday **Employment at will**
*Patricia H. Werhane and Tara J. Radin, “Employment at Will and Due Process”
- 11/16 Thursday **Discussion**
Supplementary reading:
John A. Gallagher, “Employment at Will: The Most Misunderstood Workplace Principle”
Mises Institute, “In Defense of Employment-at-Will”
Liz Ryan, “Ten Ways Employment At Will Is Bad For Business”

Unit 4: The System

- 11/21 Tuesday **Discussion**
Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room
Matt Taibbi, “The Great American Bubble Machine”

== THANKSGIVING BREAK ==

- 11/28 Tuesday **Socialism**
*Kai Nielsen, “A Moral Case for Socialism”
- 11/30 Thursday **Meaningful Work**
*Karl Marx, “Estranged Labor”
Matthew Crawford, “Shop Class as Soul Craft”
- 12/5 Tuesday **Christian social thought**
*Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, excerpts
*Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, excerpts
- 12/7 Thursday **Altruism**
Peter Singer, *How Are We to Live?*, ch. 1
*Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”
- 12/12 Tuesday **Conclusion: Business, Ethics, Education**
Jackson Lears, “The Liberal Arts vs Neoliberalism”

Paper due by end of day Wednesday, Dec. 13
Final Exam TBD

*Note that the syllabus is subject to change. You will always be given advance notice if readings will be added or subtracted or if there will be any alteration in due dates or assignments.