

# BUSINESS ETHICS

Sample Syllabus for an intermediate undergraduate course on moral and political philosophy as applied to business. Taught six times between 2011 and 2012 at Brooklyn College as PHIL 3314.

## ABOUT THIS COURSE

This course is an introduction to the philosophical study of ethics (also known as morality) as it relates to business. This topic has both theoretical and practical dimensions. Some of the theoretical questions we'll consider are:

- What makes an action right or wrong?
- Which sorts of creatures are ethically important?
- Do different ethical rules apply to people in different social roles?
- What is the role of business in a just society?

Some of the practical questions we'll consider are:

- When are we morally obligated to boycott a product?
- Are our present methods of food production and consumption morally permissible?
- Who, if anyone, is to blame for the recent housing crisis in the United States?
- Should prostitution or the sale of presently illegal drugs be legalized?
- Which aspects of public policy encourage immoral acts?

The course is intended to develop the kind of critical and detail-oriented thinking, reading, and writing skills that is typical of philosophical inquiry, as well as the ability to apply these skills to problems of obvious practical concern. It is also designed to engender an awareness of the broader ethical, social, and political issues that reside in the background of contemporary discussions about the role of business in our society.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- Daily Short Quizzes — 25%
- First Essay — 20%
- Office Visit — 10%
- Second Essay — 30%
- Final Exam — 15%

## DAILY QUIZZES

We'll have a brief quiz during the first fifteen minutes of every class. The quiz will contain no more than three questions about that day's readings and the previous day's class discussion. They will be graded on a pass/fail basis, and won't be handed back. You can check your quiz grade after class or during my office hours.

Each quiz you pass will be worth one percentage point on your final grade, to a maximum of 25. You can miss or fail a few quizzes without it affecting your grade. There is no way to make up for missed or failed quizzes.

## ESSAYS

There are two essay assignments. You will receive the assigned topics several weeks before the due date. The due dates are listed in the course outline, below.

If you hand an essay in late, I will deduct one point from the essay's contribution to your course grade for each day past the due date. For example: if you hand in your first essay two days late, it will be worth a maximum of 18% on your total grade instead of 20%.

There are no extra credit assignments in this course.

## FINAL EXAM

The final exam will take the form of short essays and quotation-identification questions. It will cover material from the readings, but also some material talked about in class which may not have been in the readings. The final exam will cover material from the entire semester.

## COURSE WEBSITE

All required readings, podcasts, and movies are available on the course website. Make sure to bookmark it.

## HOW TO GET A GOOD GRADE

Unless there's something very unusual about you, getting an A in this course will require you to do all of the following:

- (a) Do all of the readings before we discuss them in class, and in most cases again afterward.
- (b) Come to every class and display your knowledge of the readings on the quizzes and in class discussion,
- (c) Regularly ask questions, preferably during class, but alternatively during office hours or by email,
- (d) Work hard at understanding the theories we discuss and practice applying them to new cases.
- (e) Learn to write in the clear, concise, and convincingly argumentative style that philosophers like. (A good guide to this writing style is Peter Horban's essay, 'How to Write a Philosophy Essay', which is on the website.)
- (f) Ruthlessly revise and proofread your essays until they are written in clear and grammatical English.

	MONDAY	WEDNESDAY
1	January 30th Introduction	February 1st Malcolm Gladwell: Offensive Play Luna Schyr: Lasting Impact
2	February 6th Peter Singer: What Ethics is Not	February 8th John Stuart Mill: Utilitarianism James Rachels: The Utilitarian Approach
3	February 13th (NO CLASS Lincoln)	February 15th James Rachels: The Debate over Utilitarianism
4	February 21st (*Note: This is a Tuesday Conversion Day*) Peter Singer: The Life You Can Save, Part 1	February 22nd Peter Singer: The Life You Can Save, Part 2
5	February 27th Immanuel Kant: Groundwork for a Metaphysics of Morals James Rachels: Are There Absolute Moral Rules?	February 29th James Rachels: Kant and Respect for Persons The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
6	March 5th Norman E. Bowie: A Kantian Approach to Business Ethics	March 7th Milton Friedman: The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits Jeff Goodell: The Dark Lord of Coal Country
7	March 12th R. Edward Freeman: Stakeholder Theory of the Modern Corporation	March 14th Roger A. Dickenson and Mary L Carsky - The Consumer as Economic Voter (ch. 2 of The Ethical Consumer) This American Life - Mr. Daisey and the Apple Factory
8	March 19th Michael Pollan: The Omnivore's Dilemma Food Inc. (feature film)	March 21st David Foster Wallace: Consider the Lobster Mary Anne Warren: The Moral and Legal Status of Abortion
9	March 26th Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett: The Spirit Level	March 28th John Rawls: A Theory of Justice
10	April 2nd Robert Nozick: Justice and Entitlement	April 4th (TBA)

SPRING BREAK: April 6th-15th

11	April 16th Catharine MacKinnon: Prostitution and Civil Rights Martha Nussbaum: Prostitution and Puritanism	April 18th The Economist: How to Stop the Drug Wars Radley Balko: The Lessons of Prohibition
12	April 23rd The Linux Information Project: Public Goods: A Brief Introduction Planet Money: Lighthouses, Autopsies, and the Federal Budget (podcast)	April 25th Thomas Pogge: Reimagining Pharmaceutical Innovation (video) This American Life: When Patents Attack (podcast)
13	April 30th This American Life: The Giant Pool of Money	May 2nd Inside Job (feature film)
14	May 7th David Harvey: The Enigma of Capital Richard Wolff: How Class Works (video) Planet Money: Socialism (podcast)	May 9th Tyler Cowan: The Inequality That Matters Planet Money: Libertarianism (podcast)
15	May 14th TBA	
	May 21st: Final Exam (11am, room TBA)	