

Phil 3314: Moral Issues in Business

Section: MWEA

Classroom: 3407B

Meeting time: Mon. and Weds. 11:00-12:15

Instructor: Matthew Rachar

Email: matthewrachar@gmail.com

Office, hours: Mon 12:15-1:15, room 3317

Introduction

This course is an introduction to philosophical ethics with a focus on its relation to business issues. As such, it has both theoretical and practical parts. In the first part of the course, we will focus on major philosophical theories of ethics, considering questions such as: What makes an action right or wrong? Are there absolute moral rules, or are moral rules relative to a particular culture or person? In the second part, we will focus on particular moral issues in business. Some of the topics we will consider are the role of business in a just society, the appropriate method of governance of a corporation, and the relationship between employees and management.

Students will develop the critical and detail-oriented thinking, reading and writing abilities that are required for philosophical inquiry, as well as the ability to apply these skills to current practical concerns. We will also engage in discussions of the broader ethical, social and political issues that frame any analysis of the proper role of business in society.

Required Text

James Rachels – *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* [EMP]

All other texts are from the course pack, which will be provided to you on Blackboard.

Course Requirements and Grading

Class Participation/Group Work 14%

Weekly Quizzes/Attendance – 16%

Mid-term Exam – 20%

Final Exam – 20%

Writing Assignments – 30%

Participation/Group Work

This class is a mix of lecture and discussion, and -- as such -- I expect you to come to class ready and willing to ask questions, raise objections, offer responses, and in general to discuss the readings assigned. Sometimes I may have you pair off or join small groups to review arguments,

summarize, give examples, etc. This is an important aspect of this class and therefore constitutes a sizable portion of your grade.

Weekly Quizzes

There will be a quiz handed out at the beginning of thirteen randomly chosen classes based on the reading material due for that class and the previous days' class discussion. Each quiz is graded on a pass/fail basis. You must successfully pass ten quizzes to earn full credit. It may also serve as a basis for some questions on the exams. If you are late or miss class, you will fail the quiz, unless your lateness or absence is excused. There is no way to make up for missed or failed quizzes, but you can miss or fail three before it affects your grade.

Writing Assignments (WA)

There are four writing assignments during the semester. You will need to complete three of them. I will distribute prompts focused on the material from the readings two weeks before the due date. You will be able to choose from two prompts. Each one you complete is 10% of your grade (30% total). 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 8% of your total grade.

Exams

These will be blue book-style, and will include vocabulary, multiple choice, and short answer questions. The final is not cumulative.

How to do well in this course

For most people, getting an A in this course will require the following:

- (i) Do all of the readings before we discuss them in class, and usually again after.
- (ii) Come to every class and display your knowledge of the readings in the class discussion. If you are going to miss class, email me.
- (iii) Ask questions, either in class, by email, or in office hours.
- (iv) Work hard at understanding the theories we discuss and practice applying them to new cases.
- (v) Write your papers in a clear, concise, and convincing style (a guide for doing this is in the course pack, Peter Horban – “How to Write a Philosophy Essay”)

(vi) Revise and proofread your papers until they are clear and grammatically sound.

Course Objectives

1. Students will be able to identify arguments and distinguish premises and conclusion, in general – and specifically, in relation to the key philosophical questions with regard to the moral issues in business examined in the course
2. Students will be able to formulate an argument in support or in opposition of a claim, in general – and specifically, in relation to the key philosophical questions with regard to the moral issues in business examined in the course
3. Students will be able to evaluate (by providing reasons) the validity and/or cogency of an argument, in general – and specifically, in relation to the key philosophical questions with regard to the moral issues in business examined in the course
4. Students will become informed about the key philosophical questions with regard to the moral issues in business examined in the course – as well as the answers to these questions and the problems with these answers that make the issues an object of an ongoing debate

CUNY Rules, Regulations, and Services

University Policy on Academic Integrity

The faculty and administration of Brooklyn College support an environment free from cheating and plagiarism. Each student is responsible for being aware of what constitutes cheating and plagiarism and for avoiding both. The complete text of the CUNY Academic Integrity Policy and the Brooklyn College procedure for policy implementation can be found at www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/bc/policies. If a faculty member suspects a violation of academic integrity and, upon investigation, confirms that violation, or if the student admits the violation, the faculty member MUST report the violation.

Center for Student Disability Services

In order to receive disability-related academic accommodations students must first be registered with the Center for Student Disability Services. Students who have a documented disability or suspect they may have a disability are invited to set up an appointment with the Director of the Center for Student Disability Services, Ms. Valerie Stewart-Lovell at (718) 951-5538. If you have already registered with the Center for Student Disability Services, please provide your professor with the course accommodation form and discuss your specific accommodation with him/her.

Course Schedule

Subject to change, especially the second half.

Introduction

Aug. 28 General Introduction
Aug. 30 Philosophical terms and methodology

Part 1: Theories of Ethics

Sept. 4 No class, Labor Day
Sept. 6 Ethical theories, EMP Ch. 1
Sept. 11 Cultural Relativism, EMP Ch. 2
Sept. 18 Subjectivism, EMP Ch. 3
Sept. 20 No class
Sept. 25 Religion, EMP Ch. 4
Sept. 27 Egoism, EMP Ch. 5 – WA 1 Due
Oct. 2 Social Contract Theory, EMP Ch. 6
Oct. 4 Utilitarianism I, EMP Ch. 7
Oct. 9 No class, Columbus Day
Oct. 11 Utilitarianism II, EMP Ch. 8
Oct. 16 Kant I, EMP Ch. 9
Oct. 18 Kant II, EMP Ch. 10
Oct. 23 Care Ethics, EMP Ch. 11
Oct. 25 Virtue Ethics, EMP Ch. 12 – WA 2 Due

Oct. 30 Midterm

Part 2: Ethics in the Business World

Nov. 1 The Market and its Norms
Nov. 3 The Scope of Business Ethics
Nov. 8 Fairness and Equality
Nov. 10 Distributive Justice
Nov. 15 The Meaning and Value of Work
Nov. 17 Worker's Rights – WA 3 Due
Nov. 22 Corporate Governance
Nov. 24 Financialization and the Housing Crisis
Nov. 27 Truth-telling and Whistleblowing
Nov. 29 Discrimination and Affirmative Action
Dec. 4 Anti-trust Law, Multinationals, and Globalization
Dec. 6 Marketing Ethics
Dec. 11 Value and Liability – WA 4 Due