

Business Ethics Syllabus (PHI 334, Fall 2016)

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Required Readings

- Brenkert & Beauchamp, *Oxford Handbook of Business Ethics* Oxford, 2010. First Edition. (Should be less than \$60 new, \$40 used).
- Handout Week 2 Peter Kreeft, Truth
- Handout Week 2 Peter Kreeft, Goodness.
- Handout Week 3 Utilitarianism
- Handout Week 4 Kantian Deontology
- Handout Week 5 Virtue Ethics
- Film Week 6 Inside Job

Course Description

Some of the hardest decisions we make have to do with making money working in a business or running a business. As employees, professionals, managers, investors, or entrepreneurs, we will make tough business decisions every day. Even as consumers we will “vote with our dollars” when we buy product, use, re-use, and recycle. This course attempts to help us to think deeply about the issues of wealth, fairness, politics, trade, payment, and work. The aim is that we can act well when hard decisions come.

Philosophy in general asks questions about foundations of the world and our knowledge of it: what is real, how do we know what we know, what is the meaning of life? Philosophy is continuous with science, mathematics, religion. So when we conduct business, our whole world view is engaged. Ethics is the branch of philosophy that investigates right and wrong, good and bad. What is worthwhile or worthless and how to live a worthwhile life. What is good? Who is truly enviable?

So, in business ethics, we ask about foundations: What is a good business? What is success? What is private and public property? Are there constraints on products and services one can provide?

These questions and more we will attempt to answer by clarifying terms, establishing secure ethical principles, being sensitive to contextual details, identifying reasonable answers, evaluating arguments for and against each reasonable answer, and coming to our own conclusions. Though we will consider arguments

from Kantian, consequentialist, and religious standpoints, our official approach to these questions will be from the standpoint of traditional virtue ethics.

Each of us belongs to a tradition and a community. Our goal is to understand our own tradition and understand rival traditions, and why they disagree. We will disagree, but do so peaceably and with understanding.

The bottom line is always to think hard about hard questions, to discard wrong answers and discover and prove right answers to these questions. The hard questions will revolve around business, wealth, justice, safety, information, incentives, globalization, etc. but may branch out to related tangents including logic, public policy, anthropology, religion, law, and more.

Course Goals

- to understand business as part of life
- to understand business as part of applied ethics, public policy, and as a sub-discipline of ethical philosophy
- to become familiar with major ethical theories, especially: virtue ethics, utilitarianism, and deontology
- to grow intellectually by critically analyzing articles, books, studies, and news articles about business
- to understand our own ethical tradition better and make clear plans for how to make hard decisions
- Also to understand the tradition of others (religious ethics, deontology, utilitarianism, virtue ethics) in approaching ethical issues;
- and thereby to become more virtuous people capable of handling difficult life circumstances.

Course Structure

To accomplish our course goals, the semester is broken into 8 units of 1-2 weeks each. Each Unit consists of (a) readings and quizzes, (b) lectures, (c) discussions, and (d) a unit paper. The readings and lectures offer analysis, the discussions and papers synthesis.

Grading

Your grade for the class will depend on your performance in each course component, plus tests and applicable extra credit. To get an 'A': (a) read carefully every week, (b) attend and participate in class through talking and/or writing, (c) study hard for the tests, and (d) write the Unit Papers according to the given instructions.

Assessment category	Percent of semester grade
Readings (quizzes)	20%
Participation (talk, write, present)	20%
Tests (midterm, final)	30%

Assessment category	Percent of semester grade
Unit Papers	30%

Reading tips

Read ahead. Read carefully. You will get faster, but start slow and careful. Try to read *and understand* the book. What is the main thesis? Is it true? Take notes. Talk with each other before class. More are tips available online.

Quizzes

Short reading quizzes assess that you read the day's text. These are easy points. Also, read to *understand*. Come to class with thoughts, questions. Ask yourself: What is the main point? What confused me?

Attendance

We need you here! Attendance is mandatory. Roll will be taken each class by marking a 3x5 card. (Being repeatedly or egregiously late will count as an absence.) You may check your absences at any time by requesting to see your card. I recommend you aim for perfect attendance to maximize your learning. You are paying for this education including this class, so why wouldn't you make the most of it?

That said, I give everyone up to 3 "Personal absences". These 3 absences apply for *for any reason*, including emergencies, family visits, sickness, sports, or sleep. 3 absences adds up to one week of classes you can miss with no penalty. 3 is usually sufficient for emergencies, and sometimes you just need a break. But after that, absences *require an excuse*. After 3 personal absences, any unexcused absences will cost 2% deduction from the semester grade *per absence*. 6 unexcused absences is a letter grade and 9 will make a passing grade impossible.

- 1 = -0
- 2 = -0
- 3 = -0
- 4 = -2%
- 5 = -4%
- 6 = -10% (a letter grade)

- 7 = -12%
- 8 = -14%
- 9 = -50%

Participation

The primary competency of this class is philosophical dialogue. Hence, you must attend and participate. Class time is primarily focused on discussion of the material for which I expect you to be fully engaged.

We do dialogue for five main reasons: (1) You must take responsibility for your own learning. (2) We can actually get to know each other. (3) I learn best in discussion. (4) Most people learn (and retain) best in discussion. (5) Philosophy is dialogical.

You are responsible to talk in class. Even if you are confused, tired, or unmotivated, I expect you to make yourself participate and engage. Get out of your comfort zone into your growth zone. Come *prepared*. Read, take notes, reflect, and come ready to share your viewpoint, defend it, listen to others' viewpoints, and critique theirs.

Everyone starts at an 80% (B-) for the participation grade. You will move up or down depending on whether you pay attention and speak at least once per week. (I prohibit the use of electronic devices in class, although laptop users may request permission to sit in the front of class with their computers.) Other discussion ground rules are posted online.

To earn participation points, you will voluntarily share your thoughts in discussion at least once per week, and/or respond when called upon. You are not required to write posts on the discussion board online. By default, everyone is an "external processor". "*Internal processors*": Some may wish to opt out of speaking in class and emphasize writing. To earn participation points, you will post class reflections online every week. You may elect to speak in class as well, and may be called upon.

Critical Reading:

Every student will present two group "critical readings." Your group of 2-3 people must meet ahead of time to read and discuss the assignment more thoroughly than your normal reading. You will then summarize the reading, analyze it, and present your own opinions. One or all of you will present your summary to the class. Instructions are posted online.

Test

There are Quarter 1 and Quarter 3 exams. The exams might draw questions from quizzes, so pay attention to questions you may have missed. A study guide may be provided. New questions (on familiar material) may be introduced, or a new phrasing of questions you have seen before.

Unit Papers

Every student will write several Unit Papers. These Unit Papers help you synthesize your own views after doing the readings and listening to lectures and participating in the discussions. This assignment is pass/fail, so follow the instructions closely. Be careful to cite your sources correctly. I will not tolerate plagiarism — unintentional or intentional. If I detect plagiarism, I will contact you. The assignment will receive a zero, and disciplinary action may follow. The instructions are posted online.

Extra Credit

Those who opt for extra credit may do so. Instructions are posted online.

Miscellany:

1. **Bring your textbook** to every class.
2. **Participate.** Participation is your responsibility; I may or may not call on you. Challenge yourself!
3. **Stay focused.** Do not distract yourself with side conversations, texting, Facebook, or doing anything else in class. Take a short mental break or bathroom break if you need to, but come back. (If you have an important phone call or text, please step outside the class for a moment, then return.)
4. **No smart phones.** No other electronics, laptops, iPhones, or iPads, iPods, smartphones, etc. Unplug, listen and engage.
5. **Laptop/tablet users** must request permission to use their device. If approved, you must sit in the front row.
6. **Be respectful of others:** Pay attention when a neighbor is talking. No teasing. Don't pack up early.
7. **Contact me.** Best method is to chat after class. I read every email but may not respond to every email. You need a response, and I haven't responded within three (3) business days, email again with the subject "nudge". Please use keith.buhler@uky.edu.
8. **Contact.** For short, quick questions, use Twitter ([keith_buhler](#))
9. **Email.** You are expected to have an active e-mail account that you check regularly, and to check "news" or "announcements" section on Canvas (or Discovery, etc.). Section related announcements will be made on this platform and/or via e-mail (e.g. if I am sick, pointers for home work, change in due dates).
10. Disabilities can be accommodated if you are registered with the Disability Resource Center. See <http://www.uky.edu/StudentAffairs/DisabilityResourceCenter/>
11. Make up work is not accepted after the due date, unless you obtain prior (email) permission.
12. **Plagiarism.** Do not plagiarize. Intentional or unintentional plagiarism will result in a zero for the assignment, and jeopardizes your standing in the class. Do not intentionally take anyone else's work nor provide your work to anyone else (under whatever auspices). You'll submit your papers to SafeAssign on Blackboard to help avoid accidental plagiarism. Don't even think about stealing someone else's thought/work. Cite your sources. See also the UK academic integrity appendix.

13. **Enjoy philosophy.** We are not merely solving abstract puzzles here, but digging deeply into human thinking in a way that could change your life forever. The more you and your fellows allow yourselves to acquire a “taste” for the material, the more inclined you will be to give it the real effort required to master it.

Outline (Short)

This outline tells you what is due when. A detailed outline is available online. Always check this outline for updates, as well as Canvas for quizzes and announcements. Dates are subject to minor changes due to weather, illness, teacher travel, etc. The online version is always up to date.

Week 1 Business Ethics

W Aug-24 Syllabus day (no reading)

F Aug-26 Introduction to Business Ethics (no reading)

Week 2 Truth and Goodness

M Aug-29 Basic Philosophy: Peter Kreeft, Truth Handout

W Aug-31 Basic Philosophy: Peter Kreeft, Relativism Handout

F Sep-2 Basic Philosophy: Religion & Reason

Week 3 Utilitarianism

M Sep-5 Labor Day (no class) W Sep-7 Basic Ethics: Utilitarianism Handout

F Sep-9 Discussion

Week 4 Kantian Deontology

M Sep-12 Basic Ethics: Kantian Deontology Handout

W Sep-14 Basic Ethics: Kantian Deontology Handout

F Sep-16 Discussion

Week 5 Virtue Ethics

M Sep-19 Basic Ethics: Virtue Ethics Handout

W Sep-21 Basic Ethics: Virtue Ethics Handout

F Sep-23 Review of Ethical Theories. **Exam 1**

Week 6 Inside Job

M Sep-26 Inside Job (film) Parts I-III introduction

W Sep-28 Inside Job Parts I-IV

F Sep-30 Inside Job Part V and discussion

Week 7 Methods of Business Ethics

M Oct-3 Business Ethics, Methods of Business Ethics

W Oct-5 Business Ethics, the Place of Ethical Theory

F Oct-7 Discussion

Week 8 Capitalism

M Oct-10 Competitive Markets, Ideal of Capitalism

W Oct-12 Competitive Markets, Corporate Responsibility

F Oct-14 Discussion

Week 9 Compensation

M Oct-17 Economic Justice, Executive Compensation

W Oct-19 Economic Justice, Just Access to Health Care

F Oct-21 Discussion

Week 10 Universal Norms

M Oct-24 Universal Norms

W Oct-26 Universal Norms

F Oct-28 Discussion

Week 11 Information

M Oct-31 Information

W Nov-2 Information

F Nov-4 Discussion

Week 12 Incentives

M Nov-7 Incentives and Influence

W Nov-9 Incentives and Influence

F Nov-11 Discussion

Week 13 Employee Rights

M Nov-14 Employee Rights

W Nov-16 Employee Rights

F Nov-18 Review. **Exam 2**

Week 14 Risk

M Nov-21 Safety, Risk, Harm

W Nov-23 Thanksgiving Break

F Nov-25 Thanksgiving Break

Week 15 Environment

M Nov-28 Creating Moral Organizations

W Nov-30 Creating Moral Organizations

F Dec-2 Discussion

Week 16

M Dec-5 “Environmental Ethics and Business”

W Dec-7 Film

F Dec-9 Last day UK

M Dec-12 Finals Week UK

W Dec-16 Paper Due by 11:59PM online.

F Dec-18 Grades Due UK

Course Outline (Detailed)

Each date tells you the reading due and the topic. Each date also includes detailed lecture notes because students asked for them to help prepare. Subject to minor changes due to weather, illness, etc. The online version is always up to date.

Aug-24 W Syllabus day. Realistic expectations for this class. How to get an “A”.

Aug-26 F Introduction to Business Ethics. What is business ethics? What is an ethical business? Philosophy, in general, is a search for causes. Philosophers aim to prove what things are and why they are that way. Ethical philosophy is a search for the good. Ethicists aim to prove what ought to be done, and what avoided, and why. Science is the process of mapping the order of being; ethics is the process of mapping the “practical order”, the order of doing.

Aug-29 M “Basic Philosophy: Peter Kreeft, Truth. Is there any objective truth – in science, philosophy, religion, mathematics? If not how would we know it? If so, how do we know truth? Kreeft argues that truth is correspondence to reality. Other alleged definitions of truth presuppose the correspondence definition. And truth is knowable to anyone who has language. He refutes various objections to the possibility of knowing truth.**

Aug-31 W “Basic Philosophy: Peter Kreeft, Relativism. Is there any objective goodness in morality or ethics? If so, how would we know it? Kreeft argues against moral relativism, moral nihilism, and moral skepticism and argues that some moral laws are like mathematical and logical laws.**

Sep-2 F “Basic Ethics: Religion & Reason. Many people derive their ethics in part from their religion. What is the role – if any – of religion in business and in ethics?”

Sep-5 M Labor Day – no class**

Sep-7 W Basic Ethics: Utilitarianism. John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham resurrected a modern version of the ancient doctrine of Epicurus: that the only intrinsic good is pleasure. Hence, the one objective moral rule is that we ought to maximize pleasure. Make as many people happy as possible. Make everyone as happy as possible. Alternately, reduce pain as much as possible.

Sep-9 F Discussion What is right about utilitarianism or consequentialism? What is wrong with it? Sep-12 M”Basic Ethics: Kantian Deontology. Immanuel Kant resurrected a modern version of the ancient doctrine of Stoicism: the only good is conformity to the moral law. The good will always wills the good. What is the good? Your duty. Always do your duty. How do you know your duty, what command or imperative should you obey? Kant’s”imperative” was a formal principle that should always be obeyed by rational creatures. It is categorical, not hypothetical. There are three expressions of his Categorical Imperative. Kantianism has come to be known as “deontology”, the moral theory grounded in duty.

Sep-14 W”Basic Ethics: Deontology cont’d“ Sep-16 F”Discussion What is right about Kantianism? What is wrong?” Sep-19 M “Basic Ethics: Virtue Ethics Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Bernard Williams, and others resurrected a modern version of the ancient doctrine of Aristotle: that the good

person is the virtuous person. Moral virtue is a mean between extremes of too much and too little, while intellectual virtue is a consistency in knowing truth.” **Sep-21 W “Basic Ethics: Virtue Ethics” Sep-23 F “Review of Ethical Theories for Exam”** What is right about virtue ethics? What is wrong?”

Online Exam Quarter 1

Sep-26 M “Film: Inside Job Parts I-III. The”Inside Job” documentary is about the 2008 housing crisis. Everyone felt the effects of this terrible financial meltdown. What caused it?**

Sep-28 W “Film: Inside Job Parts I-IV”: Sep-30 F “Film: Inside Job Part V and discussion” Oct-3 M “Business Ethics, Methods of Business Ethics”:

Oct-5 W “Business Ethics, the Place of Ethical Theory”: Oct-7 F “Discussion”:

Oct-10 M (76-96) Gaus, “Competitive Markets, Ideal of Capitalism” 1: **What is capitalism? Can capitalism be ethical? Can it be unethical?**

Oct-12 W Gaus, “Competitive Markets, Ideal of Capitalism” 2:

Oct-14 F “Discussion”:

Oct-17 M “Economic Justice, Executive Compensation”:

Oct-19 W “Economic Justice, Just Access to Health Care”:

Oct-21 F “Discussion”**

Oct-24 M “Universal Norms”

Oct-26 W “Universal Norms”

Oct-28 F “Discussion”

Oct-31 M “Information”

Nov-2 W “Information”

Nov-4 F “Discussion”

Nov-7 M “Incentives and Influence”

Nov-9 W “Incentives and Influence”

Nov-11 F “Discussion”

Nov-14 M “Employee Rights”

Nov-16 W “Employee Rights”

Nov-18 F “Discussion”

Nov-21 M “Safety, Risk, Harm”

Nov-23 W “Safety, Risk, Harm”

Nov-25 F “Creating Moral Organizations”

Nov-28 M “Environmental Ethics and Business”

Nov-30 W Thanksgiving Break - No class

Dec-2 F Thanksgiving Break - No class

Dec-5 M Film viewing and discussion

Dec-7 W Film viewing and discussion

Dec-9 F Last day UK

Dec-12 M Final Exams

Dec-18 F Grades Due UK

Links to Readings of Interest

[Coming soon]