

334 Syllabus, Fall 2016

PHI 334 Business Ethics

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Office Hours: Wed 2-3pm, before/after class, and by appointment.

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Course Description: Some of the hardest decisions we make have to do with 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? In business, we ask about foundations: what is success? 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.

To accomplish these goals, our study will unfold in 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.

Required Readings: Brenkert & Beauchamp, *Oxford Handbook of Business Ethics* Oxford, 2010. First Edition. (Should be less than \$60 new, \$40 used).

Handouts: (All posted online)

1. Peter Kreeft, Truth.
2. Peter Kreeft, Goodness.

Course Outline: *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.*

W Aug-24 Syllabus day
 F Aug-26 Introduction to Business Ethics
 M Aug-29 Basic Philosophy: Peter Kreeft, Truth
 W Aug-31 Basic Philosophy: Peter Kreeft, Relativism
 F Sep-2 Basic Ethics: Religion & Reason
 M Sep-5 Labor Day
 W Sep-7 Basic Ethics: Utilitarianism
 F Sep-9 Discussion
 M Sep-12 Basic Ethics: Kantianism
 W Sep-14 Basic Ethics: Kantianism
 F Sep-16 Discussion
 M Sep-19 Basic Ethics: Aristotle
 W Sep-21 Basic Ethics: Aristotle
 F Sep-23 Review of Ethical Theories & Exam
 M Sep-26 Inside Job Parts I-III introduction
 W Sep-28 Inside Job Parts I-IV
 F Sep-30 Inside Job Part V and discussion
 M Oct-3 Business Ethics, Methods of Business Ethics

W Oct-5 Business Ethics, the Place of Ethical Theory
F Oct-7 Discussion
M Oct-10 Competitive Markets, Ideal of Capitalism
W Oct-12 Competitive Markets, Corporate Responsibility
F Oct-14 Discussion
M Oct-17 Economic Justice, Executive Compensation
W Oct-19 Economic Justice, Just Access to Health Care
F Oct-21 Discussion
M Oct-24 Universal Norms
W Oct-26 Universal Norms
F Oct-28 Discussion
M Oct-31 Information
W Nov-2 Information
F Nov-4 Discussion
M Nov-7 Incentives and Influence
W Nov-9 Incentives and Influence
F Nov-11 Discussion
M Nov-14 Employee Rights
W Nov-16 Employee Rights
F Nov-18 Discussion
M Nov-21 Safety, Risk, Harm
W Nov-23 Safety, Risk, Harm
F Nov-25 Creating Moral Organizations
M Nov-28 “Environmental Ethics and Business”
W Nov-30 Thanksgiving Break
F Dec-2 Thanksgiving Break
M Dec-5 Film
W Dec-7 Film
F Dec-9 Last day UK
M Dec-12 Final Exams- Final Paper/project due on December 16th by 11:59PM on Bb
W Dec-16 Finals UK
F Dec-18 Grades Due UK

Grading: Your grade for the class will depend on your performance in each 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%
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. (Repeated tardies count as absences.) 1 to 3 absences are “freebies” – the first four are excused no matter what. No credit lost. After the 3rd absence, I will need an excuse or else points will be deducted. 4-7 absences cause major deductions to the semester grade; 8 is a full letter grade deduction. You are paying for this education including this class, so why wouldn't you make the most of it?

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.

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.

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.

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

Tests: There is a midterm and final. The “Study Guide” with all the questions will be posted online.

Unit Papers: Every student will write about 5 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 every day.
2. **Participate.** Challenge yourself to talk.
3. **No smartphones.** If you need to take a text message or phone call, step out, respond, and come back.
4. **Laptop/tablet users must sit in the front row.**
5. **Be respectful of others:** no teasing, and pay attention when a neighbor is talking. Don’t pack up early. Don’t come late. Don’t talk while your neighbor is talking.
6. **Contact me.** Best method is to chat after class. I read every email but may not respond to every email. If I don’t respond within three (3) business days, email again with the subject “nudge”.
7. For short, quick questions, use Twitter (keith_buhler)
8. Disabilities can be accommodated if you are registered with the Disability Resource Center. See <http://www.uky.edu/StudentAffairs/DisabilityResourceCenter/>
9. Plagiarism has been an issue. Even unintentional plagiarism earns a zero for the assignment and, in intentional or egregious cases, failing the course and receiving a permanent mark on your academic record. 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.
10. **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.

Links to Readings of Interest