

Philosophy 1317-002: Business Ethics

Fall 2010 Section 002 Steve Hiltz
Office Hours: MWF 10:00-10:50, or by appointment Hyer 210E
214-613-2084 (home) 214-768-4027 (office) shiltz@mail.smu.edu

Description: After a substantial introduction to basic moral theory, we will discuss ethical and political issues connected with the free-enterprise system. Topics will include market economics, corporate responsibility, downsizing, product safety and marketing. We will watch a movie dealing with the recent financial collapse and ensuing economic crisis, and (time permitting) a movie on Enron and related accounting scandals. In addition to assigned portions of the main text, further reading will be required as part of one of two paper projects students will choose between. The readings pertaining to one project will include a compendium of case studies of various psychological traps by which people fall into unethical behavior. The readings pertaining to the other project consist in a compendium of data correlating economic inequality with problems in areas such as mental and physical health, educational performance, violence, and social mobility.

Student Aims and Orientation: Philosophy involves thoughtful analysis and assessment of the fundamental concepts, assumptions, principles and patterns of inference that are implicit in various areas of discourse. Students must exhibit a willingness to think, and be open to revision or expansion of their current mindset, or the clarification of the basis for it. Since the goal is to determine the most reasonable position to take on a variety of issues, careful attention should be paid to assessing the grounds offered in support of, or in criticism of, the economic practices in question.

Course Objectives: Students will demonstrate a basic facility with the concepts and methods of philosophical analysis, including a basic familiarity with the major positions and their supporting arguments concerning the application of ethical principles to the economic realm. Students will develop their analytic skills in assessing such positions and arguments, and will develop their abilities to write cogently about them. Students will thereby build a foundation for achieving their life goals — assuming that such goals include the development of moral character and a sense of how to maintain it in their workaday lives, as well as the capacity, as good citizens, to participate competently in discussions related to relevant political and social policies.

Texts:

Shaw and Barry, *Moral Issues in Business* (required)

Hoyk and Hersey, *The Ethical Executive* (installments on Blackboard)

Wilkinson and Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger*
(recommended, on reserve)

Outline of Readings:

Part I: Moral Theory

Shaw and Barry, Chapters 1 and 2

Essays by Solomon and by Luban, Strudler and Wasserman; various handouts

Hoyk and Hersey, pp. 1-60

(Wilkinson and Pickett, Chs 1-3)

Test #1 (date to be announced)

Part II: Market Economics and Corporate Responsibility:

Shaw and Barry, Chapters 4 and 5

Essays by Isbister, Sen, Cassidy, and Orlando

Hoyk and Hersey, pp. 61-102

(Wilkinson and Pickett, Chs 4-12)

Test #2 (date to be announced)

Part III: Moral Issues regarding Business, Consumers and the Environment

Shaw and Barry, Chapter 6

Hoyk and Hersey, pp. 103-118

(Wilkinson and Pickett, Chs 13-16)

Paper Due: Project A: Friday, 11/18; Project B: Monday, 12/5 (last class period)

Final Exam: Wednesday, 12/7 (This date cannot and will not be changed.)

Grading: There will be two tests, each worth 25% of your grade, covering Parts I and II of the above outline, respectively. A final exam, worth 30%, will cover Part III as well as the main points of earlier material. You will also have to write a paper that will be worth 15% of your grade. There are two options: Project A will require you to discuss the connection of the material in *The Ethical Executive* with some selection of videos, case studies in the text, or other business situations you know of through personal experience or studies in other courses. Project B will involve relating the material in *The Spirit Level* to the role the concept of equality plays in moral theory, Isbister's discussion of equal opportunity, and the debate between narrow and broad views of corporate responsibility. Specific instructions for these exercises will be provided at a later date. The remaining 5% of your grade will be based on class participation.

Attendance: Since most of the learning in philosophy occurs in class, or in reflection on class discussions in relation to the reading, regular attendance and participation in class is strongly recommended. If you do not show up for class — or if you *merely* show up — you cannot expect to learn much. Past experience has taught me to back up this advice with a sanction. Consequently, if you accumulate **5 unexcused absences** you will have **5 points deducted** from the next test.

Disability Accommodations: Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first be registered with Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS) to verify the disability and to establish eligibility for accommodations. Students may call 214-768-1470 or visit <http://www.smu.edu/alec/dass> to begin the process. Once registered, students should then schedule an appointment with the professor to make appropriate arrangements.

Religious Observance: Religiously observant students wishing to be absent on holidays that require missing class should notify their professors in writing at the beginning of the semester, and should discuss with them, in advance, acceptable ways of making up any work missed because of the absence. (See University Policy No. 1.9.)

Excused Absences for University Extracurricular Activities: Students participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled University extracurricular activity should be given the opportunity to make up class assignments or other graded assignments missed as a result of their participation. It is the responsibility of the student to make arrangements with the instructor prior to any missed scheduled examination or other missed assignment for making up the work.

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty: Violation of SMU's honor code will not be tolerated. Every piece of work you turn in must be entirely your own. Writing a paper means *both* expressing your own thoughts *and* expressing them in your own words. You may not copy unquoted passages from our texts, from any other texts, or from the internet, even if the passages are brief. No one else may write a paper for you, whether in whole or in part. In a typical case (for example, a student turns in a paper mostly cut-and-pasted from web sites), the **penalty** for violating the honor code will be an **F** in the course. On top of this grade penalty, the case may be presented to the honor council, in which case the student may be subject to **further disciplinary action**, such as suspension or dismissal from the university.