

BUSINESS ETHICS

Gregory Johnson, Ph.D.

gregory.johnson@msstate.edu

1 Preliminaries

Sending me a message online (email, Canvas, or direct message on GroupMe) is the best way to reach me, and I will usually respond within 24 hours. If you would like a more immediate response, you can try calling or sending a text message to 267-416-0292. But don't leave a voicemail. I won't get it.

Meetings are [by appointment](#). (Webex or George Hall)

2 Mississippi State University Syllabus

The Mississippi State University Syllabus contains all policies and procedures that are applicable to every course on campus and online. The policies in the University Syllabus describe the official policies of the University and will take precedence over those found elsewhere. It is the student's responsibility to read and be familiar with every policy. The University Syllabus may be accessed at any time on the Provost website under Faculty and Student Resources: provost.msstate.edu/faculty-student-resources/university-syllabus.

3 Readings

Buy Sandel, M. (2012). *What Money Can't Buy* (<https://amzn.com/dp/0374533652>). Get a paper copy of the book, not the kindle or audio book version. The other readings for this course are posted on Canvas.

4 Course Description

What if we could remake earth? What would you change? It seems like every other day, astronomers discover some new "Earth-like" planets ... Can you imagine all the possibilities of having a new habitable planet? What would we do with it?

These questions were posed by the journalist Stephen Dubner. He continues,

Maybe we'd use it to raise all our food, and harvest its precious metals and petroleum and lumber. Maybe we'd send all our criminals and political enemies there! Or ... Maybe we'd say goodbye to *this* old Earth and move to that one instead. Earth 2.0: a fresh start. What would *that* look like? After all our trial and error on Earth 1.0, how would Earth 2.0 be different? If we had a chance to reboot our civilization—to build new institutions and systems from scratch—whether on a new planet or this one, what would we do? What would our political and economic and medical and educational systems look like if we weren't stuck with all the residue of the past few millennia? ("[Earth 2.0](#)")

This is one way to begin thinking about Business Ethics. Earth 2.0 isn't about to happen, but, nonetheless, change happens, and we want to be informed about how our world works, the problems, and the possible solutions. Business, economics, and finance (and the moral dimensions of each) are part of the changing—or at least, changeable—world that every inhabitant of earth must, at one time or another, confront. Hence, this course.

There are no prerequisites for this course, and students do not need to be engaged in a business-related course of study to take it.

The course will begin with an overview of the major ethical theories and how moral responsibility may need to be adapted for those who work in large enterprises. Then, we will consider the purpose of the corporation and to whom corporations should be accountable. After that, we will examine two issues that concern the appropriate treatment of employees: pay (both at the top of the pay scale and at the bottom) and sexual harassment. For the last four weeks of the course, we will read Michael Sandel's *What Money Can't Buy* and consider the moral status of price gouging during emergencies.

Responsibilities If you are having trouble with any part of this course, please contact me right away. The course is designed to make working through the material and learning it a straightforward process, but you are still responsible for the following.

1. Making time each week to do the course work.
2. Using the readings (and some videos) to complete the assignments.
3. Determining if and when you need to contact me with questions.

Again, don't hesitate to contact me. It's what I'm here for, and I don't mind answering questions.

5 Learning Objectives

Naturally, one objective is to become acquainted with the assigned material. Other, no less important, goals are improving reading comprehension, critical thinking, and writing skills.

6 Schedule

See the Google calendar in Canvas for the exact schedule. The calendar is also available [here](#).

Weeks 1 - 3	An introduction to ethics Johnson, "What is ethics anyway?" Sandel, "Introduction" in <i>What Money Can't Buy</i> Luban et al., "Moral responsibility in the age of bureaucracy"
Weeks 4 & 5	The purpose of the corporation Friedman, "The social responsibility of business" Freeman, "Managing for stakeholders"
Week 6	The role of government Hacker & Pierson, "The case for the mixed economy"
Week 7	Test 1
Weeks 8 & 9	Paying employees MacKenzie, "Mythology of the minimum wage" LaBossiere, "In Defense of the Minimum wage" Moriarty, "Do CEOs get paid too much?"
Week 10	Sexual harassment May, "Sexual harassment and solidarity" Leeser & O'Donohue, "Defining sexual harassment"
Weeks 11 - 15	Moral limits on markets? Sandel, <i>What Money Can't Buy</i> , chapters 1 - 4
Exam Week	Test 2

7 Student Honor Code & Academic Misconduct

Mississippi State has an approved Honor Code that applies to all students. The code is as follows:

As a Mississippi State University student, I will conduct myself with honor and integrity at all times. I will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor will I accept the actions

of those who do.

Upon accepting admission to Mississippi State University, a student immediately assumes a commitment to uphold the Honor Code, to accept responsibility for learning, and to follow the philosophy and rules of the Honor Code. Student will be required to state their commitment on examinations, research papers, and other academic work. Ignorance of the rules does not exclude any member of the MSU community from the requirements or the processes of the Honor Code. For additional information, please visit: <http://honorcode.msstate.edu/policy> and <http://students.msstate.edu/studentconduct/>.

To be clear, students who cheat in any way will be penalized. Cheating includes giving as well as receiving help when such help is not explicitly allowed.

Plagiarism is also a form of cheating, as is using AI (i.e., a generative AI tool) to complete an assignment. The best way to avoid anything that might be academic misconduct is to put yourself in a position where you don't need to cheat or plagiarize. Don't get behind, and if there are things that you don't understand, give yourself time to figure them out or schedule a meeting with me.

Please ask me if you have any further questions about what constitutes academic misconduct. I am happy to answer any questions about what is and is not allowed. But ask me before you do something questionable.

8 Coursework & Grading

Letter grades will be assigned using this scale: an A is 90 – 100 percent, a B is 80 – 89 percent, a C is 70 – 79 percent, a D is 60 – 69 percent, and an F is below 60 percent. The grades will be set based on this coursework and these percentages:

- quizzes & homework assignments: 50 percent
- reading response papers: 20 percent
- two tests: 30 percent

All of the quizzes and tests in this course will be open book and notes – your own notes, not someone else's. There will usually be one or two quizzes and one short writing assignment per week. Quizzes and other weekly assignments cannot be made up or submitted late, but your two lowest quiz or homework grades will be dropped.

In the last four weeks of the course, you will read Michael Sandel's *What Money Can't Buy*, and each of those weeks, you will submit a 2 – 3 page reading response paper. There will not be any extra credit at the end of the course. Therefore, you should do as well as you can throughout the semester.

Honorlock You will use the proctoring software Honorlock for both tests. There is information about using this software on Canvas, but, right now, you should make sure that you have a working webcam – either the webcam built into your laptop or an external one (which doesn't have to be HD or otherwise fancy).