

## PHIL 160: BUSINESS ETHICS, FALL 2016

Professor Kisilevsky

TTh, 9:15-10:30, PH 153

Office Hours: Tues, 3-5, PH 350G

Email address: Please email me through Blackboard

### Course Description:

What is appropriate conduct in business? Recent events (the financial crisis, the Madoff scandal, etc.) have taught us that blind pursuit of profit can lead to disastrous consequences, both morally and financially. It is no longer permissible to ignore the needs of others in pursuit of profit. Success requires financial acumen along with sensitivity to the consequences of one's actions on the world around us.

Yet it is perfectly permissible to try to make a profit. There's nothing wrong with making a good deal, even if people sometimes lose money on them. What are the limits of morally acceptable practices in business? What can people permissibly do to one another in the pursuit of profit? Can one do whatever it takes to get ahead in business? When must business interests cede to moral concerns?

This course is a course in *critical moral reasoning*. It will teach you to identify and critically assess morally complex situations as they arise in the business context, and deepen your understanding of them. Ethics isn't a matter of picking a "side" in a debate or taking a stand on an issue. Most everyday issues are too complex for this. We will study how to navigate the "grey areas" of business so that you can work through them carefully, systematically, and critically so that you can arrive at narrow and carefully reasoned conclusions on specific matters that arise.

The topics that we will cover include world poverty, duties to others, moral responsibility, coercion, respect for persons, exploitation and manipulation, and equality and discrimination. These are some of the morally complex that arise everyday matters of business.

### Evaluation:

1. Reading Questions: 15 (of 28) x 1% each, for a total of 15%
2. Assignments: 3 x 25% each, for a total of 75%
3. In-class participation: 10%

### Class Policies:

#### Submission of Work:

1. **Reading Questions:** There are 28 classes in the semester. Each class will have a brief reading question (requiring one sentence to one paragraph answers), due before class on the day on which we are covering the reading. You must answer **at least one reading questions per major section of the course** (as marked

by the bold roman numerals on the syllabus), for a total of 15 of 28 questions. Answers to reading questions must be submitted *before the beginning of class* on Blackboard on the day on which they are due. Late submissions will not be accepted.

2. **Assignments:** There are three short assignments due throughout the semester. When time permits, you will be given time in class to work on them.
3. All submitted work is formal written scholarship. It must include your name and class number, and an appropriate title. Your work must be written in full, grammatically well-formed sentences. And it must be properly cited. Failure to do any of these will result in a loss of grades.
4. All use of materials that do not come directly from your head needs to be properly cited. Failure to fully cite all material used constitutes an academic offence. For more information about citation formats, consult the Queens College Writing Center, or the Purdue Online Writing Lab (available online). For information about what constitutes an academic offence, see the College Bulletin.
5. The only excuses for a late assignment are illness or emergency. You must provide official documentation for this (a doctor's note or a letter from the registrar) specifying that you could not fulfill your work requirements on the dates that they were due. Late assignments submitted without documentation will be docked 2% per day.
6. **In-class participation:** As philosophy proceeds by debate, there will be a large emphasis on discussion in this class. You will be graded on your level of participation. Grades will be awarded for *meaningful participation* in class discussions. This includes thoughtful input on the matter at hand, thoughtful responses to comments by your peers (why you agree, disagree, don't like, etc. their suggestions), *any* question about the content of the readings, and so on. Lack of familiarity with the assigned readings, not paying attention to your classmates' comments, asking me to repeat the question, prolonged absences from the class, and so on will all result in *loss* of participation marks. *Checking your phone or other devices in class will result in loss of participation grades.* If there is an emergency requiring you to keep your phone on, please notify me at the beginning of class.
7. You are expected to come to class prepared and participate in class discussions. I will often call names off the roster.

**Classroom Environment:**

**Electronic Devices:** There are *no laptops, tablets, phones* or other devices allowed in class. If you have reading or writing disability and need to take notes on a laptop, please contact Disability Services to arrange for special accommodation. If you are expecting an important phone call during class time, please let me know ahead of time and I will accommodate you. Otherwise, please make sure your cell phones are turned off during class time.

There is a lot of discussion of controversial issues in this class. The classroom is like any other professional environment. You should always maintain a professional attitude towards others. This includes

1. Listening attentively when other people are talking. I will often call on you to respond to one another.
2. Not interrupting other people when they are speaking.
3. Treating your fellow students with respect even when you disagree.

Failure to adhere to these requirements will negatively affect your participation grade.

**Resources:**

The readings and handouts are all available on the class website, which is run through Blackboard. Please make sure that your Blackboard email is up to date, and to consult the website regularly for updates and announcements about the class.

I will also make a printed copy of the reader available.

**Schedule of Readings:**

Aug. 25          Introduction

**I.          Duties to Others**

Aug. 30          Singer, "Rich and Poor"

Sept. 1          Singer, cont'd

Sept. 6          Singer, cont'd

Sept. 8          Toby Ord, "The Moral Imperative Towards Cost Effectiveness"

Sept. 13          Shue, *Basic Rights*

Sept. 15          Ponting, "Creating Rich and Poor"

Sept. 20          In-Class Work

**II.          Responsibility for Harm**

Sept. 22          Hart, "Tracing Consequences"

Sept. 27          Schulz, "Trading with Abusive Regimes"  
**Assignment 1 Due**

Sept. 29          In-class work

Oct. 6 NO CLASSES

Oct. 11 NO CLASSES

### **III. Respect for Persons**

Oct. 13 Hoffman, "The Ford Pinto"

Oct. 14 Kant, from *The Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*

Oct.18 Kant, cont'd

### **IV. Exploitation & Manipulation**

Oct.20 Frontline, "The Card Game"

Oct. 25 Buss, "Valuing Autonomy"

Oct. 27 Feinberg, "Non-Coercive Exploitation"

Nov. 1 Feinberg, cont'd

Nov. 3 Goldman Sachs

Nov. 8 Goldman Sachs, cont'd

Nov.10 In-class work

### **IV. Equality and Discrimination**

Nov. 15 *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.*

Nov. 17 Implicit Bias  
**Assignment 2 Due**

Nov. 22 Singer, "Is Racial Discrimination Arbitrary?"

Nov. 24 THANKSGIVING BREAK – NO CLASSES

Nov. 29 Singer, cont'd,

Dec. 1 TBA

Dec. 6        TBA

Dec. 8        In-class work

**Assignment 3 due during exam week.**