

Syllabus

Business Ethics

PHIL 1040 | Fall 2016
Department of Philosophy
Auburn University

For ease of navigation, the PDF version of this syllabus has a hyperlinked table of contents, which should be viewable in any PDF reader.

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Office:	Haley 3058		
Office Hours:	Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3:30–5:00, and by appointment		
Class Meetings:	PHIL 1030–003	TR 8:00–9:15	Haley 3174
	PHIL 1030–004	TR 11:00–12:15	Haley 3174
	PHIL 1030–005	TR 9:30–10:45	Haley 2461
	PHIL 1030–006	TR 12:30–1:45	Haley 3218

1 Course Description

In this course, we will explore a wide range of issues concerning the place of business in society. Questions we will address include (but are not limited to) the following: What responsibilities do businesses have to society at large? What responsibilities do businesses have to the members of that society, be they employees, consumers, shareholders, or merely (present or future) citizens? What responsibilities does the society at large have to businesses? What responsibilities do individuals (employees, for example) have to businesses? How do laws and public policies affect everyday business behavior? How does everyday business behavior influence legislators and policymakers? What are the ethical ramifications of these relations between business and government?

2 Course Objectives

The overall goal of the course is not to provide definitive answers to any of the questions posed above; it is, rather, to develop a sense of the complexity of those questions, and of the interrelations between the different issues raised by each of them. The goal, in other words, is not to decide what place business should have in

society; it is, instead, to become practiced in thinking about the various considerations that are potentially relevant to making particular decisions about the role of business in the real world. We will address this complexity by thinking about each business-ethical problem we discuss from a variety of perspectives, including those of employees, consumers, business managers, shareholders, politicians, policymakers, and citizens. We will see that different facets of each business-ethical problem come into view from each of these different perspectives. Our working assumption will be that a truly satisfying solution to any business-ethical problem would be one that takes into account every single one of these perspectives. Perhaps no such truly satisfying solution is possible. But in that case the aim should be to take into account as many perspectives as possible, given whatever real-world constraints there may be.

3 Learning Outcomes

In this course—*if* you put in the work, i.e., if you read and reflect on the material, come to class, participate in discussion, and put time and effort into your written work—you will acquire and/or hone some important and widely applicable skills, in particular, how to read and think analytically and critically, and how to construct and critique arguments effectively. But you will learn to apply these skills primarily in relation to views about the interface between ethics and business. You will thus learn, most especially, to think more carefully and critically about a range of issues pertaining to living well (i.e., both happily and ethically) as a participant in the modern economy. You will learn how to think about the obstacles (both personal and systemic, both local and global) to making money without harming others or yourself, and without allowing others to harm you. And you will acquire familiarity with some of the considerations and arguments (on both sides of various debates) that are relevant to:

- acting ethically in your working life,
- integrating your job or career into a satisfying and rewarding *human* life,
- promoting justice and fairness in your society (from the level of individual businesses to that of the global economy),
- assigning responsibility (for the effects of doing business) to businesses and their employees,
- evaluating and weighing the potential benefits and harms of new technologies,
- assessing the appropriateness or inappropriateness of various forms of marketing, and

- analyzing the ethical costs of different economic and political systems as such (e.g., capitalism and communism, welfarism and socialism).

4 Course Requirements

4.1 Readings

You are required to complete all assigned readings *prior* to the class meetings for which they are assigned, as indicated in the Schedule of Readings (see section 6 below).

There is only **one required text:** *Honest Work: A Business Ethics Reader* (Third Edition), edited by Joanne B. Ciulla, Clancy Martin, and Robert C. Solomon (Oxford University Press, 2014). **If you do not buy the book from the Auburn University Bookstore, make sure you purchase the *Third Edition*.** The vast majority of assigned readings will be from this text. Occasionally, however, readings will instead be posted to Canvas in PDF format.

You are required to bring the day's assigned reading with you to class, in hard copy. (This means that you will need to **print out** the readings that are posted to Canvas.) Persistent failure to bring materials to class will lower your final grade by one full letter grade.

4.2 Participation

You will have **three different ways of fulfilling the participation requirement** for the course; to receive full participation points, however, **you *must* participate in at least two of these ways on a regular basis.** The three ways of participating are (i) speaking in class, (ii) contributing to Discussions on Canvas, and (iii) discussing course material with me during office hours.

Our classroom time will be divided between interactive lecture and small group discussion. Thus, anytime I'm lecturing, I invite and encourage you to raise your hand and, when called upon, ask questions or request clarification about, or offer an alternative (perhaps even conflicting) perspective on, anything I've said. These "interruptions" to lectures are crucial to the success of the course. The more I know about what you're thinking, what sense you're making of the course material, and what you think about it, the more I can tailor my lectures and our discussions to what interests and concerns *you*.

Because there are 34 or 35 of you (depending on the section you're in), and because productive discussion amongst so many people can be difficult to maintain, we'll also frequently break up into small groups, where you can discuss material from

the readings, and questions raised in class, with your peers. When we're working in small groups, I'll move from group to group, participating occasionally, but frequently simply listening and taking in your points of view.

And because our classroom time is limited, I've also created a Discussion on Canvas where you can post requests for definitions of words, clarifications of concepts, and explanations of theories (or whatever else seems important to you) that come up in our readings, in lecture, or in class discussion, and that strike you as important to understanding the course material. Once you and your classmates have begun posting such requests, I encourage you also to submit replies in which you offer a definition of a term, a clarification of a concept, an explanation of a theory, or whatever. I'll of course offer responses of my own, when necessary, but our aim as a class will be to try to provide a response to every such request, and in some cases some of you may have specialized knowledge to offer the class. You should also feel free to create additional Canvas Discussions on topics that come up in the course and that interest you, but that we don't find the time to pursue (either at all or in enough depth) in class. In other words, treat Canvas Discussions as an extension of the classroom, and use them freely.

Finally, I encourage you to use my office hours, especially if you don't like speaking in front of large groups. Again, this counts as a form of participation; it's a way of showing me that you're engaged with the material and putting effort into the course.

4.3 Assignments

4.3.1 Quizzes

There will be **at least six unannounced in-class quizzes**. These quizzes are designed to test your comprehension of the reading—in particular, your ability to identify the central claim or claims of assigned articles. Quizzes will consist of five multiple-choice questions, and will be graded as follows:

5/5	100
4/5	90
3/5	80
2/5	70
1/5	60
0/5	50

If you miss a quiz, your score for that quiz will be a 50. **Your lowest two quiz grades will be dropped**, i.e., will not factor into your final grade. You can make up any quizzes you miss due to *excused* absences, and you should be in touch with me as soon as possible after your absence to schedule a make-up quiz (quizzes will

thus be announced on Canvas shortly *after* they are administered). Typically, I will have you take make-up quizzes in my office, either during office hours or during a specially scheduled appointment. **Quizzes missed due to *unexcused* absences cannot be made up.**

4.3.2 Course Paper

You will also write **one two-page paper**. Deadlines for papers will be spread out over the semester. (This is, unfortunately, necessary in order to make grading manageable; but it also means that I should be able to grade your paper within a week of submission.) **You will thus have a self-selected deadline, between September 19 and November 14 (always a Monday morning)**, with selection subject to the following constraint: There will be exactly nine different deadlines. About three weeks into the quarter, you will have the opportunity to sign up for whichever deadline you prefer, on a first-come, first-served basis (so, for better or worse, only four of you will be able to choose the latest deadline). (But because some of you will select your deadlines quite far in advance, you can request an extension, and I will generally grant all reasonable such requests.)

Your course paper is to be submitted through Canvas, and I will use Canvas's grading system to grade it anonymously. Due to time constraints, I will be able to provide only minimal written comments, but I encourage you to come discuss your paper with me in person during office hours.

Before the first paper deadline, I will distribute (and post to Canvas) a set of Grading Criteria for Course Papers, so that you know both (i) what I expect of you on your paper and (ii) how your grade on your paper will be determined.

4.3.3 Peer Review

You will also perform **peer reviews of three of your classmate's papers**. To that end, the class will be divided into groups of four (or, where necessary, three) students. (We will also use these same groups for in-class small-group discussions.) One week before your chosen paper deadline (of which you will inform the other members of your group in advance), you will send each other member of your group a draft of your paper. Thus, over the course of the semester, you will *receive* three draft papers from other members of your group. **Your assignment** will be to **review those drafts for argumentative cogency**, making suggestions for revisions to be made before the final draft is submitted to me. (We will discuss arguments in detail in class before the first papers are due, and will spend time in class working on assessing arguments for cogency, and figuring out how they might be improved.)

You will also, upon submission of your paper, rate the feedback you receive from the other members of your group for its helpfulness in improving the

argument of your paper. Your grade for the peer review assignment will be calculated from the average of the ratings you receive from the other members of your group.

Before the first paper deadline, I will distribute (and post to Canvas) a set of instructions for reading and analyzing your classmates' papers, writing your peer review, and using the reviews you receive from your classmates to revise your paper for final submission.

Because your classmates can only complete their peer reviews if you submit your drafts in a timely fashion, late submission of your draft will negatively effect your grade on the course paper. More precisely, your draft will be due on a Monday at noon, and peer reviews will be due on that Wednesday at 5:00pm. If your draft is submitted by 5pm, you will receive 10 out of 20 points for timely draft submission; your group members will then be responsible for conducting their peer reviews within 53 hours (48 plus 5) of your submission of your draft.

Similarly, late submission of peer reviews will negatively affect your grade on the peer review assignment. Specifically: when everyone rates the peer reviews they receive, their rating will be based partly on the timely submission of the reviews.

4.3.4 Final Exam

Finally, there will be a final exam, consisting of 40 multiple-choice questions. The exam will be administered at the assigned time during exam week:

PHIL 1030-003	Thursday, December 8	8:00am-10:30am
PHIL 1030-004	Friday, December 9	12:00pm-2:30pm
PHIL 1030-005	Wednesday, December 7	8:00am-10:30am
PHIL 1030-006	Wednesday, December 7	12:00pm-2:30pm

5 Grading

Your final grade will be determined according to the following weighting of individual assignments and assignment of letter grades to the resulting percentage scores. Calculated percentage scores will not be rounded.

Participation:	15%
Quizzes:	25%
Course Paper:	25%
Peer Review:	10%
Final Exam:	25%

$90 \leq \text{Score} \leq 100$	A
$80 \leq \text{Score} < 90$	B
$70 \leq \text{Score} < 80$	C
$60 \leq \text{Score} < 70$	D
Score < 60	F

6 Schedule of Readings

Each reading is to be completed *before* the class meeting on the date for which it is assigned. Readings marked with an asterisk (*) will be posted to Canvas, and are to be printed out. All other readings are from *Honest Work*.

Introduction

Aug 16 Introduction, pp. xxiii–xxv

Everyday Ethics at Work

Aug 18 Chapter 1, pp. 1–19

Aug 23 Chapter 1, pp. 20–37

The Good Life

Aug 25 Chapter 3, pp. 85–104

Aug 30 Chapter 3, pp. 104–127

Fairness and Justice

Sep 1 Chapter 5, pp. 189–214

Sep 6 Chapter 5, pp. 214–233

Sep 8 Chapter 5, pp. 233–246

The Future of the Free Market

Sep 13 Chapter 15, pp. 633–657
Focus: E. F. Schumacher, “Buddhist Economics” (pp. 653–657)

Sep 15 Chapter 15, pp. 658–684
Focus: Robert Kuttner, “Everything for Sale” (pp. 675–678)

Sep 20 *Joseph A. Pichler, “Capitalism in America”

Focus: pp. 19–23, 26–28, and 36–38

Sep 22 *Karl Marx, *Capital Vol. 1*, Chapter 1, Sections 1 and 2

Focus: Section 2

Sep 27 *Lauren Berlant, “Slow Death”

Social Responsibility and Stakeholder Theory

Sep 29 Chapter 6, pp. 249–257 (Friedman, Stone)

Oct 4 Chapter 6, pp. 263–273 (Freeman, Arrow)

Oct 6 *Michael Harrington, “Corporate Collectivism”

The Ethics of Corporate Governance

- Oct 11 Chapter 14, pp. 597–608 (Dunfee)
Oct 13 Chapter 14, pp. 615–632
Focus: McCall, “Employee Voice . . .” (pp. 615–622)

Ethics and Technology

- Oct 18 Chapter 7, pp. 290–300
Oct 20 Chapter 7, pp. 315–326

The Ethics of Advertising, Marketing, and Sales

- Oct 25 Chapter 8, pp. 327–336
Oct 27 Chapter 8, pp. 337–341, 354–362

Product Liability and Consumers

- Nov 1 Chapter 9, pp. 363–383
Nov 3 Chapter 9, pp. 384–409
Focus: Thomson, “Remarks on Causation and Liability,” 391–396

International Business

- Nov 8 Chapter 11, pp. 449–480
Focus: Donaldson, “Values in Tension,” 458–465
Nov 10 Chapter 11, pp. 481–498

Environmental Ethics and Business Ecology

- Nov 15 Chapter 12, pp. 499–520
Focus: Sagoff, “At the Shrine . . .,” 503–510
Nov 17 Chapter 12, pp. 521–537

Thanksgiving Break

- Nov 22 NO CLASS | Thanksgiving Break
Nov 24 NO CLASS | Thanksgiving Break

Self-Interest

- Nov 29 No Reading
Dec 1 *Kernohan, “Self-Interest and the Dilemmas of Cooperation”