

UCOR 2910
Ethical Reasoning in Business
Winter 2019

Room: ADMN 306
T/Th 3:45–5:50

Instructor: Ben Suriano, PhD
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Office hours: By appointment

Course Description:

The purpose of this course is to begin cultivating forms of ethical consciousness that will prepare students to think critically within the business world. Some of the questions that will guide this course are: What does it mean to take up ethical reasoning? Is ethics merely a private affair or necessarily social and public? Is the economy an amoral sphere of life, or are there inherent ethical standards within its functioning? What is the nature and purpose of a corporation? How might ethical reasoning be applied not only to issues within the business world but its broader relation to society and the environment? In pursuing these questions this course will be evenly split into 2 sections, the first dealing with three main forms of ethical theory and their historical development (virtue theory, utilitarianism, deontology), and the second dealing with their practical application to contemporary issues within our economic relations. Success in this course will mean that students are conversant within the three theoretical frameworks and can critically frame business and socio-economic matters according to these ethical horizons.

Learning Outcomes:

On successful completion of this course (i.e. by passing this course), you will be able to:

1. Broadly understand the three main ethical paradigms of Aristotelian virtue ethics, modern utilitarianism and Kantian deontology, and the historical context of their social origins.
2. Compare and contrast the forms of reasoning within these paradigms, assessing their various strengths and weaknesses.
3. Understand some of the historical origins of, and basic ethical issues within, modern economic life and its business practices.
4. Critically apply one of the traditions of ethical reasoning to specific business issues in a way that sheds greater light on how to engage the complexities of modern economic reality.

Required Texts:

Sandel, Michael J. *Justice: A Reader*, 1st ed. Oxford U. Press, 2007.

Sandel, Michael J. *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009

A number of required readings will be posted on Canvas. You are expected to have read these and to bring a printed copy of them with you to class on the day they are assigned.

Requirements and Grading:

Total Grade Breakdown

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| Attendance and Participation | 20% (2 components) |
| Group Presentations | 20% (1 component) |
| Papers | 60% (2 components) |

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| Grading scale for Essay, Exams, and Final Grade: | A | 93-100 |
| | A- | 90-92 |
| | B+ | 87-89 |
| | B | 83-86 |
| | B- | 80-82 |
| | C+ | 77-79 |
| | C | 73-76 |
| | C- | 70-72 |
| | D+ | 67-69 |
| | D | 63-66 |
| | D- | 60-62 |
| | F | <60 |

Assignments:

Participation:

Class Attendance and Involvement = 10%

Participation means not only showing up to class on a regular and timely basis, but also doing the readings. This means being prepared to insightfully comment on, question, and engage the texts with your peers during class conversation. In order to facilitate the dialogical nature of ethics, students will be assigned to discussion groups. Throughout the quarter we will break into these discussion groups in order to engage the readings and issues through dialogue with each other and the rest of the class. These assigned discussion groups will be the same groups that given presentations at the end of the quarter.

Quizzes = 10%

Ten small quizzes asking one basic question about the readings will be given at random throughout the quarter. These quizzes will not be difficult if you engaged the texts.

Presentations

Group Presentation of Contemporary Issues = 20% (Due the last week of class)

Because ethics entails learning how to live and reason together with regard to shared communal ends, group presentations will provide an opportunity for active learning in applying ethics. During the last week of class each assigned discussion group will prepare a 20 to 30 minute presentation that outlines a contemporary business issue not previously discussed in class. The presentation must clearly present the problem, provide differing points of analysis from all three ethical frameworks, and then conclude with a reasoned argument for the best way forward in resolving the problem.

Papers:

Comparative Analysis Paper = 25% (5 pages - Due 2/14)

The comparative analysis paper must compare and contrast all three ethical frameworks and conclude with a reasoned argument as to which is preferable.

Final Research Paper = 35% (6 pages - Due 3/21)

The final research paper must pick an ethical issue in business and apply a specific ethical framework to its analysis.

Please cite all sources according to the guidelines provided in the *MLA Handbook* or *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

A note on Academic integrity: Any paper suspected of plagiarism will be dealt with according to Seattle University policies. This means that an assignment containing plagiarized material will receive a failing grade and may even result in automatic failure of the course. If you are unsure about plagiarism and whether your paper commits such, or if you have questions about proper citation, please see me before final submission.

Writing Center:

The Writing Center employs writing consultants who assist students at all stages of the writing process. Consultants will help students begin writing tasks, organize and develop first drafts, and revise and edit later drafts. It is strongly recommended that you take advantage of this service. To schedule an appointment, call 206-296-6239.

Office Hours:

Talk to me after class or through email and we will determine a time that works best for both of us.

Course Schedule:

| Date | | Topic | Reading Assignment |
|---------------|------|--|--|
| Week 1 | 1/8 | Introduction | Sandel, <i>Justice: What's the Right Thing</i> , Ch. 1 |
| | 1/10 | Historical Origins of Ethics | Canvas: Ellen Meiksins-Wood, "Athenian Democracy: A Peasant Culture"; Alasdair MacIntyre, "The Sophists and Socrates" |
| Week 2 | 1/15 | Historical context of Aristotle | Sandel, <i>What's the Right Thing</i> , Ch. 8; Canvas: McCarthy - "Aristotle on the Constitution of Social Justice and Classical Democracy"; |
| | 1/17 | Virtue Ethics | Canvas: <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , book I, book V.1; Aristotle in <i>Justice Reader</i> , <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , pp. 295–299 (books II & X); |
| Week 3 | 1/22 | Virtue Ethics | Aristotle in <i>Justice Reader</i> , <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , pp. 264–266 (chapters 1 & 2), 270–275 (chapters 8–10) |
| | 1/24 | Virtue Summary and Introduction to Utilitarianism and its social context | Canvas – Peter Critchley, "Aristotle and the Public Good" |
| Week 4 | 1/29 | Utilitarianism – Bentham and Mill | Sandel, <i>What's the Right Thing</i> , Ch. 2; Bentham in <i>Justice Reader</i> , pp. 9–14; Mill in <i>Justice Reader</i> , pp. 14–47 |
| | 1/31 | Utilitarian summary and introduction to Deontology | Sandel, <i>What's the Right Thing</i> , Ch. 5 |
| Week 5 | 2/5 | Deontology – Kant | <i>Justice Reader</i> , pp. 161-167 (sections 7–14), p. 176 (section 25), pp. 178-185 (sections 29–37) |
| | 2/7 | Ethical Theories Summary | Canvas: Martha Nussbaum, "Human Functioning and Social Justice" |

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| Week 6 | 2/12 | What is Capitalism? What is a Corporation? | Canvas: William H. Shaw, “The Nature of Capitalism” & “Corporations” |
| | 2/14 | History of Capitalism | Canvas: Merchant, <i>The Death of Nature</i> ; Barbara Fields, “Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the USA” |
| | | | PAPER DUE |
| Week 7 | 2/19 | Social Responsibility | Canvas: Shaw, “Poverty in America”; Angela Hanks, Danyelle Solomon, “Systematic Inequality: The Black-White Wealth Gap” |
| | 2/21 | Social Responsibility | Canvas: Nancy Fraser, “How Feminism became Capitalism’s Handmaiden”; Bouree Lam, “How do we Close the Gender Pay Gap?” |
| Week 8 | 2/26 | Social Responsibility | Canvas: Shaw, “Catastrophe in Bangladesh”, “One Nation Under Walmart”, “Yahoo in China” |
| | 2/28 | Social Responsibility | Canvas: Shaw, “A New Work Ethic?”, “Casino on Wall Street”; Synthetic CDOs (<i>The Big Short</i>) |
| Week 9 | 3/5 | Environmental Issues | Canvas: Kolasi, “The Physics of Capitalism”; Carbon Markets/Cap and Trade (storyofstuff.org); |
| | 3/7 | Environmental Issues | Canvas: Shaw, “Poverty and Pollution”, “Palm Oil and its Problems” |
| Week10 | 3/12 | Environmental Issues Group Presentations | Canvas: Naomi Klein, “Capitalism Killed our Climate Momentum, Not ‘Human Nature’”; Laura Paddison, “We Cannot Fight Climate Change with Capitalism” |
| | 3/14 | Group Presentations | |
| Week11 | Final Paper Due 3/21 4 PM | | |

University Policies:

Students with Disabilities: In case of a disability requiring accommodation, it is your responsibility to request such accommodation from the Disability Services Office (Learning Center, Loyola Hall, Room 100). Make an appointment with the Disability Specialist who will evaluate, determine, and grant the needed accommodation. An official request is required for every quarter that an accommodation is needed. To ensure granting of the needed accommodation, make the request early in the quarter.

Counseling Center: Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) is committed to helping students meet the challenges of life during college, graduate and professional school by encouraging healthy personal choices and balanced perspectives. Students seek counseling and psychological services for a wide variety of reasons, including depression and anxiety; life crises; identity issues; relationship concerns; difficulty with loss or other life transitions; sexual choices and concerns; problems related to alcohol or drug use, as well as many other issues of concern. Our professional team of licensed social workers, psychologists, and graduate trainees, provide time-limited group, couples and individual psychotherapy for students and referral services for those requiring specialized or longer term care. These services are provided free of charge to students enrolled in classes. All clinical services are confidential: no information is released without the student's consent, unless required by law.

Course Withdrawal: Failure to officially withdraw from a course without completing it will result in an F grade on the student's academic record.