

DePaul University

Department of Religious Studies

Syllabus

Business Ethics and Society--REL228-83-101 (cross-listed w/MGT228-45-101)

John Wall

Autumn 1998 MWF 8:30-9:30

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COURSE OBJECTIVES

In this course we explore the ethical issues which arise in contemporary business. We first discuss major competing contemporary approaches to ethical theory, including ethical issues such as the nature of moral freedom, the meaning of social justice, and the relations between individuals and their communities. Then we turn to select ethical issues in business such as the moral responsibilities of corporations to shareholders, customers, employees, and communities, the risks of business to the natural environment and families, affirmative action, gender discrimination, business self-regulation, truthfulness in sales and advertizing, and standards of international commerce. Students will develop a theoretical approach to business ethics, cultivate critical skills in public business ethical discussion, and learn to apply complex moral concepts to concrete business cases.

REQUIRED TEXTS

All of the following four books are required reading for the course. They are available at the bookstore. They should also be on two-hour reserve at the Circulation Desk at the Richardson Library.

Milton Friedman, Capitalism and Freedom (The University of Chicago Press, 1962)

John Rawls, A Theory of Justice (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971)

Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue, Second Edition (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984)

EXPECTATIONS OF THE STUDENT

1. **Class Attendance.** Because this is primarily a discussion class, you are expected to attend every class meeting. Attendance will be taken. You can be excused from attendance if you inform me about it *before* class. More than three *unexcused* absences from class will begin to have an effect on your grade for class participation.
2. **Reading.** You should carefully read all assigned texts. In the first part of the course we will read some difficult ethical theorists; you are not expected to master their every argument fully, but you are expected to bring to class your questions about how to understand the material and your views on the issues raised.
3. **Class Participation.** One of the major purposes of the class is for you to develop your own capacities to handle ethical issues and concepts in a public setting. Class participation is the best way for you to try out ideas, practice responding constructively to the ideas of others, and articulate your own business ethics approach. Class participation means both contributing to the class's understanding of the readings and issues and bringing to discussions your own critical perspective. Class participation constitutes a significant part of your grade.
4. **Small Group Discussions.** Each Friday throughout the quarter will be devoted to small group discussion of a business ethics case. Each student in the class will be responsible during one of these Fridays for 1) leading six to ten of their classmates in discussion of an actual case (supplied by the instructor) related to that week's readings, and then 2) briefly presenting the group's thinking to the rest of the class. You will in effect be the "Chair" of a business "Ethics Board" which is charged with coming up with recommendations on how the case might be approached and resolved. You will be able to choose the week in which you do this. You will not be graded for your presentation. However, if you fail to lead a group and make a presentation your grade for the course as a whole will be reduced by one full letter.
5. **Papers.** You will write a 2-3 page mid-term paper and a 7-10 page final paper. Details for papers will be given out at least a week before they are due. The mid-term paper will involve a comparison of the ethical theories we explore in the first part of the course. The final paper will be an in-depth analysis of one practical business ethics issue of your own choice from the latter part of the course (you may choose the same issue on which you lead a discussion). Except in the case of an emergency, late papers will be penalized a full letter grade for each day they are late. Plagiarism or cheating of any kind will result in a final grade of "F" for the course.

GRADING

Class participation: 25% Mid-term paper: 30% Final Paper: 45%

SYLLABUS

Introduction to the Course

Wed. 9/9: Goals of the course; syllabus

Fri. 9/11: What is ethics?; the major contemporary approaches to ethics

Major Contemporary Approaches to Ethics

Mon. 9/14: Freedom and individualism

Reading: Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 1-21

Wed. 9/16: Freedom and government

Reading: Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 22-36, 161-176

Fri. 9/18: Small group discussion of a case of sexual harassment

Reading: Beauchamp and Bowie, *Ethical Theory and Business*, 432-436

Mon. 9/21: Justice and equality

Reading: John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 3-22

Wed. 9/23: Justice and impartiality

Reading: John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 60-65, 136-142

Fri. 9/25: Small group discussion of a case of health care provisions

Reading: Beauchamp and Bowie, *Ethical Theory and Business*, 658-659

Mon. 9/28: Virtue and community

Reading: Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 1-5, 181-196 (to 2/3 way down page)

Wed. 9/30: Virtue and tradition

Reading: Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 204-225

Fri. 10/2: Small group discussion of a case of advertising ethics

Reading: Beauchamp and Bowie, *Ethical Theory and Business*, 480-490

Corporate Social Responsibility

Mon. 10/5: **Midterm paper due**

Stakeholder theory

Reading: Beauchamp and Bowie, *Ethical Theory and Business*, 66-76

Wed. 10/7: Stakeholder theory critiqued

Reading: Beauchamp and Bowie, *Ethical Theory and Business*, 76-96

Fri. 10/9: Small group discussions of a case of stakeholder theory (no reading)

Business Self-Regulation

Mon. 10/12: Business codes and peak organizations

Reading: Beauchamp and Bowie, *Ethical Theory and Business*, 124-135

Wed. 10/14: Ethical responsibilities of individuals within a corporate structure

Reading: Beauchamp and Bowie, *Ethical Theory and Business*, 136-157

Fri. 10/16: Small group discussion of a case in business self-regulation (no reading)

Acceptable Risks of Business

Mon. 10/19: Risks of business to consumers

Reading: Beauchamp and Bowie, *Ethical Theory and Business*, 201-215, 230-236

Wed. 10/21: Risks of business to families

Reading: Hewlett and West, *The War Against Parents*, 57-87 (handout)

Fri. 10/23: Small group discussion of cases in risks to consumers and families (no reading)

Workplace Discrimination

Mon. 10/26: Affirmative action

Reading: Beauchamp and Bowie, *Ethical Theory and Business*, 370-387, 438-440

Wed. 10/28: Comparable pay for women

Reading: Beauchamp and Bowie, *Ethical Theory and Business*, 387-409; 440

Fri. 10/30: Small group discussion of cases in workplace discrimination (no reading)

Truth and Deception in Sales and Advertising

Mon. 11/2: The moral relationship between salespersons and customers

Reading: Beauchamp and Bowie, *Ethical Theory and Business*, 463-472

Wed. 11/4: Persuasion vs. manipulation in advertising

Reading: Beauchamp and Bowie, *Ethical Theory and Business*, 472-490

Fri. 11/6: Small group discussion of cases in sales and advertising (no reading)

Business Ethics in the International Arena

Mon. 11/9: Cultural relativism and international rights

Reading: Beauchamp and Bowie, *Ethical Theory and Business*, 522-545, 604-607

Wed. 11/11: Business ethics in Russia and Japan

Reading: Beauchamp and Bowie, Ethical Theory and Business, 545-568

Fri. 11/13: Small group discussion of a case in international business ethics (no reading)

Conclusion

Mon. 11/16: What is business ethics?; questions about final paper (no reading)

Mon. 11/23: **Final paper due**