

LGST 1008: Ethics and Social Responsibility
The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania
Spring Semester 2024
Monday/Wednesday 1:45-3:15pm

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Course Description

This course is an introduction to business ethics. It also serves as an introduction to ethical reasoning, and to moral and political philosophy more generally. We'll aim to assess a range of competing views about the obligations of businesses and the individuals who run or work for them.

The main aims of the course are: (1) to introduce students to the methods of analysis of moral and political philosophy, and business ethics in particular; (2) to enhance students' critical reasoning skills, particularly as applied to ethical issues; (3) to improve students' ability to engage productively in discussions of difficult and controversial moral questions; (4) to improve students' ability to write effectively about complex issues, including ethical issues.

The course's assignments are structured with these goals in mind. There will be no exams, no pop quizzes, and I won't cold call for the purpose of checking up on whether students have read. Instead, I'll operate on the assumption that students have read and are prepared to discuss the material.

In the first five weeks of the course, we'll cover some central methodological and substantive issues in ethics and business ethics. Questions that we'll consider include: How does reasoning and argumentation in ethics work? What are the appropriate roles of moral principles and intuitions about cases in guiding our thinking about challenging ethical questions? How should our answers inform our thinking about important real-world issues, such as the programming of autonomous vehicles? What are our obligations to the global poor? What obligations do corporations have to the poor? Do businesses have any obligations besides making money for shareholders? If so, what are they, and what principles might explain them? Are there special principles that apply to individuals when they are acting in their roles in businesses, or are they subject to the same general principles that apply to us in our everyday lives outside of work?

After the first five weeks, the topics that we cover will be determined by student preferences, except for the very last day of class. At some point in the first few weeks, I'll provide a large list of possible topics, and will survey the class. The topics that receive the most interest from students will occupy us for the remainder of the semester.

Course Requirements

Class Participation: 20%

- Robust class discussions are essential to the success of the course. You'll be expected to come to class prepared to discuss the reading. This portion of your grade will be determined primarily by the quality rather than the quantity of your participation, although participating regularly is expected.

Group Presentation (leading class discussion): 20%

- After the first five weeks of class, each class discussion will be led by 2 students, who will be required to prepare a handout on the day's reading(s) in the style of those that will be provided by me during the first five weeks. Students will be in charge of introducing the central arguments made in the reading, suggesting key points for discussion, and guiding the discussion with classmates.

Paper #1 (1400-1600 words): 20% (due March 1st)

Paper #2 (2300-2700 words): 40% (due May 6th)

Readings

- *Note:* In addition to the reading on this syllabus, I will sometimes distribute recent news articles that discuss real world cases in which ethical issues in business are raised.

I. Business Ethics: Why and What?

Jan. 22nd: Introduction (no reading)

Jan. 24th: Jeffrey Moriarty, "Business Ethics: An Overview" (Sections 1-3)
Amartya Sen, "Does Business Ethics Make Economic Sense?"

II. Methodology in Ethics: Cases, Intuitions, Principles, and Applications

Jan. 29th: Judith Jarvis Thomson, "The Trolley Problem"
Peter Unger, *Living High and Letting Die* (Chapter 1, Sections 1-3; Chapter 4, Sections 1-5)

Jan. 31st: Patrick Lin, "Why Ethics Matters for Autonomous Cars"

III. Duties of Aid

Feb. 5th: Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"
Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Kindness to Strangers"

Feb. 7th: Thomas Dunfee, "Do Firms With Unique Competencies for Rescuing Victims of Human Catastrophes Have Special Obligations? Corporate Responsibility and the AIDS Catastrophe in Sub-Saharan Africa"

IV. Theoretical Approaches in Business Ethics

- Feb. 12th: Milton Friedman, “The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits”
R. Edward Freeman, “A Stakeholder Theory of the Modern Corporation”
- Feb. 14th: Thomas Donaldson, “Constructing a Social Contract for Business”
- Feb. 19th: Joseph Heath, “Business Ethics Without Stakeholders”
- Feb. 21st: Brian Berkey, “Prospects for an Animal-Friendly Business Ethics” (with guest speaker)
- Feb. 26th: TBD
- Feb. 28th: TBD
- March 11th: TBD
- March 13th: TBD
- March 18th: TBD
- March 20th: TBD
- March 25th: TBD
- March 27th: TBD
- April 1st: TBD
- April 3rd: TBD
- April 8th: TBD
- April 10th: TBD
- April 15th: TBD
- April 17th: TBD
- April 22nd: TBD
- April 24th: TBD
- April 29th: TBD
- May 1st: Karl Marx, “Alienated Labor”

Course Policies and Information

1. *Class Discussion*: Philosophical inquiry is a cooperative enterprise. We can best arrive at well-justified views by working together to think through the arguments that might be made for different, competing views. The ethical issues that we'll discuss are difficult and complex, and there will be disagreements. That's a good thing, since it will help all of us think more carefully about the range of plausible views about the complex questions that we'll be grappling with. For discussion to be productive in this way, it's essential that we all participate in a spirit of mutual respect. Respecting others is consistent with vigorously challenging their views and the arguments that they offer for them. What matters is that criticisms are presented in a way that interprets the arguments being challenged charitably, and that properly appreciates the status of those being challenged as cooperators in a joint intellectual endeavor.

2. *No Bullshit*: You'll need to do the readings in order to participate productively in class discussions. Philosophy is often challenging to read, and you may need to read things more than once in order to understand them. And sometimes there will be things that you don't understand even after multiple readings. That's OK – part of the purpose of discussion is to clarify issues that may be unclear in the readings, and I'll always be happy to answer questions about aspects of the reading that you found difficult. But if you haven't done the reading, attempting to participate will be counterproductive, and I'll probably be able to tell.

3. *Laptops/Tablets/etc.*: Electronic devices are not permitted in class. Your attention should be focused on the discussion, and devices offer too many distractions. Remember that there are no exams in the course, so there's no need to take extensive notes. It's much more important to be engaged in the discussion than to take down everything that I say. That said, I recommend having a pen and paper so that you can write down anything that strikes you as particularly important.

4. *Don't Plagiarize!*: Punishment for plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct will be severe. Any time you draw on someone else's work, you need to cite it, even if you're not quoting directly.

4b. *Don't Use Chat-GPT! (or similar programs)*: Philosophical reflection on the difficult topics that we'll cover requires independent thought and engagement. It's not the kind of work that programs like Chat-GPT can help you do well. In addition, while Chat-GPT can now write short Philosophy papers that might get a B or B-, it absolutely can't produce A-level work in Philosophy. So if you want an A, you have to do your own work!

5. *Late Papers and Extensions*: Late papers will be penalized 1/3 grade for each day late (so an A- paper turned in one day late would get a B+), with weekends counting for one day. Extensions will be granted for medical or other emergencies, and in some cases for other *serious* conflicts. If you need to request an extension, you should do so as early as possible.

6. *Office Hours*: I strongly encourage you to come to office hours. Discussing philosophical issues one-on-one or in a small group setting is an extremely valuable supplement to in-class discussion, and should help you to write better papers. You don't need to have specific questions prepared in order to come, and you're welcome to come in a group. If you can't make it during scheduled office hour times, I'll be happy to arrange to meet at another time.

7. *Dinners*: I also encourage you to sign up on Canvas for a dinner sponsored by the Wharton Meals Program. Dinners are free for students.

8. *Grading*: I don't grade on a curve. If everyone does A-quality work, then everyone gets an A. Course grades will be calculated using a 4-point scale. For example, an A for participation would count for $4 \times .2 = .8$; an A- for discussion forum postings would count for $3.7 \times .1 = .37$; a B+ for the first paper would count for $3.3 \times .25 = .825$; and an A- for the second paper would count for $3.7 \times .45 = 1.665$. The total for those grades would be 3.66 (A-). Here are the ranges for each letter grade in the A-C range:

$3.85 - 4 =$	A	$3.15 - 3.5 =$	B+	$2.5 - 2.85 =$	B-	$1.85 - 2.15 =$	C
$3.5 - 3.85 =$	A-	$2.85 - 3.15 =$	B	$2.15 - 2.5 =$	C+	$1.5 - 1.85 =$	C-

Note: I may give a grade of A+ for *truly exceptional performance*. This requires more than getting A's for all components of the course grade. Primarily, it will require writing papers that are of significantly higher quality than even typical A papers in an undergraduate course. This is extremely difficult to do, so it's very unusual for an A+ to be awarded.