

LGST 100-301
ETHICS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY
Spring 2021

Professor Amy Sepinwall
Huntsman Hall, Room 642
sepin@wharton.upenn.edu

Office hours: Scheduled occasionally (“hang-outs”) but also very happy to meet by appointment

COURSE OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

This is a course with three aims: First, and most importantly, the course is intended to provide you with the tools to answer the question, “what should I do?,” as regards a morally weighty issue, and as that question might arise in your future professional lives (and perhaps in your personal lives too). Second, the course aims to acquaint you with some of the most prominent post-enlightenment accounts of moral and political philosophy – a knowledge base that some might say every good college education should provide. Finally, the course seeks to improve your analytic and critical thinking and writing skills: you will learn some logic and acquire other tools that will enhance your ability to construct your own arguments, and to identify and criticize others’.

You will do all of this by gaining acquaintance with seminal philosophical accounts and applying them to questions like:

- Should for-profit corporations be engaging in politics or otherwise trying to make the world a better place?
- Are high CEO salaries morally justifiable? Why or why not?
- Do we have obligations to assist the domestic or global poor? Why or why not?
- Are there moral limits to the market? E.g., should people be permitted to sell babies? Their bodies?
- Should we seek to redress injustices from long ago (e.g., reparations for slavery, restoring stolen art)?
- How can you lead your (morally) best life? And (why) should you?

GRADING

1. ***Introductory Video*** – 1% (bonus point!)
 2. ***Class Participation*** – 15%
 3. ***Group work*** – 40%
 4. ***Film Reflections*** – 10%
 5. ***Final Paper*** – 35 %
- **General policy:** *You must complete each of 1-5 to pass this course.*

1. **Introductory video** (1%) – due by Sun., Jan. 24, at 10 PM.

Please create, and upload to Canvas, a video of not more than 1 minute that tells me:

- i. Your full name, as written on roster and pronounced slowly
- ii. The name you would like to be called, pronounced slowly
- iii. Your preferred pronouns
- iv. Where you are in the world as you take this course (indicate any expected changes in your location over the semester). What is the time difference there?
- v. Your class year, major/concentration, minor, etc.
- vi. Where you are from
- vii. One fun thing you have managed to do during the pandemic

2. **Class participation** (15%)

The success of the course, and your success in it, depends in significant part on your active participation. You should come to class having read the materials assigned for that session, and prepared to offer critical insights. **The primary mode of class participation will involve my calling on students.**

I will also frequently poll the class as a whole. I expect you to answer the poll questions in a timely fashion.

Finally, I will sometimes welcome and encourage students to volunteer their thoughts in class. Students' participation grade will be dictated far more by **quality** than quantity **of participation.**

- a. **What counts as “quality” participation?** The purpose of our class discussions is to gain clarity together on an author's position and the reasons to accept or reject it. Quality interventions are those that help advance this purpose: they describe an author's position, or provide reasons for accepting or rejecting it. Quality interventions are also those that are responsive to my questions. Unhelpful interventions are those that raise issues not clearly relevant to the discussion at hand; those that have the effect of obstructing our progress to clarity; and those that fail to demonstrate proper respect for others in the room. (This last is not intended to deter disagreement. In fact, disagreement is enthusiastically welcomed! But it should be pursued respectfully.)
- b. **Synchronous attendance:** By default, I expect students to attend class synchronously. With that said, I understand that synchronous attendance is challenging for those of you outside of the Americas. I am happy to offer alternative means of participation but, in order to avail yourself of these alternative means, you must contact me by **Sun., Jan. 24, at 10 PM (or as soon thereafter as you join the course, if you add it after the first class session(s)).** All class sessions will be recorded, and recordings will be available to students who cannot participate synchronously. Please notify me in advance about one-off absences too. Properly justified absences will be excused but, depending on the circumstance, a short writing assignment may be required.

3. Group Work:

- a. Problem-solving assignment – 20%: With your group, decide upon which of the following two films you will watch (individually, or together in an appropriately socially distanced way):
 - i. The Facebook Dilemma: [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#) OR
 - ii. The Social Dilemma, available on Netflix.¹

Then, with your assigned group, please prepare a videotaped slide presentation (using PowerPoint, Prezzi, etc.) of not more than 8 minutes that articulates a policy proposal meant to address one of the problems raised in the film that you watched. You are welcome to do outside research but I am much more interested in your problem-solving skills. If you do consult other sources, please include them on your final slide. (I have no preferred citation format.)

Your video should feature each group member. You will be graded on the following bases:

1. How well do you describe the problem your policy is meant to address? 4/20
2. How good is your policy?
 - a. How effective is it likely to be? Convince the viewer that it is effective by describing how the policy is supposed to work and why you think it will have its intended effects. 8/20
 - b. How easy to implement is your policy? 4/20
3. What are the potential pitfalls of your policy? Why should we adopt your policy notwithstanding these pitfalls? 4/20

Please upload your presentation to Canvas by 10 PM on Feb. 28. **Late assignments will receive a 0.**

- b. News assignment – 20%: With your group (to be assigned after the first month of class), please create a video describing a business-ethics related **news item**. Your group will be assigned a topic, and the issue you choose related to that topic should be from sources within the last year. Find three news sources on your issue. Your final product should consist of a videotaped slide presentation (using PowerPoint, Prezzi, etc.) of not more than 8 minutes that features each group member. You should present the news item as if your viewer is completely unfamiliar with the issue. You should identify the business ethics questions the issue raises, and two theories or concepts from the course to which the issue relates. You will be graded on the

¹ Of course, you are welcome to watch both. But your final product should be based on only one of them. I recognize that not everyone has a Netflix subscription so your group should select The Social Dilemma only if you can ensure that each group member has access to the film.

following bases:

- i. Choice of issue – 2/20: How well does the issue fit with the assigned topic? How interesting is the chosen issue?
- ii. Business ethics analysis – 7/20: How well have you identified and articulated the business ethics questions that the issue raises?
- iii. Application of course concepts – 7/20: Have you identified the two most relevant concepts, and have you spelled out their application compellingly?
- iv. Entertainment value – 4/20: how engaging and entertaining is your presentation?

Please upload your presentation to **Canvas by 10 PM on March 31, 2021**.
Late assignments will receive a 0.

4. ***Film Reflections:***

Assignment 1 – 5%

1. Watch the film “Citizen Kane,” available through Lippincott Reserves and our Canvas page before your discussion.
2. Sign up for a small-group discussion through Canvas. Come prepared to discuss the film! **Dates: Feb. 12-15.**

Assignment 2 – 5%

1. Watch the film “Arbitrage,” available through Lippincott Reserves and our Canvas page before your discussion.
2. Sign up for a small-group discussion through Canvas. Come prepared to discuss the film! **Dates: Apr. 15-18.**

5. ***Final paper:*** 2000 word maximum. Due in Canvas by 10 PM May 8 (I reserve the right to refine or elaborate on the below. I promise that any modifications will be made in a timely manner.)

TOPIC: Junior analysts at large banks often work exceptionally long hours under high-stress conditions. Some have even referred to these workplaces as “white-collar sweatshops.” Are such jobs exploitative in an ethically problematic way? Your answer should engage with a philosophical theory of exploitation as advanced only in the two background readings below.

To that end, you will need to offer a brief description of the typical junior analyst position (see below on “background reading”). You will then need to summarize the theory, or theories, to which you are appealing. Based on that theory/theories, what makes exploitation wrong or not wrong? Finally, you will need to apply that theory to the issue at hand: How does the answer to that question inform the moral permissibility of the working conditions of junior analysts?

BACKGROUND READING (available on Canvas: Assignments>Final Paper Materials):

- a. On the working conditions of a junior analyst:

Of course not all junior analyst positions are the same. I take the description [here](#) to offer an accurate take on a typical position. For purposes of the paper, assume that you are evaluating a junior analyst position that fits the description in that source.

- b. On exploitation:
 - Zwolinski, “Sweatshops, Choice, and Exploitation”
 - Meyers, “Wrongful Beneficence: Exploitation and Third World Sweatshops”
 - You should not do outside research on the notion of exploitation.
 - Your papers should be written without help from your classmates. But you are permitted to work through these two articles with your classmates – i.e., to discuss them in an effort to better understand them.

GENERAL GUIDANCE ON WRITING PAPERS: It is essential to have a clear, well-reasoned argument, and the best papers will have something interesting or somewhat original to say. Clarity in writing and reasoning is critical. The top papers will also add value (i.e. say something non-obvious). It is perfectly fine to use the first-person, but you don’t have to. For more guidance, the following links provide resources for writing a philosophy paper, which may be useful:

- [Jim Pryor's guidance](#)
- [Harvard philosophy department guidance](#)

COURSE POLICIES:

1. **Canvas:** There will be a course website on Canvas, which will be our primary resource. For example, the Canvas site will be the repository for all of your readings, under “Files.” You will also be submitting all of your assignments through Canvas.
2. **Email:** Students should check email at least daily in the event that I send a message to the class.
3. **Late assignments:** All assignments must be submitted by the deadlines stipulated above. Late assignments will receive a 0. I will make exceptions only for extraordinary circumstances. You should not request lenience unless you feel reasonably certain that your circumstances are in fact extraordinary.
4. **In-class conduct:** In order to ensure your full engagement, I expect you to be using your computers only for purposes of viewing the class. (If we were in person, I would forbid all electronic devices. This is for your benefit. Studies show that students are more engaged when they have no electronics in front of them.)

5. **Sensitive topics:** We will be venturing into some of the most fraught topics of the day – issues of racial injustice, electoral politics, rights of historically oppressed groups, etc. In order to discuss these fully and trenchantly, we will have to allow that each of us has the freedom to speak their mind, no matter how distasteful their views may be to others in the class. This class will welcome all viewpoints but I nonetheless expect that you will proceed with a tone of civility and respect for one another.

6. **LGST 100 in the time of coronavirus:** As this syllabus likely makes clear, I aspire to run this course in a manner that closely reflects the experience you would have if we were meeting in person. But that is an aspiration, not an expectation. I very much appreciate that we are all facing challenges, and some of us have difficulties over and above those affecting us all. I cannot stress enough how important it is to me that you reach out to me if your particular situation poses unique challenges. I am very willing to be flexible, and very much committed to working with you to ensure that each of you can get the most out of this course notwithstanding the difficulties.

POLICIES FOR ONLINE LEARNING:

1. **Audio & Video:** Your audio will be muted by default when you enter class. You will need to unmute yourself to speak; please be prepared to do so. Your video should mainly be on. I regard class as a collective activity, and I expect to see you if you are in class or in office hours. I understand if you occasionally need to mute your video momentarily for personal reasons. If, for some reason, you cannot have your video on generally, please talk to me.

2. **Questions & Chat:** If you want to speak or ask a question, you should type “Question” in the chat function. (And if I seem not to see your raised hand, just call out. Seriously!)

3. **Synchronous attendance and recordings:** The default expectation is that you will be in class when class is held. You cannot simply opt out of classtime. With that said, I recognize that time differences or other challenges may not allow for your synchronous participation. If you are unable to attend class regularly for any reason, please let me know **by Jan. 24, 2021 (or as soon thereafter as you join the course)**. All class sessions will be recorded, and recordings will be available to students who cannot participate synchronously. Please notify me in advance about one-off absences too. Properly justified absences will be excused but, depending on the circumstance, a short writing assignment may be required.

CALENDAR OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

All required materials for the course will be available on our Canvas site. *Dates subject to change, depending on the speed of our progress through the materials.*

Date	Topic	Reading
1/20	Introduction	No reading
	UNIT I	Corporations and Ethics
1/24	Homework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upload your video introduction to Canvas by 10 PM tonight. • If synchronous participation poses a challenge for you, please send me an email by 10 PM tonight.
1/25	Corporate Purpose	Milton Friedman, “The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase Its Profits”
1/27	“	Lynn Stout, The Problem of Corporate Purpose
2/1	Homework	Sign up for small-group film discussions for Citizen Kane *and* Arbitrage
2/1	Meaningful Work	Elizabeth Anderson, Tanner Lecture
	UNIT II	Moral Theory
2/3	Cultural Relativism	James Rachels, The Challenge of Cultural Relativism
2/8	Utilitarianism	John Stuart Mill, excerpt from Utilitarianism
2/10	“	“
2/12-2/15	Homework	<u>WATCH</u> “Citizen Kane” before discussion sessions, which run from 2/12-2/15!
2/15	Kantian Ethics	Michael Sandel, Kantian Ethics
2/17	“	“
2/22	Altruism	Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”

2/24	Altruism	“
2/28	Homework	Problem-solving group work assignment should be uploaded to Canvas by 10 PM tonight!
UNIT III		
Resource Distribution		
3/1	Distributive Justice	John Rawls, Distributive Justice
3/3	Distributive Justice	Rawls (continued)
3/8	“	Robert Nozick, Anarchy, State, Utopia
3/10	NO CLASS	
3/15	Distributive Justice (cont'd)	Nozick (continued)
3/17	“	Iris Marion Young, Responsibility and Structural Injustice
3/18	FSB Event	Rahul Sagar, The Misinformation Revolution – register here If you cannot make the event, a video recording will be available
3/22	“	Note on the Law of Sexual Harassment Center for Work-Life Policy, Lack of Sponsorship Keeps Women from Breaking Through the Glass Ceiling Finds New Study
UNIT IV		
Moral Limits of the Market		
3/24	Libertarian Perspective	Richard Posner and Elizabeth Landes, Selection from <i>Rethinking Commodification: Cases and Readings in Law and Culture</i>
3/29	“	“
3/31	NO CLASS	
3/31	Homework	News Presentations should be uploaded by 10 PM tonight on Canvas
4/1	FSB Event	(Optional, but encouraged): Matt Shafer, Silence Is Violence, and So Is Speech
4/5	Communitarian Perspective	Michael Sandel, What Money Can't Buy

4/7	“	“
4/12	Corrective Justice 1	Reparations for Slavery Ta-Nehisi Coates, The Case for Reparations Ta-Nehisi Coates Revisits the Case for Reparations
4/14	Corrective Justice 2	College admissions cheating scandal – read: Inside the College Cheating Scandal Restoring stolen art – read: nothing
4/15-4/18	Homework	WATCH Arbitrage before discussion sessions, which run from 4/15-4/18!
4/19	Moral rights of artists	Charles Beitz, The Moral Rights of Artists
4/21	Ethics of Boycotts	Tom Christiano, The Uneasy Relationship Between Democracy and Capital
4/26	Environmental ethics	Hardin, The Tragedy of the Commons Newton, “Eight Perceptions of the Natural World”
4/28	Leading a Good Life	Sartre, Existentialism Is a Humanism Greg Smith, Why I am Leaving Goldman Sachs Phillip Meyer, American Excess: A Wall Street Trader Tells All
5/8	Homework	Final paper should be uploaded to Canvas by 10 PM tonight!