

B/P350 Business, Ethics and Politics Spring 2018

Course Instructor:

NAME Dr Evgenia Mylonaki
EMAIL
HOURS AVAILABLE
PHONE

Class Meetings:

DAY HOURS

Course Description

In this course we will examine some of the standard issues in Business Ethics and Politics and we will examine what deeper philosophical problems (both ethical and political) lie at the source of these issues. The main form of Business we will be concerned with is the Corporate form of Business in capitalism. Thus, in the beginning of the course we give a brief overview of this form of business.

In the first part of the course we will acquaint ourselves with the dominant ethical philosophical theories, and with the help of these theories we will ground the philosophical problems that lie at the source of Business Ethics. Thus, we will formulate and examine the following philosophical problems: 1) The philosophical problem of personhood and corporate responsibility, 2) The philosophical problem of corporate corruption and crisis, and last 3) The philosophical problem of corporate management and happiness.

In the second part, we will acquaint ourselves with the dominant political philosophical theories and with the help of these theories we will formulate and examine the following philosophical problems: 1) The problem of Corporate Citizenship, 2) The problem of Democracy, 3) The problem of Justice, 4) The problem of freedom, 5) The problem of Labor, and 6) The problem of Environment.

Finally, in the third part of the course we will examine answers to these problems by alternative, radical, activist forms of production and exchange of goods.

Course Resources and Activities

- 1) Each student will have the opportunity to interview a corporate lawyer, a representative of a corporation, a representative of an NGO, and a representative of alternative economies and activists. (This will count towards fulfilling the participation requirement – see below)
- 2) Philosophical texts
- 3) Newspaper clippings and articles on Case Studies (North Dakota Pipeline, Mexico Golf Oil Spill, Sweat shops, etc.)
- 4) Historical material (particularly related to colonialism, slavery, etc.)
- 5) Film (e.g. The Corporation)
- 6) Guest Philosophy Lectures

Learning Objectives

It is the aim of this class to enable students to think through the philosophical character of some of the problems we all face and that have to do with the contemporary forms of business and to enable all of us to do philosophy together.

In this class you will be able to:

1. Familiarize yourselves with fundamental ethical and political philosophical theories.
2. Appreciate how philosophical theories help us frame problems arising from the activity and the nature of contemporary forms of business.
3. Consider alternative solutions to these business problems, and finally,
4. Consider alternative forms of business which attempt to solve these problems.

Course Requirements

- 1) Class Participation In this class, philosophy is being taught as an activity and not a mere body of doctrine. As a consequence, we will all try to engage in dialogue with each other, starting from what we know and experience and moving on to a philosophical understanding of each of the concepts and problems we will be reading about in class. Students will interview lawyers, representatives of corporations, NGOs, alternative economies, etc. as a part of fulfilling this requirement.

- 2) Writing

A. Weekly Reflections:

You will be asked to turn in *one* weekly 1-2pages free report or reaction to the readings of the upcoming class that will be delivered to my email address before the first or the second class of the week. The reports will be briefly commented on and returned to you but not graded separately. You will be graded just for turning them all in on time. You will get an A+ if you've turned them all in on time and an F if there are more than two reports unjustifiably missing or written in such a manner as to convey that the reading was not actually done

B. Paper(s):

You will also be asked to write a midterm paper of 3 to 5 pages and a final paper of 5 to 7 pages. The deadline for the midterm paper will be on the 25th of October and the deadline for the final paper will be on the 13th of December.

The option of re-writing will be open only for midterm papers. The particulars of the process will be discussed in class. Guidelines for writing a paper will be discussed in class as we move on and you turn in more reading reports. Paper topics will be selected freely by you, after prior consultation with me. There will be no exams for this class.

Grading and Evaluation

Assessment Distribution:

Class participation: 30% of the grade. (Interviews 50% of this part of the grade, 15% of the whole grade)

Weekly reports: 20% of the grade

Midterm paper: 15% of the grade

Final paper: 35% of the grade

Class Schedule

Class Week	Day/Date	Topic / Readings / Assignments Due
1 st	Ethical and Political Issues in Business	<p>In this section we will go over some of the standard problems in what is usually taken to be the area of Business Ethics and Business Politics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethical Issues that arise in <i>Business Decisions</i> (Management, Marketing, Finance, etc.) and <i>Business Methods</i> (Reward/punishment systems, codes of ethics, whistleblowing, etc.) • Political Issues that arise in the involvement of Business with <i>Politics</i> (domestic and international), <i>Society</i> and the <i>Environment</i>. <p>And we will get a first taste of what deeper philosophical problems (both ethical and political) lie at the source of these problems.</p>
2 nd	The Form of Corporate Business	<p>In this section we will familiarize ourselves with the form of production in which the corporate model of business is embedded as well as the structure of the corporate model of business.</p> <p>Thus we will examine fundamental features of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Capitalist Economy. 2. The Corporation. <p>To this end we will read abstracts from works such as:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Adam Smith, <i>The Wealth of Nations</i> 2. Marx, <i>The Capital</i> 3. Micklethwait, <i>The Company</i> <p>* Watch: <i>The Corporation</i> (Documentary)</p>
3 rd to 6 th	Philosophical Problems of Ethics	<p>In this section we will examine the ethical identity that the corporation takes up for itself as well as the ways in which it has transformed our ethical identities. In particular, we will examine the following issues:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Corporate Personhood and Personal Responsibility <u>Problems in Business Ethics:</u> <i>In this class we explore issues having to do with the ways in which corporations are held responsible. Thus we will deal with the issue of the conditions of personhood and we will ask the question of whether it is possible for a collective of agents/persons to count as a single agent and person. Is the new personhood possible? Does it change the conditions of ascription of blame?</i>  <p>Philosophical problems:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Individual and Collective Agency 2) Personal Identity and Personhood <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Corporate Corruption and Crisis <u>Problems in Business Ethics:</u> <i>The 2008 financial crisis was attributed by some to the failure of the market agents to meet standards of excellence, rules of utility and rightness of conduct. In this session we will examine these attributions from the perspective of the ethical theories presented in the first section and we will consider one critique</i>



of these attributions from the perspective of the Aristotelian conception of human function and excellence.

Philosophical theories:

- 1) **Utilitarianism** (John Stewart Mill, *Utilitarianism*)
- 2) **Kantianism** (Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*)
- 3) **Virtue Ethics** (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*)

3. **Management and Happiness**

Problems in Business Ethics: *Contemporary managerial practices in the workplace often center on the production and maintenance of "happiness in the workplace" independently of the structural and circumstantial conditions in the workplace. In this class we will consider the notion of happiness involved in management and consider it in contradistinction with the classical ethical conception of happiness.*

Philosophical concepts:

- 1) **Alienation** in Marx (Grundrisse)
- 2) **Eudaimonia** in Aristotle (Nicomachean Ethics)

7th to 10th

Philosophical Problems of Politics

In this section we will explore the political identity that the corporation takes up for itself as well as the ways in which it has transformed our political identities. Thus we will examine the following issues:

1. Corporate **Citizenship?** (corporate lobbying, corporate election financing, etc.)
*In this class we will examine the discussion concerning the social responsibility of corporations and the **status of corporations as citizens**. We will consider classical and modern conceptions of citizenship and ask the question whether the idea of corporate citizenship is a transformation of these conceptions or a myth.*

Philosophical Theories:

Classical and Modern **Theories of Citizenship** (Aristotle and Hobbes)

2. Corporate **Justice?** (Indigenous Populations, Housing problem in the U.S., Prisons, etc.)
*In this class we will consider various **cases** which raise questions concerning **justice**.*

Philosophical Theories of Justice:

- **Libertarianism** - Robert Nozick, *Anarchy State and Utopia*
 - **Kantianism** - John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*
 - **Marxism** - Cohen, G., *If You are an Egalitarian How Come You're so Rich?*
3. Corporate **Freedom?** (slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism, debt-colonies)
In this class we will consider various ways in which corporate activity has been intermingled with slavery and colonialism and examine how this intermingling has affected our conception of freedom.

Philosophical Concepts:

Positive and Negative Freedom (Isiah Berlin)



4. Corporate **Labor?** (Sweatshops and high-brow brands)
In this section we will consider various forms of labor under corporate management. And in particular we will examine how some of these forms of labor may have altered the form of human life.

Philosophical Problems:

The **Human Function** (Aristotle)

The **form of Human Life** (Aristotle)

5. Corporate **Environment?** (Mexico Gulf Spill, North Dakota Pipeline)
*In this class we will consider cases of **environmental issues** resulting from corporate activity and examine the question of how the activity of corporate business transforms the form of nature and life itself.*

Philosophical Issues:

The form of Human Life

11 th and 12 th	Alternative Systems of Production and Distribution	In this section we will examine alternative systems of production and distribution. In particular, we will examine: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Socialist systems of production and distribution.• Examples of Alternative Economies throughout the world.
--	---	---
