

## Phil 243: Ethics in Business

(Current as of 03/11/2025)

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| Class Time: 12:05-12:55 MWF    | Discussion Sections:              |
| Location: Van Hise 494         | 331 Thurs 9:55-10:45 Mosse 2653   |
| Course Website:                | 332 Thurs 11:00-11:50 Mosse 2619  |
| canvas.wisc.edu/courses/444472 | 333 Thurs 12:05-12:55 Mosse 2619  |
| Instructor: Matthew J. Maxwell | Teaching Assistant: Will Siegmund |
| Contact: mjmaxwell3@wisc.edu   | Contact: wsiegmund@wisc.edu       |
| Office: Helen C. White 5146    | Office: Helen C. White 5112       |
| Office Hours: 11-11:50 MWF     | Office Hours: 1:15-3:15 W         |

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### Course Description

What is a morally good career? What sorts of freedoms should be allowed in the workplace? Ought you be loyal to your employer, even if they are acting immorally? And when should you speak out? Ought intellectual property be thought of in the same way as other property? When is it morally permissible to use AI or algorithms in the workplace? Do we have an obligation to work? These are some of the questions we'll be examining in this class on ethics in business. We will be developing the skills to answer these questions through writing assignments and discussions with your peers.

This course may be different from other courses you've taken. We will not be learning "content" in the usual sense. Rather, we'll be investigating *reasons* for the various answers to questions covered in this course. This course is not aimed at changing your mind or filling it up with facts and you will never be graded on what you believe. You should, however, come away with a better understanding of what you do believe, why you believe it, and how to discuss it with and communicate your reasons to others.

### Learning Outcomes

1. Ability to think critically about arguments.
2. Ability to interpret complex texts accurately and analyze them logically
3. Ability to communicate precisely and concisely in both writing and speech.
4. Familiarity with a diversity of viewpoints and ideas in business ethics.

### Required Texts

All required texts will be available via either the library or the course Canvas site.

## Credit Hour Explanation (4 credits)

This class meets for a total of 4 class period hours each week over the semester and carries the expectation that students will work on course learning activities (reading, writing, studying, etc.) for about 2 hours outside of the classroom for every class period hour.

## Prerequisites

Sophomore standing or 3 Credits in PHILOS

## Classroom Discussion Norms

Discussion is one of the most important parts of this class. Here are a few guidelines to make the most of it!

- Listen actively and with an ear to understanding others' views. (Don't just think about what you are going to say while someone else is talking.)
- Criticize ideas, not individuals. We all can learn something from each other, even if our views don't necessarily align.
- Allow everyone the chance to speak.
- If you think something is missing from the conversation, don't wait for someone else. Make the contribution yourself.
- Ask questions when you do not understand. Chances are that others also do not understand.
- Try not to silence yourself out of concern for what others think. So long as your contribution is sincere (i.e. not trolling), your perspective is likely useful.

## Assignments

### Critical Response Papers ( $10 \times 3 \text{ pts} = 30 \text{ pts}$ )

Approximately every three weeks you will write a journal entry that engages in a critical reflection on the previous weeks' material. A critical reflection takes as its starting point some idea we studied or passage from a reading, and your thoughts about it. These entries are not a stream of conscious expression of your feelings about the material, neither are they a summary of what we read or discussed in class. These responses provide you with an opportunity to explore what matters to you in some depth and on a consistent basis.

- **Journals should be approximately 600 words.** You may find it easier to think of these as short response papers rather than journals
- **Journals will be graded out of 10 points.** The basis for grading is whether they exhibit clarity, depth of critical reflection, and relevance to the ideas we study. Grades will be given as follows:

Sample Kinds of Critical Response Paper:

- **Argument** – A careful examination of the reasons why one agrees or disagrees with an idea discussed in class. A good argument will explain the reasons offered in favor of the idea as discussed in class/reading. Next, it will offer necessary supplements, or counter arguments. If you are thinking about majoring in philosophy, you should get comfortable writing this kind of paper.
- **Relation** – A careful explanation of how some idea that we studied relates to an idea studied in another class, or that you have encountered elsewhere. A strong relation response will carefully explain both ideas, and the relationship between those concepts.
- **Application** – An application of a concept to a problem or event in one's life, in the world more broadly, or what happens in a book or movie. This requires a careful explanation of the concept, an account of how the concept applies to the problem, and why it has the implication that it does.
- **Reflection** – An exploration of how one and why one thinks about the concepts, with a particular emphasis on how and why your thinking has changed, developed (or not) in light of what we study. This again requires a clear explanation of the idea we studied, your thoughts about it, and a careful explanation of how and why you think as you do.

### Reading Quizzes ( $10 \times 5$ pts = 50 pts)

Each week there will be a short reading quiz on Canvas. These will be due on Wednesdays by 11:59 pm and are designed to make sure you're keeping up with the readings. These quizzes are open note and open book.

### Case Study Essay (20 pts)

In this assignment you will use the tools you've learned in this class to analyze **one** difficult ethical case in business from the public sphere.

- Choose an actual current or historical event, a novel, a movie, a TV show, or similar that illustrates a difficult ethical case in business (broadly construed).
- Write and submit an outline of your paper. You must write the outline and accept comments on it before writing your final paper. Failure to do so will result in a 0 on the essay.
- The outline and essay will have a clear thesis and conclusion; i.e. they will not simply conclude that there are "differing opinions" or good points on both sides."
- The final essay will be 1200-1500 words in length and include citations as appropriate.
- You are encouraged to discuss the issue with others, however the words in your essay must be your own.

Final essays will include:

1. A detailed account of the case and why it is difficult.
2. A clear and complete explanation of the tools you will use to analyze the case.
3. A detailed explanation of how the tools apply to your case and how they lead to your resolution.

Previous students' paper topics have included:

- Should student-athletes be paid?
- Is it wrong to purchase “fast fashion”?
- Are the Minions in the movie *Minions* (2015) the subjects of unjust workplace abuse?

## Attendance

Attendance is required for this course. You may miss up to 3 lectures without penalty and 1 discussion section. Missing further lectures will result in a 1 point penalty per missed lecture. Missing a discussion section will result in a 2 point penalty per missed section. If you must miss more classes or will be absent for an extended period, contact the instructor or TA.

## Late Assignments

Assignments handed in late will be assessed a 1 point penalty per day. If you can't hand in an assignment on time, contact your instructor or TA about an extension.

## Grades

| Grade  | A      | AB    | B     | BC    | C     | D     | F        |
|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|----------|
| Points | 100-93 | 92-88 | 87-83 | 82-78 | 77-70 | 69-60 | Below 60 |

With this grading scheme and assignment structure, you must turn in all assignments to do well. If you find yourself falling behind or doing poorly on graded assignments, please reach out to your instructor or TA as soon as possible so that we can discuss options for getting you back on track.

We will not be curving or “bumping” grades. If you know that you need a good grade it's best to start thinking about this early. Talk with us about your work in the class before it's too late.

## Course Schedule

(Subject to change. See Canvas for the latest version.)

| Date      | Readings                                                                                                                                               | Assignments            |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1/22-1/24 | Syllabus                                                                                                                                               |                        |
| 1/27-1/31 | Singer “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”; Hardin “Lifeboat Ethics”                                                                                     |                        |
| 2/3-2/7   | Singer <i>The Most Good You Can Do</i> , chaps 4-5, 10; Srinivasan “Stop the robot apocalypse”                                                         | CRP Due                |
| 2/10-2/14 | Blunt “The Gates Foundation, global health and domination”; Monahan “Ethics of Socially Responsible Investing”; CapTimes “UW Foundation responds. . .” |                        |
| 2/17-2/21 | Locke <i>Second Treatise</i> chap 5; Nozick, <i>Anarchy, State, &amp; Utopia</i> 174-182; Herzberg “Elinor Ostrom’s <i>Governing the Commons</i> ”     |                        |
| 2/24-2/28 | Anderson “When the market was ‘Left’”; Bromwich “Market Rationalization”                                                                               | CRP due                |
| 3/3-3/7   | Anderson “Private Government”; Cowen “Work isn’t so bad after all”                                                                                     |                        |
| 3/10-3/14 | Frontline <i>A Dangerous Business</i> ; Redding “Rocking Boats, Blowing Whistles, and Teaching Speech Communication”                                   |                        |
| 3/17-3/21 | Dekker <i>Just Culture</i> (selections); Reis-Dennis “What ‘Just Culture’ doesn’t understand about punishment”                                         | CRP due                |
| 3/24-3/28 | <b>NO CLASS SPRING BREAK!</b>                                                                                                                          |                        |
| 3/31-4/4  | Harris & Narayan “Affirmative Action as Equalizing Opportunity”; Dobbin & Kalev “Are Diversity Programs Merely Ceremonial?”                            |                        |
| 4/7-4/11  | Kahneman et al “Noise”; Fazelpour & Danks “Algorithmic Bias”                                                                                           |                        |
| 4/14-4/18 | Goldhaber “The Attention Economy”; Doctorow “The ‘Enshittification’ Of TikTok”; Graeber “On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs”                           | Case Study Outline Due |
| 4/21-4/25 | Danaher “The case for technological unemployment”; Cholbi “A duty to work”                                                                             |                        |

| Date     | Readings                                                                                           | Assignments             |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 4/28-5/2 | Friedman “Social responsibility of business. . .”; Sen “Does Business Ethics make Economic Sense?” | Case Study<br>Essay due |
| 5/9      | <b>Finals Week</b>                                                                                 | no final exam           |

## Accommodations

While some discomfort is expected when discussing difficult topics, harm is never a positive outcome. Some of the material in this course may be extremely personal or otherwise distressing to some students. If this is the case for you, please reach out to me so that we can make adjustments or devise alternatives as necessary.

If you have learning accommodations through the McBurney Center, please let me know as early in the semester as possible. More information is available at <https://mcburney.wisc.edu/>

## A Note on Plagiarism

All work turned in for this course must be your own. When using the words and ideas of others you must cite them as appropriate. While AI tools may be appropriate for checking grammar or re-wording passages that you have written, they are not appropriate for generating responses or writing essays (and will frequently lead to wrong answers). Work that I determine is not your own will, at minimum, receive a score of 0 and may be subject to further sanctions.

## Academic Statements and Policies

Additional statements and policies regarding this course are available at <https://guide.wisc.edu/courses/#syllabustext>