

PHL295: Business Ethics

Course Description

This is a course in business ethics. We will begin by applying moral theories and concepts drawn from everyday life to issues in business ethics, like advertising, product safety, and price gouging. We will then consider some arguments that business ethics is not reducible to the ethics of everyday life, paying particular attention to the key institutions invoked in business ethics: private property, wage labour, markets, corporations and capitalism.

Teaching Team

Instructor: Steve Coyne – he/him

Drop-in Office Hours (Zoom): Thursdays 4:30-5:30. See the Quercus website for the link. Most days, I'm also happy to hang out for a few minutes after class.

E-mail: For written communication, please contact me at steven.coyne@mail.utoronto.ca (and not Quercus, which I don't regularly check.) Make sure to identify the course (PHL295) in the title of your e-mail. I make every attempt to respond to administrative questions (e.g. about course registration, etc) within 24 hours. I'm also happy to answer quick, specific questions about course content by e-mail though it may take me a little longer to get back to you.

Teaching Assistants:

Sean Dudley (sean.dudley@mail.utoronto.ca)

Joshua Brecka (j.brecka@mail.utoronto.ca)

Sean and Joshua will be grading your two essays. They will be available for office hours and short e-mail questions around the due dates of the essays.

Course Flow

This is an in-person course. We meet on Thursdays from 6-9PM in BA1180. Questions and comments are very welcome during lectures. Most lectures will have a 15–20-minute group activity to get you thinking about the material.

To accommodate people who need to miss lecture, I will post audio recordings of our lectures within 24 hours. However, this is an in-person course, and you should plan to come to lectures whenever possible – it will be difficult to succeed in this course without generally digesting the material in the context of lecture.

Readings

All readings will be accessible through Quercus or online library access.

Student Success

Like all second-year philosophy courses at the University of Toronto, our course material is challenging and the standards on assignments and tests are high. But I want you to profit from the course and to succeed in it. You are very welcome to come and chat with me after class or during my office hours. I'm happy to answer questions or repeat points made in lecture, discuss ideas about essays, and more

generally talk with you about how your semester is going. Your TAs will also be available to assist you with your essays and I encourage you to take full advantage of their expertise.

Evaluation

Course Component	Percentage of Grade	Date(s) due
Essay 1	25%	February 17
Essay 2	35%	April 10
Test	35%	March 16
In-class Group Activities	5%	In lecture, from week 2 onwards (except the week of the test)

Note that all assignments should be submitted through Quercus through the corresponding links under 'Assignments'. Please submit all assignments in .doc, .docx, or .pdf – not pages or any other format.

Essays: You will complete two essays on assigned topics. The first essay will be approximately 1200 words, the second essay will be approximately 1500 words.

Test: During week 9 there will be a test that covers the material considered so far in the course. Please bring your student card or other identification to the test.

Group Activities: Starting week 2, every lecture (apart from the midterm) will have a group activity. Each activity is worth 0.5%, and they will be graded on a pass/fail basis. There is a make-up option for students who miss them (see below).

Assignment Policies

Late Penalties on Essays: Without an extension or an accommodation, late essays will incur a 1% penalty for every day that they are late, up to a maximum of 7%. Without an extension or accommodation, no essays will be accepted after they are seven days late.

Extensions: For an extension on an essay, get in touch with me by e-mail (steven.coyne@mail.utoronto.ca) before the deadline. I am aware that students often run into unexpected difficulties, and as such, as long as you can provide a plausible reason for why you need an extension, the extension is of reasonable length, and you ask for it reasonably in far advance of the deadline, I will likely grant it. (Note, however, that I do not grant extensions *after* the deadline. At that point, it is a matter of accommodation, which has much stricter requirements. See below.)

Accommodations: If you require an accommodation for a test or written assignment that you have missed because of an illness, severe personal crisis, etc, please get in touch with me by e-mail (steven.coyne@mail.utoronto.ca) as soon as possible after the deadline. You must complete a declaration of absence on ACORN in order to be eligible for an accommodation, and you must supply further documentation for accommodations longer than seven days. If you miss the test, there will be one opportunity to retake it the same format. Any missed make-up tests will take the form of an oral exam (and will require additional documentation).

In-Class Activities: There will be a make-up activity made available after lecture for students who miss an in-class activity – an individual written exercise of approximately 250 words. There is no need to inform me or give documentation if you take this option. Make-up activities for in-class activities are due the next day (Friday), however there is a two-week grace period to submit them without penalty. After the two-week grace period, there will be no further opportunity to make-up the missed activity unless you have documentation that covers the whole two-week grace period.

Regrade Policy: If you do not understand why your test or assignment received the grade that it did, and I graded it, you should ask me about it at office hours. I occasionally make mistakes when grading and am happy to correct them when I do. If your assignment was graded by a TA, you should seek further clarification from your TA at their office hours or through e-mail. If you are not able to reach a resolution with your TA, you can ask for me to regrade it from scratch. To do so, send a blank copy of your assignment to me by e-mail. I may decide that the grade should be higher or lower than the TA's assessment.

Note: The 'total' column in the grades section on Quercus does not reflect your current or total grade in the course.

Accessibility

If you have a disability or health consideration that may require accommodation, please get in touch with me and Accessibility Services (www.accessibility.utoronto.ca).

Course Conduct and Academic Integrity

I encourage you to work together in this course. You will profit more from the course if you study together for the test, discuss your ideas for your essays with one another, and critique one another's essays once you have written them. However, as a matter of academic integrity, you must follow these rules (as well as any others in our university's academic integrity policy, available at <https://www.academicintegrity.utoronto.ca/>):

- 1) You are expected to be the author of your own work.
- 2) The use of translation software (apart from individual words or short phrases) or the use of large-scale language models (e.g. ChatGPT) is not permitted.
- 3) Any word-for-word use of another person's phrasing (including my own) should be put in quotation marks or set out as a distinct quotation paragraph with a page number or lecture citation (e.g. "(Coyne, Lecture 5)").
- 4) Any use of another person's phrasing or ideas, even if you do not use their exact words, should be given a page number citation. (e.g. "Friedman argues that the social responsibility of a firm is to increase its profits. (Friedman, 23)"). You should be particularly vigilant about this if you choose to use external sources apart from the course readings or lectures. If you use any external sources, you must provide a bibliography with enough information for the reader to find it.

If you have any questions about these rules, or other elements of the university academic integrity policy, please contact me by e-mail *before* you submit your assignment (steven.coyne@mail.utoronto.ca). I am more than happy to answer them.

Out of respect for your intellectual work and fairness to the class, I take academic integrity very seriously and make strenuous efforts to verify that my students are not engaging in it. I forward all suspected violations of academic integrity to administration, who may impose a serious penalty on you.

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are

described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>). If you do not wish to submit your work to the tool, that is fine, but you will be required to meet with me to discuss and answer questions about your work.

Course Schedule and Readings

(Readings subject to change.)

<i>Unit 1: The Ethics of Everyday Life and Business</i>	
Week 1 (January 12) <i>Ethics 101</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No Readings
Week 2 (January 19) <i>Moral Theories and Business</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Benjamin Todd and William McAskill, "Is It Ever Okay to Take a Harmful Job in Order to Do More Good?" (blog post) Norman Bowie, "A Kantian Approach to Business Ethics."
Week 3 (January 26) <i>Lying, Advertising and Autonomy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simon Archer, "The Ethics of Creative Accounting" Daniel Attas, "What's Wrong with Deceptive Advertising?" Roger Crisp, "Persuasive Advertising, Autonomy, and the Creation of Desire"
Week 4 (February 2) <i>Product Safety, Price Gouging</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> John Hasnas, "The Mirage of Product Safety" Mikhail Valdman, "A Theory of Wrongful Exploitation" Discussion of essay thesis formulation <p>Essay 1 instructions released</p>
<i>Unit 2: Institutions of a Market Economy</i>	
Week 5 (February 9) <i>Private Property and Wage Labour</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion of essay writing John Locke, <i>Second Treatise of Government</i> (excerpts) Karl Marx, "Estranged Labour" (sometimes called "Alienated Labour") Optional (but fun): David Graeber, <i>Bullshit Jobs</i>
Week 6 (February 16) <i>Markets</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> David Gauthier, "No Need for Morality: The Case of the Competitive Market" Joseph Heath, "An Adversarial Ethic for Business: when Sun-Tzu met the Shareholder" <p>Essay 1 due February 17</p>
Reading Week	No Class (Reading week)
Week 7 (March 2) <i>Corporate Capitalism (part 1)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R.H. Coase, "The Nature of the Firm" Milton Friedman, "The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits" Frank Easterbrook and Daniel Fischel, "The Corporate Contract" (excerpts)
Week 8 (March 9) <i>Corporate Capitalism (part 2)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R. Edward Freeman, "A Stakeholder Theory of the Modern Corporation" Catch-up/review
<i>Unit 3: Criticisms of Market Institutions</i>	

<p>Week 9 (March 16) <i>Test (1h50)</i> <i>Inequality (50 minutes)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test (6:10-8PM) • Justin Fox, “Piketty’s Capital in a Lot Less than 696 pages” (https://hbr.org/2014/04/pikettrys-capital-in-a-lot-less-than-696-pages) <p>Essay 2 instructions released</p>
<p>Week 10 (March 23) <i>Freedom</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elizabeth Anderson, <i>Private Government</i> (chapter 2) • G.A. Cohen, “The Structure of Proletarian Freedom”
<p>Week 11 (March 30) <i>Commodification</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Michael Sandel, <i>Tanner Lectures</i>
<p>Week 12 (April 6) <i>The Ethics of Disruptive Technologies: Artificial Intelligence, Blockchain</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optional Readings – TBD <p>Essay 2 due April 10 Final Day to Accept Late Assignments without Petition is May 4</p>