

Ethics of the Marketplace

REL 312 / Spring 2015
Phillips Exeter Academy
Mr. Prescott



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COURSE DESCRIPTION

The very topic of Religion 312 is controversial. Some argue that business ethics and corporate social responsibility do not (and should not) exist. Others strongly believe that business has many moral responsibilities – and that very few of those are met. We'll begin by getting a better understanding of what the corporation is and how it functions, and make sure we understand the key features of capitalism and the global economy. Along the way we will consider many specific cases in which business has confronted ethical dilemmas over the past few decades.

Part of our study will be to understand what makes for an ethical dilemma and how to go about analyzing the circumstances surrounding it. Depending to some degree on the interests of the class, we will consider such topics as insider trading, executive pay and income distribution, the immigration debate, health insurance, environmental concerns, consumer and product safety, and questions about the nature of advertising.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS, EVALUATION, AND POLICIES

I. Required Text(s): (1) Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*; (2) William Shaw and Vincent Barry, *Moral Issues in Business*, 10th edition; (3) Additional readings will be made available via handout or ExeterConnect. *Because we are not using the above books for the whole term, but just for a few weeks each, we will use department copies that I would like you to return unmarked for future class.*

II. Evaluation

i. Classroom Preparation/Participation – Come to class prepared to participate on a daily basis – bringing in questions and comments from the readings, listening to and drawing out your fellow classmates whenever possible, and helping to articulate larger questions that arise as we consider the readings. Feel free to disagree with your classmates if you find that you do, or simply to play devil's advocate from time to time. Nothing is solved by groupthink or oversimplification in a class such as this one. The issues we will cover are important – many are among the most important facing our society – and we will all benefit by considering them carefully. Try to understand not only your own position, but the arguments in opposition to it as well.

ii. Tests, Quizzes, Study Questions, and Essays – We will have a variety of these over the course of the term, all with advance notice with the possible exception of quizzes. All work not done in class should be typed.

iii. Final Project – We will finish the term with a mini-project, doing online or other research into a current topic of your choosing and presenting it in class. As

we go along, note questions or topics that seem particularly interesting or perhaps unfinished to you, and see if you want to use these for project ideas. I'll also give you a list of possible topics.

iv. Late Work – If you feel that you will be unable to complete an assignment by the due date, please speak to me in advance about the possibility of an extension (*at least 48 hours, barring an extreme circumstance*). It is **unacceptable** to wait until the due date to ask for an extension. *All late assignments will be marked down one full letter grade for each day of lateness.* Also, please note that plagiarism is unacceptable, rarely successful, and will result in the severest of consequences.

v. Grading Philosophy – A short note on grades: I do not grade on a curve but according to standards derived from my own teaching experience. Students start in the middle (B-/C+) and work their way up or down. "A" work stands out in all respects, not just meets the requirements: it is cogent, complete, and accurate, showing the ability to use what you know, not just regurgitate it; "B" work is excellent as far as it goes, but is less complete; "C" work is acceptable, but less complete, increasingly inaccurate, or careless; "D" work is severely deficient and often inaccurate. I will be happy to discuss with you at anytime the consistency with which I have applied these standards, but not about the standards themselves.

III. Religious Observances – Some students may wish to take part in religious observances that fall during the term. Should you have a religious observance that conflicts with participation in the course, please contact me as soon as possible to discuss appropriate accommodations.

IV. Disabilities – Students with learning, physical, or psychiatric disabilities who may require disability-related classroom accommodations are encouraged to see me as soon as possible to discuss your particular needs. All discussions will remain confidential, though I may consult Student Health Services to discuss appropriate implementation of any accommodation requested.

V. Illness – As noted above under Classroom Preparation/Participation, regular attendance is essential if one is to succeed in this course. However, I recognize illness is an unavoidable part of any academic year. If you will not be able to attend class due to illness, **it is the student's responsibility** to e-mail me so that appropriate plans can be made to make up missed work. Failure to do could potentially harm one's grade.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS

Unit 1: Income Inequality

TUESDAY, MARCH 24 – COURSE INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

- No assigned readings

THURSDAY, MARCH 26 – NICKEL & DIMED, PART I

- Read: Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*, pp. 1-27

FRIDAY, MARCH 27 – CLASS VISIT FROM BRIAN PRESTON

- No assigned readings

MONDAY, MARCH 30 – NICKEL & DIMED, PART II

- Read: Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*, pp. 28-43.
- Due: 1-page response

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1 – NICKEL & DIMED, PART III

- Read: Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*, pp. 193-221.
- Due: Short Responses for Feldstein Questions

THURSDAY, APRIL 2 – INCOME INEQUALITY AND GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE

- No assigned readings
- Christian Brandt (Family Aid Boston) will visit to discuss his work with low-income families in the Greater Boston area.

FRIDAY, APRIL 3 – THE PARETO PRINCIPLE

- Read: Martin Feldstein, “The Public Interest: Reducing Poverty, not Inequality”
- Due: Short responses to Feldstein questions

TUESDAY, APRIL 7 – RELEASE TIME FOR PAPER

- Work on papers

THURSDAY, APRIL 9 – INCOME INEQUALITY CASE STUDY: WAL MART

- Due: 3-page paper on Feldstein/Ehrenreich

Unit 2: What is an Ethical Question?

FRIDAY, APRIL 10 – TRIS PAJAMAS & ETHICAL RELATIVISM

- Read: William H. Shaw and Vincent Barry, *Moral Issues in Business*, pp. 8-15 and 31-32 (Case 1.1).

SATURDAY, APRIL 11 – THE A7D AFFAIR & DIFFUSION OF RESPONSIBILITY

- Read: William H. Shaw and Vincent Barry, *Moral Issues in Business*, pp. 15-24 and 33-36 (Case 1.2).

MONDAY, APRIL 13 – THE FORD PINTO AND CONSEQUENTIALIST ETHICS

- Read: William H. Shaw and Vincent Barry, *Moral Issues in Business*, pp. 58-68 and 88-91 (Case 2.2)

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15 – HACKING INTO HARVARD & KANTIAN ETHICS

- Read: William H. Shaw and Vincent Barry, *Moral Issues in Business*, pp. 68-74 and 86-87 (Case 2.1)

THURSDAY, APRIL 16 – FILM: THE MILGRAM EXPERIMENT

- No assigned readings

FRIDAY, APRIL 17 – W.D. ROSS AND CONFLICTING OBLIGATIONS

- Read: William H. Shaw and Vincent Barry, *Moral Issues in Business*, pp. 74-80

TUESDAY, APRIL 21 – RELEASE TIME

- No assigned readings

THURSDAY, APRIL 23 – METIC

- Due: 3-4 page paper on Milgram Experiment

Unit 3: The Corporation and Responsibility

FRIDAY, APRIL 24 – LIMITED LIABILITY: SELLING INFANT FORMULA OVERSEAS

- Read: William H. Shaw and Vincent Barry, *Moral Issues in Business*, pp. 224-230 (skim) and 250-253 (Case 5.2)

SATURDAY, APRIL 25 – A WIDE RANGE VIEW: YAHOO! IN CHINA

- Read: William H. Shaw and Vincent Barry, *Moral Issues in Business*, pp. 230-241 (skim) and 248-249 (Case 5.1)

MONDAY, APRIL 27 – CHARITY TO SCOUTS?

- Read: William H. Shaw and Vincent Barry, *Moral Issues in Business*, pp. 241-247 and 259-261 (Case 5.5)

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29 – STARBUCKS & CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

- Read: Ravi Somaiya, "Starbucks Ends Conversation Starters on Race," *The New York Times* (handout)
- Read: Amanda Ripley, "The Upwardly Mobile Barista," *The Atlantic* 315.4 (2015): 60-72.

THURSDAY, APRIL 30 – PRINCIPLE’S DAY

- No class!

FRIDAY, MAY 1 – THE GREED CYCLE

Read: John Cassidy, “The Greed Cycle,” in *Moral Issues in Business*, pp. 261-271.

TUESDAY, MAY 5 – ENRON: THE SMARTEST GUYS IN THE ROOM

- No assigned readings
- Due: Preliminary statement of paper topic

THURSDAY, MAY 7 – ENRON: THE SMARTEST GUYS IN THE ROOM

- No assigned readings

FRIDAY, MAY 8 – RELEASE TIME

- No assigned readings. Work on paper.

Unit 4: Conscious Capitalism

MONDAY, MAY 11 – THE PROS AND CONS OF A REGULATED MARKET

- Due: ENRON Paper

WEDNESDAY, MAY 13 – CONSCIOUS CAPITALISM

- Read: John Mackey and Raj Sisodia, "Appendix A: The Business Case for Conscious Capitalism," in *Conscious Capitalism: Liberating the Heroic Spirit of Business*, pp. 275-289.

THURSDAY, MAY 14 – CRITIQUES OF CONSCIOUS CAPITALISM

- Read: John Mackey and Raj Sisodia, "Appendix C: Misconceptions About Conscious Capitalism," in *Conscious Capitalism: Liberating the Heroic Spirit of Business*, pp. 299-305.

Unit 5: Final Projects

FRIDAY, MAY 15 – FINAL PROJECT WORKSHOP

- No assigned readings.

TUESDAY, MAY 19 – RELEASE TIME FOR FINAL PROJECTS

- No assigned readings.

THURSDAY, MAY 21 – PRESENTATIONS 1 AND 2

- Complete work assigned by presenters

FRIDAY, MAY 22 – PRESENTATIONS 3 AND 4

- Complete work assigned by presenters

MONDAY, MAY 25 – PRESENTATIONS 5 AND 6

- Complete work assigned by presenters

WEDNESDAY, MAY 27 – PRESENTATIONS 7 AND 8

- Complete work assigned by presenters

THURSDAY, MAY 28 – PRESENTATIONS 9 AND 10

- Complete work assigned by presenters

FRIDAY, MAY 29 – PRESENTATION 11

- Complete work assigned by presenters