# Business Ethics

PHIL 234F | Spring 2019  
Washington University in St. Louis

**Instructor:** Nicholas (Nic) Koziolek  
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**Office:** 101 Wilson Hall  
**Office Hours:** TR 2:45–3:45, and by appointment

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**Class Meetings:** TR 11:30–1:00, Busch 100

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**Required Texts:**  

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**Assignments:**  
Attendance & Engagement (15% of final grade)  
Case Study Project (60% of final grade)  
Quizzes (25% of final grade)

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**Grading:**  
A+ ≥ 97 > A ≥ 93 > A− ≥ 90 > B+ ≥ 87 > B ≥ 83 > etc.

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## 1 Course Description

This course provides an introduction to some of the central ethical questions concerning the place of business in a capitalist society. The course as a whole is centered around the question of distributive justice: how should work (i.e., labor) and its products be distributed amongst the members of a society? A guiding assumption of the course is that acceptable answers to this question are constrained not only by ethical considerations, but also by economic ones, so that any realistic answer must be both ethically acceptable and economically feasible. Given our specific focus on capitalist economies, then, our central question is just this: given the basic workings of capitalist economies, what would a fair or just distribution of work and its products look like, and how would businesses need to function (how, for example, would shareholders, managers, employees, customers, lawmakers, and so on, need to behave) in order to produce such a distribution, and to do so while living and behaving ethically and, ideally, living good—happy, fulfilling—lives?
2 Learning Goals

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Explain the difference between ethical and non-ethical (e.g., prudential, legal, and strategic) reasoning.

2. Explain the difference between consequence- and principle-based ethical reasoning, and employ both forms of reasoning in concert to develop ethical analyses of real-world business decisions, practices, and social structures.

3. Explain and raise critical questions about a number of foundational theories in political economy: (a) the traditional Lockean justification of private property; (b) the classical justification of markets, as originally developed by Adam Smith; and (c) Marx’s theory of the production of surplus value as resting on the exploitation of workers by capitalists.

4. Explain and raise critical questions about two influential conceptions of justice—(a) John Rawls’s conception of justice as fairness and (b) Robert Nozick’s libertarian/historical conception of justice—and use those conceptions to analyze existing business practices and social structures.

5. Think holistically about individual business decisions, larger business practices, and the overarching social structures within which businesses are embedded, by integrating ethical, economic, and political-philosophical considerations, giving due weight to considerations of each of these three kinds.

3 Assignments

3.1 Attendance & Engagement (15%)

Attendance is strictly required, and unexcused absences will result in a loss of attendance & engagement points. To receive full points for attendance & engagement, you need (i) to show up to class and (ii) to show that you’re engaged in the course—by listening attentively and asking questions in class, contributing to class discussions, taking an active role in partner/group work, contributing to the Canvas discussion board, talking with me in office hours, and so on.

3.2 Case Study Paper (60%)

Your central piece of work in this course will be an extended case study, ultimately to be written up as a 10–12 page paper. I’ll provide you with a list of cases/topics in our third class meeting, on January 22. You will submit a first, partial, 4–5 page draft of your paper (worth 15% of your final grade) by February 7; a second, complete, 8–10 page draft (worth 20% of your final grade) by April 2; and the final 10–12 page draft (worth 25% of your final grade) by April 29. The first and
second drafts are not, however, meant to be “rough”: my expectation is that they will be as polished and well-conceived as any paper you would submit for a grade in a course. The division of the assignment into drafts is meant, first, to break down your task into manageable parts, and, second (and more importantly), to give you the opportunity to address questions and objections raised, throughout the semester, by some of your peers and by me. Hence, on both February 7 and April 29, our class meeting will be devoted to peer reviews of your draft papers.

3.3 Quizzes (25%)

As a way of checking your understanding of important concepts as we proceed through the course, I will also be giving you periodic quizzes. These will take a variety of forms: they may be multiple choice, I may ask you to define important terms, or I may ask you to explain certain concepts and their interrelations in the form of a very short essay. I will warn you of quizzes beforehand, and indicate (at least roughly) what you’ll need to know for each.

4 Policies

4.1 Academic Integrity

Cheating and plagiarism are strictly forbidden. If you are caught cheating or plagiarizing, you will fail the course, and your case will be recommended to the student judicial board. This means, specifically, that you are not allowed to copy text, or even to closely paraphrase text, from the journal club article itself or from someone else’s journal club paper. To review the university’s policies on academic integrity, please consult http://www.wustl.edu/policies/undergraduate-academic-integrity.html. If you still have questions about what is and isn’t permissible for you to do in your papers, please talk to me.

4.2 Technology in Class

You may bring a computer or tablet to class for use in viewing course material or taking notes, but you are allowed to use it only for course-related purposes. If you are caught using your computer or tablet for any non-course-related purpose, you will be marked absent for the day. Similarly, if you are caught using your phone for any reason at all, you will be marked absent for the day; in other words, you are not permitted to use your phone even for course-related purposes.

4.3 Disabilities

Washington University is committed to providing accommodations and/or services to students with documented disabilities. Students who are seeking support for
a disability or a suspected disability should contact Disability Resources at 314-935-4153. Disability Resources is responsible for approving all disability-related accommodations for WU students, and students are responsible for providing faculty members with formal documentation of their approved accommodations at least two weeks prior to using those accommodations. I will accept Disability Resources VISA forms by email and personal delivery. If you have already been approved for accommodations, I request that you provide me with a copy of your VISA within the first two weeks of the semester. For more information, please visit http://cornerstone.wustl.edu/disability-resources/.

4.4 Assistance

I encourage you to email me and to come to office hours to discuss course material or assignments. My general attitude is: if you have questions, ask them. There are also some university-provided services that you might find useful:

4.4.1 Cornerstone

Academic peer mentors, study skills workshops, and other useful services, plus Disability Resources and the university’s TRiO program:

http://cornerstone.wustl.edu

4.4.2 Writing Assistance

Free one-on-one tutoring:

https://writingcenter.wustl.edu

4.4.3 Diversity and Inclusion

The center’s staff supports and advocates for students from traditionally underrepresented or marginalized populations and creates collaborative partnerships with campus and community members to promote dialogue and social change:

https://diversity.wustl.edu/framework/center-diversity-inclusion

4.4.4 Peer Counseling

https://unclejoe.wustl.edu
5 Schedule

Readings other than those from the required texts (Kernohan and Eggers) will be available on Canvas.

This schedule is subject to change; changes from the original schedule will appear in blue.

Course Overview

Jan 15 No reading

Introduction: “It’s people trying to build a business”

Jan 17 Kernohan, Chapter 1: “Ethical Decisions in Business”
  In class: Dirty Money, Episode 2: “Payday”

Jan 22 No reading
  In class: discussion of “Payday”

Ethical Reasoning

Jan 24 Kernohan, Chapter 2: “The Nature of Ethical Reasoning”
  Recommended: Chapter 9: “Moral Accountability”

Jan 29 Kernohan, Chapter 3: “Self-Interest and the Dilemmas of Cooperation”

Varieties of Ethical Reasoning

Jan 31 Kernohan, Chapter 4: “Calculating Consequences and Utilitarian Reasoning”

Feb 5 Kernohan, Chapter 5: “Motivations, Duties, and Rights”
  Recommended: Chapter 10: “Respecting Autonomy and Privacy”

Case Studies: First Draft

Feb 7 First draft of paper due (4–5 pages)
  Your group’s case study papers
  In class: peer review/discussion of case study papers

The Place of Business in Society

Feb 12 No reading
  In class: Dirty Money, Episode 3: “Drug Short”
Feb 14    Milton Friedman, “The Social Responsibility of Business is To Increase Its Profits”
Feb 19    Michael Harrington, “Corporate Collectivism”

**Property, Labor, and Commodification**
Feb 21    John Locke, *Second Treatise of Human Government*, excerpt
Feb 26    Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, excerpt
Feb 28    Karl Marx, *Capital*: “The Commodity”
Mar 7     Elizabeth Anderson, “When the Market Was ‘Left’”

**SPRING BREAK**

**Distributive Justice**
Mar 19    Kernohan, Chapter 6: “Fairness and Distributive Justice”
           **Recommended:** Chapter 11: “Free Enterprise and Global Justice”
Mar 26    Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, excerpt
Mar 28    Elizabeth Anderson, “Private Government”

**Case Studies: Second Draft**
Apr 2     **Second draft of paper due (9–10 pages)**
           Your group’s case studies
           **In class:** peer review/discussion of case study papers

**You Are Not a Commodity**
Apr 4     Dave Eggers, *The Circle*, pp. 1–71
Apr 9     Eggers, pp. 71–146
Apr 11    Eggers, pp. 146–211
Apr 16    Eggers, pp. 211–278
Apr 18    Eggers, pp. 279–358
Apr 23    Eggers, pp. 358–419
Apr 25    Eggers, pp. 419–497