

Business Ethics (Freshman Level) Syllabus

Matthew Baddorf

University of Rochester

mattbaddorf (you know what goes here) gmail.com

Course Description

In this course, we examine ethical questions that arise from economic transactions and relationships. What do employers and employees owe each other? What do businesses owe society as a whole? And how can we work to behave better as individuals in our economic roles? This course examines questions like these through the lens of philosophical reflection.

We will start by examining the most important defender of the market, Adam Smith, getting clearer on exactly what he thought, and what his arguments were. We will then read some critics of reliance on market systems, and try to determine the strength of their criticisms. The middle (and largest) part of the course will consist of examination of a variety moral issues that arise in business contexts. Finally, we will read a book that summarizes recent research on why it is so often difficult to do the right thing in business contexts, and discuss what we can do to make doing the right thing easier.

Texts

Fritz Allhoff and Anand Vaidya, *Business in Ethical Focus: An Anthology*.

Max Bazerman and Ann Tenbrunsel, *Blind Spots: Why We Fail to Do What's Right and What to Do About It*.

Tentative List of Topics

The Nature of the Market: Smith and his Critics

Shareholders and Stakeholders

Sweatshops, Safety, and Wages

Environmental Responsibility

Intellectual Property

Fair Pricing

Advertising, Autonomy, and Truth

Blind Spots: Understanding the Moral Psychology behind Unethical Business

Writing Assignments

The Levels¹

For this course, and other introductory courses, I plan to use an writing assignment system based on martial arts and video games. The goals of this system are to ensure that students achieve basic skills before attempting more complex challenges, to make it easy for me to give focused and effective feedback, and to give students a sense of their progressive accomplishment.

Students will aim to complete three “levels” of papers over the course of the semester, each of which builds on the skills required for the previous level. Students may not progress to the next paper until one of their attempts at a previous paper in the sequence has been marked as “satisfactory.” Students may turn in an attempt on any Friday; if an attempt is not “satisfactory”, they may progress by turning in a new attempt at that level which discusses a different course reading.

First Level: a focused exposition of a course reading which puts the reading's main argument in premise conclusion form.

Second Level: an elucidation of the connections between the arguments of two course readings.

Third Level: a criticism of a course reading which identifies the argument of the reading and argues that one of its premises is false.

Student's grades for this part of the course are based on how many levels they have successfully completed, and, if they did not complete all three, how close to “satisfactory” their best attempt at their highest level was.

(I may also require a full research paper due at the end of the semester, graded separately from the levels system.)

¹ This system is taken from Dustin Locke.