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Ethics, Business and Society
Bus 415/Phil 315

Introduction

Text: Business Ethics: Concepts and Cases 6th ed. By Manuel G. Velasquez.

We will also make use of a variety of supplemental texts that will be available online as well as an assortment of visual materials. The supplemental texts will be made available as downloads at freewebs.com/philosophyisprettyneato.

This class is intended to give the student the analytical tools needed to understand the ethical implications of business decisions and how they affect society. While there are a host of analytical tools and templates available to evaluate the financial and legal implications of business plans and their execution, when it comes to ethical behavior most executives fall back either on their religious beliefs, which may not be applicable, or their own subjective views, which can be wildly variable.

The spate of recent corporate scandals clearly illustrates that business leaders have more than financial obligations to their managers, boards and shareholders. They are also expected to “do the right thing.” How does a manager get the moral compass that tells him or her what the “right thing” is? How then, once we determine what the right thing is can we evaluate and weigh our ethical obligations against our obligations to our company? When dealing with HR issues, high-stakes negotiations, or corporate crisis “doing the right thing,” frequently clashes with financial realities.

The purpose of this class is not so much to gain the ability to always make the right ethical choice. Rather, its aim is to give the student an ethical framework and vocabulary to enable him or her to think clearly and analytically in ethical terms. The hope is that the ultimate result will be an understanding of how ethical behavior not only improves organizational integrity, but also its bottom line.

While the analytical tools we will study may be theoretical, the focus of the seminar will be the ethical implications of practical situations. We will use practical case studies, which will serve as the vehicle for teaching this course.

Syllabus

Course Requirements: Grades will be based on a combination of factors. There will be regular assignments of a number of Qs and As, taking the form of in-depth essay assignments. They will require an understanding of the texts and other materials as well as the ability to analyze the concepts presented there so that you can apply them to specific examples and case studies. In addition, there will be one a group project. Participation in class discussions is a requirement and will influence your grade.

Examples of some of the topics we will study:

- I. What is ethics and why should we care about it?
 - We should care about it so that we can avoid the kinds of unethical behavior that has recently become more apparent in the business world and so that we can help our organizations and ourselves maintain high standards of honesty and integrity.
 - Deontology vs. Utilitarianism: What do these terms mean and how can an understanding of them serve the ethical business manager.

- II. The ethical manager of employees:
 - Diversity: What are its ethical justifications and implications?
 - Segments from the TV show “The Office” showing managers behaving badly should lead into a discussion of the ethical implications of such issues as hiring and firing, employee communications and corporate structure.

- III. Oil spill product liability or any other “externalities” involving public ethics, public and policy .
 - The purpose here is to analyze and evaluate examples where corporate financial and other requirements clash with ethical responsibilities.

- IV. The ethics of negotiation

- Do negotiations come under different ethical guidelines than other business activities? Are the rules of this game different?
- Are lying or bluffing justifiable in negotiations.
- How can we win and stay “honest”?
- Staging of several mock negotiations using different guidelines and evaluating their outcomes.

V. Whistleblowing and professional responsibility

- What is whistleblowing?
- Whistleblowing perspectives – Personal vs. corporate values
- Practical considerations
- The risks of whistleblowing
- The ethics of whistleblowing

VI. Reputation – Why it’s important for success both in business and personally.

- Does ethical behavior only serve reputation?
- Long term vs. short-term considerations

VII. Summary and pulling together

- How ethical business practices can make a business more successful.

Assignments—These are not set in stone the order and content may change

Topic	Readings
1 Introduction	Download
2. Ethics and Business—Definition of Concepts	Velasquez pp.3-55
3. Traditional Ethical Theories --Utilitarianism	Velasquez pp. 57-99
4. Traditional Ethical Theories --Deontology	Velazquez pp.100-122
5. The Business System --Government Markets and International Trade--John Locke, Adam Smith, David Ricardo & Kark Marx	Velazquez pp.123-163
6. Group project	Download
7.Computer Ethics	Download
8. Ethics and the Environment	Download
9. The Ethics of Negotiation	Download
10.The Ethics of Whistelblowing	Download