

PHI 3653 Honors Ethics of Business, Government and Society

Spring 2023

3 credits

Class meets in person MW 12:30-1:50 in SR 275

Prof. Mark Tunick

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See Canvas for updates to the schedule

Description: The aim of the course is to address applied ethical issues from an interdisciplinary, liberal arts perspective. Discussion of ethical issues that arise in business, government and society will draw on a variety of classic and modern works that address what it means to be ethical and why one should be moral (e.g. truthful), and what kind of conduct leads to a happy human life. Many readings are by philosophers but there are some legal opinions, readings in business, economics and other social sciences, and films. We consider the tension between being successful in business and politics, and being ethical. Specific topics include corporate responsibility in a capitalist society, gambling, lying, promises, blackmail, cloning, animal rights, journalistic ethics, and obligations to strangers.

Readings: Kant's *Grounding for the Metaphysic of Morals* (ISBN 9780872201668) and Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (ISBN 9780486427034) are available for purchase at the bookstore or on amazon.com. (The Weber book is also available as an e-book at FAU's library). Other readings are available online or on Canvas. You are responsible for all assigned readings, which you should complete prior to the class under which they are listed.

Requirements: Students can earn a total of 100 points: Two mini papers of 2-3 pages each (10 points each=20 points); Two papers of 4-6 pages each (20 points each=40 points); Short quizzes and in-class or Canvas discussion board writing (30 points); and Participation in class discussion (10 points), which is based on quality and not simply quantity--for example, do you refer to the readings, do you show respect for your fellow classmates, do you think critically about the material, are you attentive in class?

Attendance mandatory: Because this is a discussion-based course, attendance is important. For each unexcused absence beyond 2 you will lose 1.5 points. Be sure to bring to each class the reading for that day's class and your notes on the readings. Please prepare a question for class discussion for each reading; base your question on a specific passage.

Grading scale is 94-100 (A), 90<94 (A-), 87<90 (B+), 84<87 (B), 80<84 (B-), 77<80 (C+), 74<77 (C), 70<74 (C-), 67<70 (D+), 64<67 (D), 61<64 (D-), <61 (F). I may utilize a curve but only if doing so would yield a higher rather than a lower grade than what you would earn using the default scale.

Canvas: This course makes use of Canvas: Background information and links to the reading, quizzes to help you understand the material, and discussion boards are available there. Be sure to check Canvas regularly for updates.

Office Hours: MW 11-12, 2-3, in HC 104. No appointment is needed. To arrange other times either in person or by zoom, you may phone me at (561) 799-8670 or email me at tunick@fau.edu.

Schedule of Topics: check Canvas for updates

I. Ethical frameworks

1/9. Introduction.

Reading: Plato, 'Why be moral' (from Republic); Bowen McCoy, Parable of the Sadhu, Harvard Business Review, May-June 1997.

1/11. The life most worth living

Prior to class, students should screen Akira Kurosawa's Film 'Ikiru' (143 minutes), available free at Kanopy (log-in using your FAU credentials). We will discuss that film in class. In addition, in class we will watch Michel Gondry's 'Interior Design', the 37-minute first part of the film Tokyo!

1/16. No Class, M.L. King Day

1/18, 1/23. Ethical frameworks I: Aristotle and the virtuous life

Reading:

For 1/18: Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics (NE): Book 1: chapters 1-5, 7-11; Book 2: 1-6, 9; Book 3: 1-2, 5, 10-11; Book 4: 2, 3, 5-8;

For 1/23: Aristotle, NE, Book 8: 1-4, 8 (paragraph 3 only); Book 9: 5-6, 10-12; Book 10: 6-9

Mini-paper one due.

1/25, 1/30. Ethical frameworks II: Kant

For 1/25: Kant, Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals (Preface and Section 1)

For 1/30: Kant, Grounding, Section 2; 'On a supposed right to lie' (included in Grounding)

For those interested: Arnold and Bowie, "Sweatshops and Respect for Persons," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 13(2):221-42 (2003)

2/1, 2/6. Ethical frameworks III: Utilitarianism

For 2/1: John Harris, 'The Survival Lottery', *Philosophy* 50:81-7 (1975)

For 2/6: Jeremy Bentham, Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation: chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 (Pars 1-37), 10 (Pars 9-12, 14-37)

2/8. Machiavellian 'Ethics' and Politics

Rdg: Machiavelli, excerpts from 'The Prince'; and news articles on Liz Cheney, Elise Stefanik, and George Santos

2/13. Ethical frameworks IV: Contractarianism

Rdg: John Rawls, Theory of Justice: pp. 3-7, 10-24, 52-55, 57-65, 102-3, 105-23, 285-90, 374-80, 386-88, 441-3, 448-9

II. Applications (1)

2/15, 2/20. Animal Rights

For 2/15: Tom Regan, 'The Case for Animal Rights' and Carl Cohen, 'The Case for the Use of Animals in Biomedical Research'

For 2/20: Peter Singer, 'All Animals are Equal', online; Kagan, 'What's Wrong with Speciesism', *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 33(1):1-21 (2016)

2/22. Designer Babies and the Ethics of Cloning

Rdg: "Designer Babies: Choosing our children's genes," www.thelancet.com vol.372:1294 (Oct. 11, 2008); Michael Sandel, "The Problem with Genetic Engineering," *Tikkun* Sept/Oct 2007;; Mary Warnock, "What is Natural? And Should we Care?" *Philosophy* 78(306):445-59 (Oct. 2003).

2/27. Gambling

Rdg: John Hobson, 'The Ethics of Gambling', *Intl Journal of Ethics* 15(2):135-48 (1905); Basham and Luik, 'The Social Benefits of Gambling', *Economic Affairs*, March 2011:9-13; S. Cowlishaw and S.L. Thomas, 'Industry interests in gambling research', *Addictive Behavior* 78:101-6 (2018); and a 3-part New York Times investigative report on sports betting, Nov. 20, 2022.

III. Is Capitalism Just? Can a capitalist be moral?

3/1. The Case of Enron

Film: *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room* (2005 documentary, 109 minutes): at Amazon Prime, or Tubi (with ads)

Rdg: "We Were Wiped Out": *New Yorkers Preyed on Chicago Cabbies*, NYT Oct 6, 2019

3/6-8: No class (Spring Break)

3/13. Marxian critique of capitalism

Rdg: Smith and Evans, Marx's *Kapital* for Beginners (online). Film: *Harlan County, U.S.A.* (1976, 104 minutes): at Kanopy.

Paper One Due

3/15: In Defense of Capitalism

Rdg: Ludwig von Mises, "Liberty and Property," online; Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations* (1776), 1:1, 1:2 (online); Andrew Carnegie, *Wealth* (1889), *North American Review* 391: 653-64 (June 1889), [online](#) .

3/20: Max Weber's ambivalent view of capitalism

Rdg: Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism chapters I-III, IV (pp. 95-128, 154), V (pp. 180-3)

3/22. The ethical capitalist and corporate social responsibility

Rdg: Mother Jones' story on the Ford Pinto case: "Pinto Madness," available [online](#); Milton Friedman, "The social responsibility of business is to increase its profits"

3/27. Market Harms and Market Benefits

Rdg: Hayden Wilkinson, 'Market Harms and Market Benefits', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 50(2):202-238 (2022): read 202-231, and the Conclusion on 238; and 'Why the road is getting even rockier for first-time home buyers', *New York Times*, 4/23/2022

3/29. Is Amazon a coercive monopoly?

Rdg: *New York Times*, "Amazon squeezes Businesses," Dec. 20, 2019; Ryan Bourne, "Is this time different? Schumpeter, the Tech Giants, and Monopoly Fatalism," *Cato Institute's Policy Analysis Number 872* (June 17, 2019).

IV. Applications (2)

4/3: Coercion and blackmail

Rdg: Jones v. Star Credit Corp., 298 N.Y.S. 2d 264 (1969); Williams v. Walker-Thomas Furniture Co., 350 F.2d 445 (1965)(excerpt); and Jeffrie Murphy, "Blackmail: A Preliminary Inquiry," *Monist* 63:156-71 (1980)

Mini Paper 2 Due

4/5. Should usury be illegal?

Rdg: Jeremy Bentham, *Defence of Usury* (1789), excerpts; 'They were unjustly imprisoned; now they're profit centers', New York Times, Nov. 27, 2022.

4/10. Promising

Rdg: William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, bk. 3, ch. 3, available [online](#); Hume, A Treatise on Human Nature, Book III, part II, section 5: 'Of the obligation of promises', [online](#); Tunick, "Promises," in *Practices and Principles*, pp. 50-52; Neil MacCormick, "Voluntary Obligations and Normative Powers," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 46 (1972), pp. 59-61, 66-71.

4/12, 4/17, 4/19. The Ethics of deception

For 4/12: the obligation to tell the truth

Rdg: Plaintiff's brief, footnote 3, from *Laidlaw v. Organ*, 2 Wheat (15 U.S.) 178 (1817); Albert Carr, *Is Business Bluffing Ethical?*; Thomas Carson, "Second Thoughts about Bluffing"; Obde v. Schlemeyer, 353 P 2d 672 (1960); Swinton v. Whitinsville Savings Bank, 42 NE 2d 808 (1942)

For 4/17: the case of "To Catch a Predator"

In class: watch excerpt of Dateline NBC's 'To Catch a Predator' tv show

Rdg: Conradt v. NBC Universal, 536 F. Supp. 2d 380 (2008); Boggess, "Attempted Enticement of a Minor: No Place for Pedophiles to Hide," 72 Mo.L.Rev. 909 (Summer 2007), excerpts; Grigoriadis, "The New American Witch Hunt," Rolling Stone 1032:64-71 (August 9, 2007); Luke Dittrich, "Tonight on Dateline This Man Will Die," Esquire 148(3):233-44 (Sept. 2007)

For 4/19: Is journalistic deception justified?

Rdg: Smith and Goodwin, "Deception," ch. 10 in *Groping for Ethics in Journalism* (1999); Desnick v. ABC, 44 F. 3d 1345 (7th Cir. 1995).

4/24. Obligations to strangers and the ethics of international affairs

Rdg: Nussbaum, "Duties of Justice, Duties of Material Aid: Cicero's Problematic Legacy," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 8(2):176-206 (2000); Peter Singer, "What Should a Billionaire Give--and What Should You?", *New York Times Magazine*, Dec. 17, 2006.

Paper 2 due.

Additional notes:

Policy on Accommodations: In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA), students who require reasonable accommodations due to a disability to properly execute coursework must register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS) and follow all SAS procedures. SAS has offices across three of FAU's campuses -- Boca Raton, SU 131 (561-297-3880); in Davie, LA 131 (954-236-1222); in Jupiter and all Northern Campuses, SR 111F (561-799-8585). Disability services are available for students on all campuses. For more information, please visit SAS website at www.fau.edu/sas/.

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) Center: Life as a university student can be challenging physically, mentally and emotionally. Students who find stress negatively affecting their ability to achieve academic or personal goals may wish to consider utilizing FAU's Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) Center. CAPS provides FAU students a range of services – individual counseling, support meetings, and psychiatric services, to name a few – offered to help improve and maintain emotional well-being. For more information, go to <http://www.fau.edu/counseling/>

Code of Academic Integrity Policy Statement: Students at Florida Atlantic University are expected to maintain the highest ethical standards. Academic dishonesty is considered a serious breach of these ethical standards, because it interferes with the university mission to provide a high quality education in which no student enjoys an unfair advantage over any other. Academic dishonesty is also destructive of the university community, which is grounded in a system of mutual trust and places high value on personal integrity and individual responsibility. Harsh penalties are associated with academic dishonesty. For more information, see University Regulation 4.001 and the WHC Academic Honor Code at <http://www.fau.edu/honors/academics/honor-code.php>.

Classroom Etiquette Policy: In order to enhance and maintain a productive atmosphere for education, personal communication devices such as smartphones are to be disabled during class.

Attendance Policy: Students are expected to attend all of their scheduled University classes and to satisfy all academic objectives as outlined by the instructor. The effect of absences upon grades is determined by the instructor, and the University reserves the right to deal at any time with individual cases of non-attendance. Students are responsible for arranging to make up work missed because of legitimate class absence, such as illness, family emergencies, military obligation, court-imposed legal obligations or participation in University-approved activities. Examples of University-approved reasons for absences include participating on an athletic or scholastic team, musical and theatrical performances and debate activities. It is the student's responsibility to give the instructor notice prior to any anticipated absences and within a reasonable amount of time after an unanticipated absence, ordinarily by the next scheduled class meeting. Instructors must allow each student who is absent for a University-approved reason the opportunity to make up work missed without any reduction in the student's final course grade as a direct result of such absence.

Florida Atlantic University policies regarding incomplete grades can be found in the University Catalog. Late work is subject to a grade reduction.

Other notes: One of the objectives of this course is to facilitate critical thinking and debate around topics, theories, and concepts where disagreement is not only anticipated, but encouraged. The ability to think critically, express your ideas clearly, and respond to the professor and other students civilly are the keystones of the academic experience. In this course, the professor will provide instruction in an objective manner and will remain open to a wide variety of viewpoints, so long as those viewpoints are evidence-based and presented in a respectful way. During class, the professor may take positions and make statements for the sole purpose of accomplishing an academic objective or enhancing the learning environment. Additionally, the adoption of class materials for this course does not imply an endorsement of the full content of those materials or the positions of the authors of those materials. Often the professor will provide materials as a point of departure for critical thinking and debate. Students should keep in mind that the ideas presented or discussed during class may not necessarily reflect the professor's personal beliefs or opinions on the subject matter.

Writing Portfolio & Writing Center: In addition to the Forum Paper and as a graduation requirement, Honors college students must submit one essay written during their 1st or 2nd years at the Honors College as part of their Writing Portfolio. Please consider submitting the final paper/essay for this course as your second paper as it meets the Writing Portfolio requirements. Papers for the Writing Portfolio must be submitted through Canvas. When you are eligible for review, you will receive an invitation to join a Canvas course for

the writing portfolio review. Accept this invitation and submit your essay as directed. You are strongly encouraged to visit the University Center for Excellence in Writing (UCEW) for assistance with the writing process

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