



**Course Title:** Ethical Dilemmas Business & the World

**Instructor:** Ariel Kernberg

### **Course Objectives**

The aim of this course is to cast light on the moral dimension of business decisions and foster a rational debate on moral dilemmas of business life, focusing on current British and European cases, or on cases of global import.

Making the right choice in the face of a dilemma requires reflecting on differing views and evaluating reasons for accepting or rejecting them. The study of how to analyse, evaluate and construct arguments is therefore an important component of this course. The benefit of developing this intellectual skill greatly exceeds its moral or philosophical application.

Moral arguments rely on general moral principles and are ultimately grounded in moral theories. Another component of the course is therefore the study of the basic ideas of Moral Egoism, Natural Law Ethics, Utilitarianism, Kantian Ethics, Virtue Ethics, and J. Rawls' and R. Nozick's theories of Justice. In addition we will look at business ethics literature on particular problems. Generally, theories and concepts will be illustrated by actual cases.

Students will research and present in class current cases of business practice and the public debate about them. The logical structure of major arguments will be analysed and their validity and soundness assessed. Objections and alternative arguments will be constructed by work groups and evaluated by their counterparts.

The cases looked at will be of wider social significance. An attempt will be made to address hot issues debated in the British media at the time. Resources used will include newspaper articles, TV and radio news magazines, current affairs programs and documentaries, as well as feature films and short stories. By acquiring familiarity with different cultural perspectives on universal problems, students will gain an opportunity to reflect on their own culture and values.

**Required Text:**

Harris, jr. C. E.. Applying Moral Theories.  
Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, Stamford, CT, 2002

**Further reading will include:**

- Hugh Mercer Curtler. Ethical Argument. Oxford University Press, 2004
- Crane, Andy and Matten, Dirk. Business Ethics: a European perspective: managing corporate citizenship and sustainability in the age of globalization. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2003.
- Ruth Benedict: Anthropology and the abnormal. The Journal of General Psychology 10 (1934).
- Reprinted (as: The Case for Moral Relativism) in: The Moral Life. Ed. Louis Pojman. OUP 2000, pp.151-159
- Louis Pojman: The Case against Moral Relativism. In: The Moral Life. Ed. Louis Pojman. OUP 2000, pp. 160-185
- James Rachel: Ethical Egoism. From: James Rachel. The Elements of Moral Philosophy. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 1999.
- Reprinted in: The Moral Life. Ed. Louis Pojman. OUP 2000, pp.151-159
- Reiss, M.J., and Straughan, R.. Improving Nature? The Science and Ethics of Genetic Engineering, Cambridge University Press, 1996. Chapter 6.
- John Stewart Mill: Freedom of Action. In: Ethics in Practice. Ed. Hugh LaFollette. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997. pp.298-302
- John Stewart Mill: Freedom of Speech. In: Ethics in Practice. Ed. Hugh LaFollette. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997. pp.326-332
- Robert Elliot: Environmental Ethics. In: A Companion To Ethics. Ed. Peter Singer. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991. ch.24
- Bernard R. Boxill: Equality, Discrimination and Preferential Treatment. In: A Companion To Ethics. Ed. Peter Singer. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991. ch.29

**Required Audio-File Listening:**

BBC Radio 4: In Our Time programs:

**Relativism**

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/inourtime/inourtime\\_20060119.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/inourtime/inourtime_20060119.shtml)

**Thomas Hobbes**

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/inourtime/inourtime\\_20051201.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/inourtime/inourtime_20051201.shtml)

**John Stuart Mill**

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/inourtime/inourtime\\_20060518.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/inourtime/inourtime_20060518.shtml)

**Duty - concepts of obligation**

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/inourtime/inourtime\\_20031113.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/inourtime/inourtime_20031113.shtml)

**Freedom - a principle worth fighting and dying for?**

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/inourtime/inourtime\\_20020704.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/inourtime/inourtime_20020704.shtml)

To hear these programmes you need to click on the "Listen Again" button. You will need to have a RealOne player installed on your computer. This can be downloaded for free from:

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio/audiohelp\\_install.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio/audiohelp_install.shtml)

## Topics Covered will include:

- What is ethics?
- What is an argument?
- Relativism vs. Universalism
- The ethics of self-interest
- The ethics of natural law
- The ethics of utilitarianism
- The ethics of respect for persons
- Virtue ethics
- Economic justice
- Free speech
- Discrimination
- Playing god? The business of genetic engineering
- The environment

## Assessment Plan

Oral presentation	30%
Midterm paper	30%
Final paper	30%
Participation	10%

### The Oral Presentation

The oral presentation is a contribution to the content of the course as well as a means of assessment. The student should present the morally relevant features of a current moral dilemma of business life and analyse major arguments concerning its resolution. The quality of the analysis should reflect the material covered in class up to that point in time.

### The midterm paper

The purpose of the midterm paper is to demonstrate the ability to apply the concepts and theories which were studied in the first half of the term to a particular case.

### The final paper

The purpose of the final paper is to demonstrate your ability to analyse a moral problem of business life, present and examine different arguments about how to approach it and argue your own view on the issue. The strengths and weaknesses of each argument discussed should be addressed. The paper should reflect grasp of the concepts and theories, which were dealt with in this course.

The subject of the paper should be an actual case from the European context, but a comparison to similar problems - including ones encountered elsewhere - is welcome.

The case analysis should draw on academic literature about the problem area discussed: papers in business ethics periodicals, collections on practical ethics and so forth. Internet resources, in particular non-academic ones, do not suffice.

### Participation

Students are expected to contribute to an atmosphere of enquiry and learning in class. This requires a considerable level of attention and engagement. Discussions in class are not a stage for expressing one's mind and feelings but rather a medium for addressing ideas and arguments. Openness to criticism is therefore needed.