

Ethics and Economic Life
PHIL 3580 Section 1
MF 11:30-12:45
Old Main 301

Spring 2015

Instructor: Erica Holberg (erica.holberg@usu.edu)
Instructor's Office Hours: Mondays 2-3 in Old Main 002K
and by appointment

Course Description:

This course is structured by the following three questions: Are the ethical concerns involved in economic exchange substantially different from the ethical concerns involved in living a morally upright and happy human life? How much does ethics matter for economic success? How important is luck for success in the economic realm? We will approach these questions by considering four general categories constitutive of the realm of economics: consumption, production, exchange, and distribution/accounting. The aim is to better understand what the economic realm encompasses (are there moral limits to "the market"?), the ethical implications of various economic theories, whether business interests extend beyond the concern for profit, how business contributes to good living, how business may harm healthy relations to ourselves and others, and what characteristics are valued and cultivated in the doing of business.

Course Objectives:

1. *Learn to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view.* We will be reading crucial texts in the history of ethical, economic, and political philosophy. The goal is to understand the aims of the arguments presented, evaluate the arguments for their strengths and weaknesses, and to understand what assumptions underlie the argumentative steps taken.
2. *Develop skills in expressing oneself orally and in writing.* You cannot do well in this class if you do not participate in class discussion. The final group presentation is a more formal way of presenting ideas and arguments to your fellow classmates. Just as importantly, you will have four chances to get better at making a clear, persuasive, sophisticated argument in writing. Your grade is a direct result of your efforts and successes in communicating your thoughts clearly in class and in writing.
3. *Acquire an interest in learning more by asking questions and seeking answers.* One guiding question for this course is how, or even if, business ethics constitutes a separate field of ethical concerns and interests. The aim is to be able to make connections between what we are reading and talking about in the classroom with various business interests and values outside the classroom. Students are encouraged to bring in materials they feel are relevant to the themes of the class and explain the connection to their classmates. Students are also encouraged to come to class with questions, either about the previous class discussion or about the readings for that day.

Texts: (books available at the USU Bookstore)
Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Paton (Harper)
Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. Zeyl (Hackett)
Smith, *The Moral Sentiments* (Penguin)

*All other course readings will be available on the Canvas site.

Grading:

First Paper: 15%
Second Paper: 15%
Third Paper: 15%
Group Presentation: 15%
Fourth Paper: 15%
Homework 15%
Class Participation: 10%

Class participation requires that you 1) ask questions, 2) contribute your own ideas and interpretations of the readings, and 3) follow up on the ideas of others. “Show and tell” and bringing questions to class are excellent ways to improve your participation grade. The 25 homework assignments can be found on Canvas. Homework is to be printed out and submitted at the beginning of class.

The first three papers are to be 5 pages long, and the fourth paper should be 5 pages of argumentation, and 1 page of group evaluation. Paper topics will be distributed about a week before the draft is due. Three paper drafts and participation in the writings seminars are required. Papers are to be submitted on Canvas by **7 p.m.** I would also appreciate it if you bring one paper copy to class the next day. If you are sick and cannot attend class, you must submit a copy to me electronically using either Canvas or email, and then bring a paper copy to the next class. Students are responsible for making sure the electronic file submitted is readable by the instructor (a file I cannot open is a late paper).

Drafts are also to be distributed to other classmates by **7 p.m.** on the due date. Please be thoughtful of others and respect this deadline, so that everyone has a chance to print and read the drafts in time for the workshop. The easiest way to distribute your draft to all your classmates is to send an email with attachment to your writing seminar group. Please print a copy of each person’s drafts (including your own) and bring them to the writing seminar prepared to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each draft.

Plagiarism is forbidden. Plagiarism is a sign that the person has lost sight of one’s role as a student and the ends of education. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please do not hesitate to ask the instructor.

Schedule:

Consumption

Friday, January 9th – Introduction, Plato, *Gorgias*, 447a-462a, pp. 1-21

Monday, January 12th – Plato, *Gorgias*, 462a-495b, pp. 21-68, HW #1

Friday, January 16th – Plato, *Gorgias*, 495b-527e, pp. 69-113, HW #2

Monday, January 19th – No Class – Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Friday, January 23rd – Weber, *The Spirit of Capitalism** HW #3

Sunday, January 25th – First paper drafts distributed to classmates by 7 p.m.

Monday, January 26th – Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, pp. 68-89, 102-104, 167-173* HW #4

Friday, January 30th – Marx, “Alienated Labor”*; “The Power of Money in Bourgeois Society”*; *Capital* – The Commodity (excerpts)* HW #5

Friday, January 30th – First papers due by 7 p.m.

Production

Monday, February 2nd – Hume, *Enquiry*, Section III* HW #6

Friday, February 6th – Kant, *Groundwork*, Chapter I HW #7

Monday, February 9th – Kant, *Groundwork*, Chapter II, pp. 74-92 HW #8

Friday, February 13th – Kant, *Groundwork*, Chapter II, pp. 92-107 HW #9

Monday, February 16th – No Class - Presidents’ Day

Tuesday, February 17th – Kant, “What is Enlightenment?”* HW #10

Friday, February 20th – Marx, “Alienated Labor”*; *Capital* (excerpts)* HW#11

Sunday, February 22nd – Second paper drafts distributed to classmates by 7 p.m.

Monday, February 23rd – Aquinas, Question 67, 77, and 78* HW #12

Friday, February 27th – Mill, *Principles of Political Economy* – Limits of the Laissez-Faire or Non-interference Principle* HW #13

Friday, February 27th – Second paper due by 7 p.m.

Exchange

Monday, March 2nd – Smith, *Wealth of Nations** HW #14

Friday, March 6th – Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Part I, Sections I and II, pp. 13-54 HW #15

Monday, Friday, March 9th -13th – Spring Break, No class

Monday, March 16th – Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Part I, Section III, pp. 55-78 HW #16

Friday, March 20th – Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Part III, Chapters I, II, and III pp. 131-181 HW #17

Sunday, March 22nd – Third paper drafts distributed to classmates by 7 p.m.

Monday, March 23rd – Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Part III, Chapters IV, V, and VI, pp. 181-206 HW #18

Friday, March 27th – Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests*, pp. 20-66* HW #19

Friday, March 27th – Third paper due by 7 p.m.

Distribution/Accounting

Monday, March 30th – Smith, *Econned*, Chapters 4, 5, and Appendix I* HW #20

Friday, April 3rd – No class, Instructor out of town

Monday, April 6th – Singer, “Tit for Tat”*; Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, Introduction HW #21

Friday, April 10th – Group presentations; Sandel, “Jumping the Queue”* HW #22

Monday, April 13th – Group presentations; Sandel, “Incentives”, pp. 43-65* HW #23

Friday, April 17th – Group presentations; Sandel, “Incentives”, pp. 65-91* HW #24

Monday, April 20th – Group presentations; Sandel, “How Markets Crowd out Morals”,
pp. 93-130* HW #25

Friday, April 24th – Group presentations; Hayes, “Meritocracy and Its Discontents”*

Tuesday, April 28th – Final paper due by 7 p.m.