

## PHIL 350 | BUSINESS ETHICS AND POLITICS

Fall 2024

**INSTRUCTOR: IASON XYGKIS**

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**Office hours: Wednesday 12.45pm–13.45pm or by appointment**

### Course Description

In this course, we will explore key topics of Business Ethics and Politics by addressing them in terms of the profound philosophical questions that underlie them. Our main focus will be the form of Corporate Business in contemporary capitalism. Accordingly, we will commence with a concise examination of some of the primary ethical and political issues arising within this socio-economic landscape.

Following this introduction, we will explore the concepts of profit, capital, and labor as developed in Marx's seminal work, "The Capital." Additionally, we will assess key ethical philosophies like Utilitarianism and Kantianism in relation to the moral evaluation of labor conditions in a capitalist context. In the second part of the course, we will examine the dominant political philosophies of neo-liberalism and socialism to question the political dimensions of the human experience within capitalism. In the concluding segment, we will expand our political analysis of capitalism and reflect on the forms of life within this system. We will approach this question from two viewpoints: Foucault's concept of biopolitics and the Aristotelian-Marxist notion of the species being of man.

The primary goal of this course is to equip students with the essential philosophical tools to assess the limitations and opportunities inherent in today's socio-economic context.

### Learning Goals

**This course will primarily teach students to:**

- Familiarize themselves with fundamental ethical and political philosophical theories.
- Discuss and interpret key concepts and aspects of moral and political philosophy.
- Appreciate how philosophical theories help us frame problems arising from the activity and the nature of contemporary forms of business.
- Consider alternative solutions to these business problems.
- Consider alternative forms of business which attempt to solve these problems.

### Course Requirements and Assessment

#### **CYA Attendance Policy**

CYA regards attendance in class and on-site (in Athens or during field study trips) as essential, so attendance at all scheduled meetings is required. All absences are recorded and have consequences that may affect your grade.

- **Class Contribution 10%** – In this class, philosophy is being taught as an activity and not a mere body of doctrine. As a consequence, we will all try to engage in dialogue with each other, starting from what we know and experience and moving on to a philosophical understanding of each of the concepts and problems we will be reading about in class. Class Contribution includes physical and mental presence in the classroom, arriving on time, preparation, participation in class discussions. Reading assignments are to be completed before each class session. I expect all of you to come prepared, engage in our discussions, ask questions, and voice your opinions in class. If you are extremely uncomfortable speaking in front of a large group of students, you may send your opinions or afterthoughts in writing via email.
- **Student Symposia 10%** – You will have the chance to talk with your classmates in two student symposia involving panel presentations, debates between assigned philosophical perspectives and Q&A sessions.
- **Home assignments 15% (Completion Requirement)** – You will be asked to complete 6 home assignments which you will then present in class. The assignments will not be graded separately. You will be graded just for turning them all in on time. You will get an A+ if you've turned them all in on time and an F if there is more than one assignment unjustifiably missing.
- **Home Assignments Presentations 10% (Completion Requirement)** – You will be asked to present a short

version of each one of your home assignments in class. You will get an A+ for this part of the grade for completing all the presentations and an F for this part of the grade for missing more than one home assignment presentation.

- **Midterm and final paper 20% & 30%** – You will be asked to write a midterm paper of 3 to 5 pages and a final paper of 5 to 7 pages (Times New Roman 12pt, 1.5 spacing). Guidelines for writing a paper will be discussed in class. Paper topics will be selected freely by you, after prior consultation with me, and discussed with your peers in class before you start writing. **There will be no exams for this class.**

### **Policy on Assignments and Make-up Work**

Details about assignments and exams will be given in advance. I will accept no late assignments or make-up exams unless discussed with me in advance. If you are unable to come to class, please let me know beforehand.

### **CYA Policies and Regulations**

#### **Academic Accommodations**

Students are required to submit an official letter from the office at their school that handles academic accommodations (generally the Office of Disability Services), or to have that office send a letter. Students who have submitted such a letter to CYA should also talk to their professors individually to discuss how these accommodations will work in each specific course.

#### **ePolicy on Original Work**

Plagiarism is literary theft. As such, it is a serious offense which will not be tolerated either at your home institution or at CYA. Plagiarism on an examination or in a paper will result in an F for the course. You must cite the author of any and all ideas that you use that are neither common knowledge nor your own idea. If you are in doubt, it is safest to cite the source. Your work should be original and reflect your own ideas and thoughts. If you are unsure about what counts as original work, please consult your professor and check the Student Handbook.

#### **Use of Laptops**

In-class or onsite use of laptops and other devices is permitted if this facilitates course-related activities such as note-taking, looking up references, etc. Laptop or other device privileges will be suspended if devices are not used for class-related work.

#### **Upgrade to 400-level course**

Courses can be upgraded to a 400-level. This constitutes usually 25% additional work on the part of the student. The option to upgrade opens the second week of classes. If you are interested in this option, please talk to your professor.

### **Required Readings**

1. Arendt, Hannah. Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil.
2. Foucault, Michel. The Birth of Biopolitics.
3. Friedman, Milton. "The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits."
4. Kant, Immanuel. Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals.
5. Marx, Karl. Capital: Critique of Political Economy.
6. Marx, Karl. Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy.
7. Mill, John Stuart. Utilitarianism.
8. Nozick, Robert. Anarchy, State, and Utopia.
9. Rawls, John. A Theory of Justice.

Fall 2024 Tentative Schedule

Day #	Date/Day	Topic / Readings / Assignments Due / Place (if applicable)
	Sep 5-7	Field Study   Delphi and Ancient Olympia
1	Sep 9	<b>Introduction</b> Overview of the class <u>In Class Assignment</u> : Separate your life in spheres and list the companies that enter into each of these spheres.
2	Sep 11	<b>Watch excerpts from <i>The Corporation</i></b> Focus topic: Business ethics, politics and profit. 1 <sup>st</sup> home assignment for next class: Take one of the ethical/social/political problems that the documentary brings up, discuss how this problem is connected with the aim of business to make profit and how it could be addressed. Due on Sep 17.
3	Sep 16	<b>The Social Responsibility of Business and Profit</b> <u>Read</u> Friedman, <i>The social responsibility of Business is to increase its profit</i> <u>Present</u> a short summary of your 1 <sup>st</sup> home assignment in class. Focus topic: on the constitution of business as a profit-making machine.
	Sep 18-21	Field Study   Crete
4	Sep 23	<b>Capitalism – Commodity</b> <u>Read</u> Marx “Commodities” from Marx’s <i>The Capital</i> Focus topic: On the difference between use value and exchange value
5	Sep 25	<b>Capitalism – Profit</b> <u>Read</u> Marx “The General Formula for Capital” from Marx’s <i>The Capital</i> Focus topic: On the difference between making money and making profit 2 <sup>nd</sup> home assignment for next class: Think of a case from standard business practice in which there is a clash between a human/animal/social/political value and the capitalist value of profit making. Be ready to present and discuss your case in class.
6	Sep 30	<b>Presentation of home assignments in class</b>
7	Oct 2	<b>A consequentialist view of the capitalist value of profit making</b> <u>Read</u> passages from Mill’s Utilitarianism Focus topic: What makes an action morally right according to the utilitarian view and whether the destruction of life by the corporate drive for profit is morally justified by the consequences.
8	Oct 7	<b>A deontological view of the capitalist value of profit making</b> <u>Read</u> passages from Kant’s <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> Focus point: What makes an action morally right according to Kant.
9	Oct 9	<b>1<sup>st</sup> student symposium: Can the capitalist value of profit making be morally justified?</b> 3 <sup>rd</sup> home assignment: Think of an idea or two for a paper topic and email me about it by Oct 15 @Midnight.
10	Oct 14	<b>Reflection day</b> Focus topic: What ground we’ve covered so far. Where we still need to be.
11	Oct 16	<b>The social responsibility of the individual</b> <u>Read</u> Hannah Arendt’s <i>Eichmann in Jerusalem</i> Focus topic: The moral and the political flaw in Eichman 4 <sup>th</sup> home assignment for next class: Write a one page draft of your midterm paper idea and be ready to present it in class.
12	Oct 21	<b>Midterm Week</b> Present your paper topic idea in class. Everyone should be ready to contribute to each of the topics discussed.
13	Oct 23	<b>Midterm Week</b> Continuation of discussion of paper topic ideas in class <b>Midterm papers due by Oct 27 @midnight</b>
	Oct 25-Nov 3	Fall Break

Day #	Date/Day	Topic / Readings / Assignments Due / Place (if applicable)
14	Nov 4	<b>Neoliberal Justice</b> Read Robert Nozick, <i>Anarchy State and Utopia</i> Focus topic: Justice and Liberty
15	Nov 6	<b>Kantian Justice</b> Rawls, <i>Theories of Justice</i> Focus Topic: Justice and Equality
16	Nov 11	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Student Symposium: Can the capitalist value of profit making be politically justified?</b>
	<b>Nov 12-15</b>	<b>Field Study   Peloponnese</b>
17	Nov 18	<b>Reflection Day</b> Focus topic: What ground we've covered so far. Where we still need to be.
18	Nov 20	<b>Foucault vs. Ideal Justice Theories</b> Watch clip in class.
19	Nov 25	<b>Life in Capitalism</b> Read Foucault, The birth of biopolitics.
20	Nov 27	<b>Human Life in Capitalism</b> Read <i>Alienated Labor</i> from Marx's <i>Grundrisse</i> 5 <sup>th</sup> Home assignment for next class: Discuss one of the ways in which your own life is alienated or is the object of biopower and be ready to present it in class.
21	Dec 2	<b>Presentation of home assignments</b> Home assignment: Think of a paper idea or two and email me by Tuesday the 23 <sup>rd</sup> of April at midnight.
22	Dec 4	(Make-up T TH class) <b>Continuation of presentation of home assignments</b> 6 <sup>th</sup> Home assignment: write up a one-page draft of your final paper topic idea and be ready to present it in our last class.
23	Dec 9	<b>Presentation of drafts of final papers</b>
24	Dec 11	<b>Continuation of presentation of drafts of final papers. Final discussion.</b>
<b>FEW</b>	<b>Dec 16</b>	<b>Final Exam Week</b>
<b>FEW</b>	<b>Dec 18</b>	<b>Final Exam Week</b> <b>Final Essays due by Dec 20 @ Midnight</b>

**Schedule at a glance**

Day #	Date	Session	Venue
	<b>Sep 5-7</b>	<b>Field Study</b>	<b>Delphi and Ancient Olympia</b>
1	Sep 9	Introduction	
2	Sep 11	The Corporation	
3	Sep 16	Friedman & Presentation	
	<b>Sep 18-21</b>	<b>Field Study</b>	<b>Crete</b>
4	Sep 23	Marx, Commodity	
5	Sep 25	Marx, Profit	
6	Sep 30	Presentation	
7	Oct 2	Utilitarianism	
8	Oct 7	Kantianism	
9	Oct 9	Student Symposium	CYA Auditorium
10	Oct 14	Reflection Day	
11	Oct 16	Arendt	
<b>12</b>	<b>Oct 21</b>	<b>Midterm Week</b> Presentation of drafts	
<b>13</b>	<b>Oct 23</b>	<b>Midterm Week</b> Presentation of drafts	

Day #	Date	Session	Venue
		<b>Midterm Essays due by Oct 27</b>	
	<b>Oct 25-Nov 3</b>	<b>Fall Break</b>	
14	Nov 4	Nozick	
15	Nov 6	Rawls	
16	Nov 11	Student Symposium	CYA Auditorium
	<b>Nov 12-15</b>	<b>Field Study</b>	<b>Peloponnese</b>
17	Nov 18	Reflection Day	
18	Nov 20	Foucault, Justice	
19	Nov 25	Foucault, Biopolitics	
20	Nov 27	Marx, Alienation	
21	Dec 2	Presentation of home assignment	
22	Dec 4	Presentation of home assignment	
23	Dec 9	Presentation of draft	
24	Dec 11	Presentation of draft	
<b>FEW</b>	<b>Dec 16</b>	<b>Final Exam Week</b>	
<b>FEW</b>	<b>Dec 18</b>	<b>Final Exam Week</b> <b>Final Essays due by Dec 20 @ Midnight</b>	

**Course Bibliography (Required and Supplementary Readings)**

Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. New York: Penguin Classics, 2006.

Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.

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Duska, Ronald. "Business Ethics: Oxymoron or Good Business?" *Business Ethics Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (2000): 111-129.

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Smith, Adam. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. 2 volumes. London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1776. Reprint, edited by R.H. Campbell, A.S. Skinner, and W.B. Todd. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976.