PHIL 103 – sections 2 and 3. Business and Computer Ethics  Fall 2015

Instructor

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Office hours

I will be available for office hours on and Monday/Wednesday 11-12:30 in Mendocino 3012. While I’m happy to meet face-to-face, you can also send me a SacCt message during those times and expect an immediate response (unless I am with another student). You can also send a SacCt message to request a real-time virtual meeting using SacCt’s online chat tool.

Reasonable Accommodation

If your circumstances require accommodation or assistance in meeting the expectations of this course, please let me know as soon as possible. You may need to provide documentation to the University office of SSWD (in accordance with the University policy outlined here: http://www.csus.edu/umanual/acad/UAMA00215.htm).

Course Description

From the catalogue: Analytical treatment of controversial moral issues which emerge in the business world, e.g., affirmative action, corporate responsibility, the global economy, industry and environmental damage, social effects of advertising, the computer threat to personal privacy, ownership of computer programs. Discussion will focus on basic moral principles and concepts relevant to these issues.

More!

The corporate model of business organization has been and is a source of productivity, wealth and technological advancement and so contributes to the well-being of society. But corporations and business leaders also act immorally and irresponsibly. Ideally, we’d have more of the former and less of the latter. This module supposes that the tools of ethical analysis can be of some help in explaining some of these problems and proposing ways to avoid them. It can, first, at a micro-level. What should we think about our individual involvement with these organizations – as customers of them, as employees of them, as executives of them, as investors in them? At a macro-level the issues more concern what this mode of organization would look like in a just society. In what ways would the operations of corporations be constrained or regulated with respect to its treatment of the environment, employees, local and global communities, consumers and our privacy?

Objectives and outcomes

By the conclusion of this course, it should be true that students (a) understand the moral and
political issues that affect questions of the appropriate role of corporations in a just society and are able to (b) apply this understanding to make sense of existing social practices and institutions (c) analyze current problems and controversies and (d) evaluate proposed solutions to them. You will need to give evidence of your ability to understand, apply, analyze and evaluate in your writing and contributions to class discussions.

Phil 101 is a GE course in area D (http://www.csus.edu/acaf/ge/Area%20D%20Learning%20Outcomes.pdf). Area D learning outcomes are that you:

1. Describe and evaluate ethical and social values in their historical and cultural contexts.
2. Explain and apply the principles and methods of academic disciplines to the study of social and individual behavior.
3. Demonstrate an understanding of the role of human diversity in human society, for example, race, ethnicity, class, age, ability/disability, sexual identity, gender and gender expression.
4. Explain and critically examine social dynamics and issues in their historical and cultural contexts.

Text

All required readings are pieces available as links or .pdf documents from the “Schedule and learning modules” folders in SacCt. The schedule is duplicated below.

Class procedures and conduct

I will lecture on Monday (for section 2) and Wednesday (both days for section 3) of each week. These lectures will be fairly scripted, but it won’t be out of place for me to pepper you with questions about your reading and you should always feel free to stop me whenever you have a question. Wednesday (for section 2) and Friday (for section 3) meetings will be mostly unscripted (at least, by me). These will be “Card Talk” sessions. Come to these meetings with one or two questions, challenges or objections related to material presented or covered in the lecture or the reading assignments that the lecture was based on. Write your question(s) on a 3x5 index card. I will open the floor or call on students at random to present one of their questions. At the end of the meeting you will submit your card with your questions on it, which will be used to take roll. Your questions must be such that they give evidence that you have done some careful thinking about the material in order for you to receive attendance credit.

Please avoid disrupting class meetings and other ways of being rude. This means that you shouldn’t use electronic devices, carry on private conversations with people around you, sleep, read, arrive late or leave early.

Schedule

Part I: Setting up the problem at a general level: ‘capitalism’ is a system of social organization based on private ownership and voluntary exchange. Is it compatible with a just society?
Part II: Capitalism is based on private ownership. In this part of the course we approach some problems related to property rules: property rights can be more or less extensive, both with respect to the sorts of things that can be legitimately owned (e.g., ideas?) and with respect to the bundle of rights the owner enjoys over these things (e.g., the right to exclude all externalities?). What sorts of property schemes can be justified?
Part III: Capitalism is based on voluntary exchange. In this part of the course we approach some problems related to the normative significance of agreement. We usually think that a person’s consent is normatively transformative. For example, the moral status of an action performed without someone’s consent, like giving someone a kiss, can be changed from ‘wrong’ to ‘permissible’ by securing consent. But is consent always morally transformative? What has to be true about an agreement in order for it to count as genuinely voluntary?

9. Oct 26-30, Managerial compensation
   • Jeffrey Moriarty, Do CEOs get paid too much?

10. Nov 2-6, Globalization
    • Carol Gould, Moral issues in globalization
    • Matt Zwolinski, Sweatshops, choice, and exploitation

11. Nov 9-13, Advertising
    • Tom Beauchamp, Manipulative advertising  IVLE
    • John Kenneth Galbraith, The dependence effect
    • FA Hayek, The non sequitur of the dependence effect

12. Nov 16-20: Product safety
    • John Hasnas, The mirage of product safety

Part IV: Capitalism has generated unprecedented levels of technological innovation. In this part of the course we approach some problems related to the use of technology. Many have concerns about privacy and equity. What should we think about them?

13. Nov 23-27, Privacy
    • G. Randolph Mayes, Privacy in a transparent age
    • J. Moor, Towards a Theory of Privacy in the Information Age

14. Nov 30-Dec 4, Net neutrality
    • Tim Berners-Lee, A Magna Carta for the web (TED talk)
      https://www.ted.com/talks/tim_berners_lee_a_magna_carta_for_the_web

15. Dec 7-11, Recap and review

Assessment

Please do not plagiarize or cheat. If you do then at a minimum you will be marked with a zero on the assignment. Multiple and/or flagrant violations will lead to me assigning a failing grade for the course and initiating disciplinary action through the Office of Student Affairs. Familiarize yourselves with the University’s Academic Honesty Policies and Procedures document (here: http://www.csus.edu/umanual/student/STU-0100.htm).
Consistent with Sacramento State’s efforts to enhance student learning, foster honesty, and maintain integrity in our academic processes, instructors may use a tool called Turnitin to compare a student’s work with multiple sources. The tool compares each student’s with an extensive database of prior publications and papers, providing links to possible matches and a ‘similarity score’. The tool does not determine whether plagiarism has occurred or not. Instead, the instructor must make a complete assessment and judge the originality of the student’s work. All submissions to this course may be checked using this tool.

You may choose to submit papers to Turnitin assignments without identifying information included in the paper (e.g. name or student number). The system will automatically show this information to faculty in your course when viewing the submission.

Turnitin services are now integrated in the Assignment function of SacCT. More information is available here http://www.csus.edu/atcs/tools/turnitin/index.html.

Smarthinking is a FREE on-demand, live person, writing assistance service provided by Pearson Publishing. This allows students to submit their written work and receive constructive feedback to improve their writing, typically within 24 hours. It is available as a link at the top of the SacCT page.

Your final course mark is based on the following:

a) reading summaries (23). These are short (200 words), basic summaries of each assigned reading. They should be thoughtful and grammatical. You need to identify the author’s thesis and the basic strategy he or she uses for prosecuting it. They are due every Monday at 5pm. Submit in the “Reading summaries journal” folder in the text box (rather than a file attachment).

b) “card talk” discussion meetings (13)


Your essay must be based on an assigned reading. If your essay is based on a reading assignment in Part I, the due date is Oct 5. If your essay is based on a reading assignment in Part II, the due date is Oct 26. If your essay is based on a reading assignment in Part III, the due date is Nov 23. If your essay is based on a reading assignment in Part IV, the due date is Dec 11.

d) Midterm exam (20)
e) Final exam (25)
a + b + c + d + e = final course mark

Grading scale:

93 and above = A
90-92 = A-
87-89 = B+
83-86 = B
80-82 = B-
77-79 = C+
73-76 = C
70-72 = C-
67-69 = D+
63-66 = D
60-62 = D-
59 and below = F