

# **BUSINESS, ETHICS, AND SOCIETY**

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PHL/MGT 228-303  
SPRING 2004  
MWF 2:20-3:20  
R. VALGENTI

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

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*Business, Ethics, and Society* is the title of our ten-week examination of the various ethical and moral issues arising in contemporary commercial life. The specific focus of our examination will be the emergence of the *consumer*, and how this idea runs counter to the notion of a mere customer in the economic world. If one agrees with the thesis that commercial life in our society has traded in the customer in favor of the consumer, it is in our interest to trace the effects of this shift in all forms of commercial life and to identify the resulting ethical dilemmas from a variety of stakeholder positions.

The goal of this course is not to import one or several ethical theories into the world of business and commerce in order to form moral judgments about business practices, or to train future business men and women to make more ethical decisions when the time arises. The goal of this course is to examine how commercial life is composed of ethical moments, that is, sites where the human will has effects that are immediate and long ranging. As participants in this life on a variety of levels and in a variety of frameworks, we necessarily have a stake in our own ethical decisions as well as in the decisions of others.

The theoretical content of this course will be utilized to develop, analyze, and critique various consumer frameworks that will allow us to understand how our commercial society functions. To run with this idea of the *consumer*, the practical content of this course will focus on the food industry, and in particular, how the food industry has become a site for consumerism in all its forms. The metaphor of *consumption* will serve us well as we examine not only our roles as consumers, but also the various ways that we are consumed within commercial life.

## **COURSE READINGS**

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There will be three types of reading for this course: philosophical texts, journalistic texts, and case studies. We will engage all three styles of writing on a weekly basis, with philosophical texts discussed primarily on Mondays, the journalistic on Wednesdays, and case studies on Fridays. My intention is not to separate these three genres, but to develop a philosophical lens through which we will understand and analyze the ethical dilemmas evident (and not-so-evident) in our commercial society.

There are two required books for this course:

*Reflections on Commercial Life*. Edited by P. Murray. New York: Routledge, 1997. ISBN 0-415-91196-6

*Fast Food Nation*, by Eric Schlosser. New York: Perennial/Harper Collins, 2002. ISBN 0-06-093845-5

Our case studies are available on electronic reserve – **you must print these out and have them read and prepared for classroom discussion** (refer to the course schedule for details). To access the e-reserves, go to the following website: <http://eres.lib.depaul.edu/courseindex.asp> and simply search for my name. There you will be prompted for the password, which is PHL228.

## WRITTEN EVALUATION

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There will be three (3) written evaluations in this course, each worth 25% of your grade. These “case study reports” will test your ability to think through a detailed case study from our text and your ability to argue a position using logic and philosophical reasoning. These reports will also serve as a springboard for discussion in class, so expect to read or summarize your argument for the class and defend your position. A more detailed description of the assignment and requirements will be available the week before the assignment is due.

## CLASS PARTICIPATION

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Class participation is worth 25% of your grade and will be the most consistent way for you to practice formulating your ideas in a way that is philosophically rigorous and sound, and the most immediate way for me to assess how well you are comprehending the texts and articulating your thoughts. On the days that we assess case studies, I will call on certain individuals to lead the analysis and discussion with the intention of giving everyone a chance to strengthen their class participation grade. Class participation does not mean attending every class, sitting attentively, reading the required texts, and being respectful towards the thoughts and ideas of your classmates – those behaviors are minimal expectations! Your class participation goes above and beyond those basic standards, and will be evaluated according to the following rubric:

100 = active and consistent participation; both questions and responses demonstrate a prepared knowledge of the texts; able to build upon responses and comments of other students and further classroom discussion.

90 = same as above, but with less frequency **or** with a less prepared familiarity with the readings.

80 = same as above, with **both** less frequency **and also** a less prepared familiarity with the readings.

70 = asks pertinent questions, but unfamiliar with the texts; only sporadic participation in discussions.

60 = unprepared on a regular basis; unable or unwilling to participate in discussions.

## ATTENDANCE

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You are expected to attend every class session. You are allowed three absences – these are free passes and you need not give me an excuse. Beyond the three absences, you will lose a full class participation grade for each day you miss. If you are 20+ minutes late or leave the class early, you will be given an absence.

## FINAL GRADE

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Your final grade will be the average generated by your class participation grade and the grades on your three written evaluations. The point average will be given a letter grade according to the following chart:

		77-79	C+
93-100	A	73-76	C
90-92	A-	70-72	C-
87-89	B+	67-69	D+
83-86	B	60-66	D
80-82	B-	0-59	F

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

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Plagiarism, cheating, and any other violations of DePaul University's academic integrity policy will not be tolerated. Ignorance and good intentions are not excuses. If you are caught, **you will fail the course**. Be informed: I will utilize the "Turn-it-in" service in cases where I suspect plagiarism. Copies of the Academic Integrity Policy can be found on the Faculty Council web page at

<http://pres.depaul.edu/faccouncil/pdf/acadIntegrity.pdf>

## CELL PHONES, BEEPERS, AND ASSORTED ELECTRONICA

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Don't even dream about having one turned on in my class. If you leave the room to take a call, please do not return and promptly drop the course.

## OFFICE HOURS

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Monday and Wednesday, 1-1:45pm  
2352 N. Clifton, Suite 150.29  
(773) 325-4930 or ext. 54930

If at any time during the quarter you are in need of extra help, have special learning needs, or just have some questions about the course material, please come to my office hours. Don't leave questions about readings or essays to the last minute!!!! If you cannot make my regular office hours, please feel free to set up an appointment with me that is more convenient. The best way to do that is to speak to me before or after class, or to email me with at least two days notice. If you need to contact me, email is best, as I rarely if ever check the voicemail at the extension listed above.

**BUSINESS, ETHICS AND SOCIETY SCHEDULE: Readings are due on the day they are listed**

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Week 1:

M	3/29	Syllabus; Introductory Discussion
W	3/31	Introduction, <i>Reflections on Commercial Life</i> , pp. 1-22.
F	4/2	Ethical models and the anatomy of a case study (discussion)

Week 2:

M	4/5	Plato, excerpt from <i>Republic</i> , pp. 39-68.
W	4/7	<i>Fast Food Nation</i> , chapters 1-3
F	4/9	No class – Good Friday

Week 3:

M	4/12	Aristotle, excerpt from the <i>Politics</i> , pp. 69-86.
W	4/14	<i>Fast Food Nation</i> , chapter 4.
F	4/16	Case Study: “Pate at Iroquois Brands” (handout)

Week 4:

M	4/19	John Locke, excerpt from the <i>Second Treatise of Government</i> , pp. 133-146.
W	4/21	<i>Fast Food Nation</i> , chapter 5.
F	4/23	<b>Case Study Report #1: “Kellogg Cereals and Children’s TV Advertising”</b>

Week 5:

M	4/26	Adam Smith, excerpts from <i>The Wealth of Nations</i> , pp. 173-204.
W	4/28	<i>Fast Food Nation</i> , chapter 6.
F	4/30	Case Study: “Putting the Squeeze on Citrus Hill Orange Juice”

Week 6:

M	5/3	GWF Hegel, pp. 223-252; Karl Marx, pp. 253-296.
W	5/5	Continuation of Hegel and Marx
F	5/7	<i>Fast Food Nation</i> , chapter 7.

Week 7:

M	5/10	John Stuart Mill, excerpt from the <i>Principles of Political Economy</i> , pp. 297-316.
W	5/12	<i>Fast Food Nation</i> , chapter 8.
F	5/14	<b>Case Study Report #2: “Is It Right to Change Nature for a Profit?”</b>

Week 8:

M	5/17	Max Weber, from <i>The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism</i> , pp. 349-364.
W	5/19	<i>Fast Food Nation</i> , chapter 9.
F	5/21	Discussion of Case Reports

Week 9:

M	5/24	Jean Baudrillard, “Consumer Society”, pp 447-474.
W	5/26	<i>Fast Food Nation</i> , chapter 10.
F	5/28	Final discussion of <i>Fast Food Nation</i>

Week 10:

M	5/31	No Class – Memorial Day
W	6/2	Case study workshop
F	6/4	<b>Case Study Report #3: “This Cow’s Life”</b>

I reserve the right to adjust the reading schedule if necessary.