

Philosophy 305: Business Ethics and Public Policy¹

Administrative Information

Professor	Robert Gressis
Office	Sierra Tower 527
Office Hours	Thursdays, 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM
Email Address	rgressis@csun.edu
Classroom	Jerome Richfield 204
Class Meeting Times	Mondays and Wednesdays, 8:30 AM to 9:45 AM
Ticket Number	13960

Course Description

In this class, we focus on three areas of interest: (Area 1) political economy (arguments about the justifiability of feudalism, capitalism, and socialism), (Area 2) business ethics (the proper way for businesspeople to conduct themselves within a capitalist economy), and (Area 3) applied business ethics (applying the framework we articulated in Area 2 to issues such as environmentalism and what sorts of goods and services are the proper objects of buying or selling).

Required Textbooks

We will discuss and read the following texts throughout the semester:

- Daniel Halliday and John Thrasher, *The Ethics of Capitalism: An Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2020).
- Joseph Heath, *Ethics for Capitalists: A Systematic Approach to Business Ethics, Competition, and Market Failure* (FriesenPress, 2023).

Both texts are available through the CSUN Campus Store.

¹ I thank the large language model, Claude Fable 5, for helping me come up with the process paper assignment, the policy on late/missed assignments, and the layout for the Schedule of Readings and Assignments.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

By the end of this course, students will be able to ...

1. ...demonstrate understanding of the fundamental differences among feudalism, capitalism, and socialism;
2. ...demonstrate understanding of the main general argument for capitalism;
3. ...demonstrate understanding of utilitarianism and contractualism;
4. ...explain Heath's contractualist argument for deontic weakening in a business context, as well as the limits of that weakening;
5. ...apply Heath's market failures approach to discrete issues, such as environmentalism; and
6. ...show an ability to improve written work in response to constructive criticism.

Assessments

To determine the extent to which students achieve these SLOs, I will employ the following assessments:

Component	Weight
Reading Quizzes	50% (each quiz is worth 2.5% of your grade)
Process Paper	25%
Final Exam	25%

Reading Quizzes: On Canvas, I will post four or six reading questions for each reading we do. At the beginning of each class where we discuss that reading, I will ask one of those four to six questions as a multiple-choice question, and you will answer it on a Scantron; which question I ask will be determined by the roll of a four- or six-sided die. If you answer the quiz question correctly, you get full credit, 2.5%. If you answer it incorrectly, you get half credit, 1.25%.

There will be twenty-four reading quizzes throughout the semester, listed below on the schedule of readings and assignments. However, I will drop your lowest four quiz-scores. In other words, only your top twenty reading quizzes count; that's why, at 2.5% each, they amount to 50% of your total grade.

I drop your lowest four quiz-scores to cover things like illness, car troubles, deaths in the family, etc. I do not offer make-ups on reading questions! Note that if you show up to class after I have given the reading quiz and collected everyone's Scantron, you have missed the quiz and cannot get a makeup.

I use the reading quizzes to help you meet SLOs 1-3.

Process Paper: Philosophy 305 is marked as a writing intensive (WI) course. I offer CSUN's own description of what a WI course is below.

Because Philosophy 305 is a WI course, I am assigning a process paper. A process paper is a paper where I assess you not just on the contents of your writing, but also on the process of how you write it. Here are the important dates in this process:

1. **Wednesday, October 21:** I post the prompt and we discuss it.
2. **Monday, November 2:** A complete first draft of your paper is due at the beginning of this class. We will have an in-class peer workshop. If you don't have a completed first draft done by this point, then you can still peer review another student's first draft.
3. **Wednesday, December 2:** I return your draft with a grade on it. In class, we have a revision workshop.
4. **Wednesday, December 9:** Your revised paper is due, along with a short memo explaining what you changed, and why. I grade your revised paper, and I also grade the memo.

Note that, while the process paper as a whole is worth 25% of your final grade, the process paper has four components, each of which is worth a different portion of your final grade:

- i. **November 2, First Draft:** worth 8% of your final grade
- ii. **November 2, Peer Review:** worth 4% of your final grade
- iii. **December 9, Revised Draft:** worth 10% of your final grade
- iv. **December 9, Memo:** worth 3% of your final grade

I use the process paper to help you meet SLOs 1-6, especially SLOs 5 and 6.

Final Exam: I will give an in-class exam on Monday, December 14, from 8 AM to 10 AM in our usual classroom, Jerome Richfield 204. This will be a closed-notes final that you will write into a green book. (You can buy a green book from the CSUN Campus Store, Matador Mercado, Arbor Market, and La Tienda.)

This final exam will be keyed to your process paper. You will be asked to reconstruct your paper's central argument, defend it against an objection, and extend it to a new case revealed on exam day. In other words, regardless of the help or tools you used while drafting your paper, you must understand your own argument well enough to work with it from memory, alone, in a room. Plan accordingly!

I use the final exam to help you meet SLOs 1-6, especially SLO 5.

Course Policies

Attendance: I don't grade on attendance, but because there are twenty-four reading quizzes, and I only let you drop four of them, you would be wise to attend as often as you can. And remember: *I will not let you make up any reading quizzes you missed.*

Late Papers and Missed Workshops: Because the process paper has four different components, I have to articulate the following complicated policy for late work:

- **First Draft:** If you don't turn in the first draft of your paper by the beginning of class on Monday November 2, you will receive a 10% penalty on your first draft, no matter the reason. However, if you don't turn in the first draft by Friday, November 13, then you will not receive any credit for it.
- **Peer Review:** If you are not present for the in-class peer review session on Monday, November 2, then you do not get any credit for it, no matter the reason for your absence.
- **Revised Draft:** If you don't turn in the revised draft of your paper by Wednesday, December 9, then you get a 10% penalty on your revised draft, no matter the reason. If you don't turn it in by Friday, December 11, then you will not get any credit for it.
- **Memo:** If you don't turn in the memo by Wednesday, December 9, then you get a 10% penalty on the memo, no matter the reason. If you don't turn in the memo by Friday, December 11, then you will not get any credit for it.

Academic Integrity and AI Tools: You can use large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT, Claude, etc., to help you in this course. More specifically: yes, you can use an LLM to help you with your process paper. Regardless of whether you do or don't use an LLM, your paper must include an acknowledgement. In this acknowledgement, you will say whether you did or didn't use an LLM to help you draft your paper. If you did use an LLM, I will ask you to include links to all the conversations in which you worked on your paper with that LLM, so *please don't delete your conversations!* If I suspect that you have used an LLM to do almost all the work, and that you haven't done much of the work yourself, then I will click on those links and examine your process. And remember: regardless of whether you do or don't use an LLM, I have set up the final exam so that you – not an LLM, but you, a human being – will have to know the material.

That said, if I judge that you have engaged in academic dishonesty – say, by cheating on one of the in-class reading quizzes, or using an LLM to draft your paper with minimal input from you – then I will report your conduct to the Office of Student Affairs.

Accessibility: If you have a disability and need accommodations, please register with Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES). They will inform me of the accommodations to make for you.

Writing Intensive Designation

CSUN has designated Philosophy 305 as a writing intensive (WI) course. Here is what CSUN has to say about such courses (see <https://catalog.csun.edu/general-education/student-learning-outcomes/> for this text in its original context):

Goal: Students will develop their abilities to express themselves and the knowledge they have obtained through practicing various forms of writing within different disciplinary contexts. Writing intensive courses will build upon the skills gained in the English Composition (Written Communication) area of Basic Skills. In each WI course, students will be required to complete substantive writing assignments.

Student Learning Outcomes

Each course meeting the Writing Intensive (W.I.) requirement must fulfill all of the following student learning outcomes.

Students will:

1. Develop and clearly define their ideas through writing.
2. Ethically integrate sources of various kinds into their writing.
3. Compose texts through drafting, revising and completing a finished product.
4. Express themselves through their writing by posing questions, making original claims and coherently structuring complex ideas.
5. Revise their writing for greater cogency and clarity.
6. Utilize adopted communication modes and documentation styles of specific disciplines (MLA, APA, Chicago, CBE, etc.) where appropriate.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Below is a list of the readings and assignments that I ask of you for Philosophy 305 this semester. Note that if a reading is due on, say, Wednesday, August 26, that means that I expect you to have done the reading *before* the class session begins. Note that “RQ” stands for “Reading Quiz.”

Date	Topic / Reading (complete before class)	Quiz
Mon Aug 24	Introduction and course framing	
Wed Aug 26	Halliday and Thrasher, Chapter 1: Introduction: What Is This Book about? (1-18)	RQ 1
Mon Aug 31	Clinic: Utilitarianism – no reading	
Wed Sep 2	Halliday and Thrasher, Chapter 2: Capitalism Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time: The Rise and Fall (and Resurrection?) of Political Economy (19-37)	RQ 2
Mon Sep 7	<i>LABOR DAY — no class</i>	
Wed Sep 9	Clinic: Contractualism – no reading	
Mon Sep 14	Halliday and Thrasher, Chapter 3: Getting Out of Feudalism—and Staying Out! (38-57)	RQ 3
Wed Sep 16	Halliday and Thrasher, Chapter 4: Market Order and Market Failure (58-81)	RQ 4
Mon Sep 21	Halliday and Thrasher, Chapter 5: So Why Not Socialism? (82-105)	RQ 5
Wed Sep 23	Heath, Introduction (1-7)	RQ 6
Mon Sep 28	Albert Z. Carr, “Is Business Bluffing Ethical?” (posted on Canvas)	RQ 7
Wed Sep 30	Milton Friedman, “The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase Its Profits” (posted on Canvas)	RQ 8
Mon Oct 5	Heath, Chapter 1: Tensions with Everyday Morality (9-16)	RQ 9
Wed Oct 7	Clinic: Rights-Based Libertarianism – no reading	
Mon Oct 12	R. Edward Freeman, “A Stakeholder Theory of the Modern Corporation” (posted on Canvas)	RQ 10
Wed Oct 14	Heath, Chapter 2: The Search for a Moral Framework (17-28)	RQ 11

Date	Topic / Reading (complete before class)	Quiz
Mon Oct 19	Heath, Chapter 3: A Theory of Justice (29-39)	RQ 12
Wed Oct 21	Heath, Chapter 4: <i>Jus ad Mercatum</i> (40-53) PAPER ASSIGNED (prompt distributed)	RQ 13
Mon Oct 26	Heath, Chapter 5: Competition (54-70)	RQ 14
Wed Oct 28	Heath, Chapter 6: Capitalism (71-91)	RQ 15
Mon Nov 2	PAPER DRAFT DUE In-class peer workshop (bring complete draft)	
Wed Nov 4	Heath, Chapter 7: <i>Jus in Mercatu</i> (92-106) (note: we're skipping chapter 8)	RQ 16
Mon Nov 9	Heath, Chapter 9: The Firm (118-131)	RQ 17
Wed Nov 11	<i>VETERANS DAY — no class</i>	
Mon Nov 16	Heath, Chapter 10: The Constraints of the Market (132-142)	RQ 18
Wed Nov 18	Halliday and Thrasher, Chapter 6: Low Wages and Lousy Jobs (106-129)	RQ 19
Mon Nov 23	Halliday and Thrasher, Chapter 10: Why Are We Still Working So Hard? (196-214)	RQ 20
Wed Nov 25	Heath, Chapter 11: Ownership (143-162) (Thanksgiving recess begins Thu Nov 26)	RQ 21
Mon Nov 30	Heath, Chapter 12: Occupational Business Ethics (163-176)	RQ 22
Wed Dec 2	<i>GRADED DRAFTS RETURNED</i> In-class revision workshop	
Mon Dec 7	Halliday and Thrasher, Chapter 11: Do Markets Wreck the Planet? (215-233)	RQ 23
Wed Dec 9	Halliday and Thrasher, Chapter 12: Boldly Going Where No Market Has Gone Before – Should Some Things Not Be for Sale? (234-250) REVISED PAPER DUE	RQ 24
Mon Dec 14	IN-CLASS FINAL EXAM (8:00-10:00 AM); bring a green book!	

