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**GRANDE PRAIRIE REGIONAL COLLEGE  
COURSE OUTLINE 1996**

**PH2620: BUSINESS ETHICS  
(University of Alberta Course Number PH 385)**

**Instructor:** John O. Langenbach  
**Phone:** Office 539-2992  
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**Text:** Poff and Waluchow (ed), Business Ethics in Canada, Prentice-Hall

**Course Objectives:**

1. Introduce students to the rudiments of ethical theory;
2. Introduce students to the major arguments surrounding some contemporary ethical issues in business;
3. Improve student's ability to read and write analytically;
4. Improve student's ability to present strong argument; and
5. Encourage student's interest in original and creative thought.

**Course Schedule:**

Each of the following topics will be covered. One to two weeks will be devoted to each topic.

1. Corporations as Moral Agents
2. Health and Safety in the Workplace
3. Employee Loyalty and Moral Independence
4. Employee Equity
5. Environmental Effects of Business Activities
6. Advertising Ethics
7. Ethical Challenges to the Capitalist System

**Assignments:**

1. Each student shall write three 1200 - 1500 word essays (typed on topics for which he or she contracted at the beginning of the semester. See list of suggested "Essay Questions." The first essay written may be rewritten to improve quality of argumentation, writing ability and to improve the mark.
2. Each student shall write a two hour final exam to be taken during final exam week.
3. Each student shall do a project which relates some ethical issue in business to a specific business in our community. Such a project need not be confrontational, but it may be if your investigations and learning experience

leads in that direction. Your project may be cooperative with business and designed for mutual enlightenment. Students may work together in groups of two or three.

### **Grading Criteria:**

1. All written work will be graded on grammar, style, spelling etc. Though philosophical merit generally is weighted more than composition, it is conceivable that an essay with copious composition errors would receive a failing mark.
2. An excellent philosophy essay will:
  - a. Contain no grammatical errors;
  - b. Define key terms which may otherwise be vague or ambiguous;
  - c. Clarify and delimit the issue to be argued;
  - d. Defend a position;
  - e. Indicate weaknesses in your original argument;
  - f. Defend your original argument against the criticisms.

### **ESSAY QUESTIONS**

The following questions are my suggestions. If you have a question of philosophical merit which is more interesting to you, and which is not included in the list of examination question, you are encouraged to write on it. Discuss the question with me prior to writing your essay.

#### **Part Two: Corporations as Moral Agents**

Ought corporate executives be imprisoned for serious wrong-doing committed in the name of the corporation for which they work? Defend your answer.

#### **Part Four: Health and Safety in the Workplace**

If an employee chooses to work in an industry with proven health hazards, ought the company to be held responsible for any related health problems which the employee subsequently develops? Defend your answer.

#### **Part Five: Employee Loyalty and Moral Independence**

Does loyalty to a company require the individual employee to support company policy even when the policy contravenes the individual's personal beliefs?

#### **Part Six: Employee Equity**

Is it justifiable to deny a qualified white male a position in senior management if a less qualified member of a group which has been discriminated against applies for the same position?

### **Part Seven: Environmental Effects of Business Activities**

How are we to balance the "costs" of pollution in terms of safety, health, and perhaps even a whole way of life (as in the case of the Grassy Narrows and Whitedog Indians) against the substantial cost of measures to reduce or eliminate pollution?

### **Part Nine: Advertising Ethics**

Find an example of an advertisement that you can reasonably argue has as its primary intent to manufacture a desire or "need" in some segment of the populace. Does this advertisement thereby violate that segment's dignity and autonomy?

### **Part Eleven: Ethical Challenges to the Capitalist System**

On what grounds would you ever advocate replacing capitalism with some other economic system?

## **EXAMINATION QUESTIONS**

Your final exam will consist of four of the following questions to be chosen by your instructor. You will have two hours to write the final.

### **Part Two: Corporations as Moral Agents**

1. Is it possible for a corporation to possess a "guilty mind"? Explain your answer.
2. Write a critical analysis of Peter Finch's argument that moral agency and responsibility can be ascribed to corporations.
3. Write a critical analysis of Werhane's argument that a corporation's formal structure renders it incapable of moral agency.

### **Part Four: Health and Safety in the Workplace**

1. Do you agree or disagree with the following remark: "Since market ideology panders to the consumer, 'profitability over safety' is favoured". Defend your answer.
2. Write a critical analysis of Gewirth's claim that employees have the right not to have certain diseases or harms inflicted upon them.
3. Discuss Frances Early's argument that the standards of acceptable risk must be raised for all individuals working in the nuclear industry in order to insure equality of opportunity for women.

### **Part Five: Employee Loyalty and Moral Independence**

1. Should there be legal protection for employees who "blow the whistle" on corporate wrong-doing? Defend your answer.
2. Do you agree with Smith and Carroll when they argue that "organizational socialization" results in a "form of 'group think'" which mitigates against moral decision-making? Defend your answer.
3. What is "The Loyal Agent's Argument"? Does this argument absolve individuals from responsibility for knowingly doing what is wrong? Defend your answer.

### **Part Six: Employee Equity**

1. Analyze Narveson's contention that there is no basic right to non-discrimination. Do you agree with Narveson? Why/why not?
2. Are employers justified in hiring according to the preferences of customers even though such a practice discriminates against older and less attractive workers, or against racial minorities, or against the physically handicapped? Defend your answer.
3. Summarize Hawkesworth's view that "conflicting conceptions of individuality" underlies the affirmative action debate. If Hawkesworth is correct, what is the solution to the problem of discrimination in hiring practices?

### **Part Seven: Environmental Effects of Business Activities**

1. How do we measure the environmental and social costs of pollution so that these can be balanced against the economic costs of regulatory measures?
2. Do we have a moral obligation to future generations or to other species of animals to leave the ecosystem in as good a shape as we found it? Defend your answer.
3. Is government justified in intervening to protect the environment from the undesirable impact of industrial activities? Defend your answer.

### **Part Nine: Advertising Ethics**

1. Do you agree or disagree that the doctrine of caveat emptor absolves advertisers of moral responsibility? Defend your answer.
2. If Galbraith (and others) is correct in his claim that the central function of advertising is to create desires and needs which it then offers to satisfy, is it correct to infer that advertisers are manipulating and controlling us in ways which violate our dignity and autonomy?

3. Critically analyze Arrington's contention that the creation of desires through advertising is not of itself morally wrong. It is wrong only when it creates within the consumer desires which are foreign to his nature.

**Part Eleven: Ethical Challenges to the Capitalist System**

1. If Michelman argues correctly that capitalist competition inherently contradicts the most basic and commonly accepted dictates of morality - truthfulness, kindness, mutual aid and self-respect - ought we to replace the capitalist system with a system which is more consistent with our morality?
2. In what way is Mullin's concept of "wealth production" superior to the profit motive? In what way is it inferior to the profit motive?
3. Write a critical summary of McMurty's proposed "Canadian alternative" to "private profit absolutism".