Nanyang Technological University

Nanyang Business School

BU8341: PRACTICAL ETHICS: THINKING ABOUT RIGHT AND WRONG

A) Course Aims/Description

Practical Ethics is a course intended to introduce the elements of ethical reasoning, and several principal concepts of core theories in the main branches of normative ethics. We ask the questions: What is its nature? And, how does it work? The case for its reality and its rationally binding objectivity will be defended, then the main branches of ethical theories outlined. These include utilitarianism, Kantian duty ethics and the ideas of the virtue and natural law ethical tradition stemming from Aristotle and Aquinas. A brief overview of theories of justice (including those of Rawls, Nozick and Sen) will be made. And it is intended that these concepts will be critically applied to the interface between ethics and law and the market, and some of paradigmatic issues and situations in three areas which confront businesses and people in all fields of practical endeavour today, in a series of case studies under the headings: Profit, People, Planet.

B) Intended Learning Outcomes (ILO)/Objectives

By the end of this course, as regards the following matters, you should be able to:

1. Acquisition of knowledge: (a) explain and use universalization and rationality as foundational components of ethical reasoning, and (b) state the core ideas of Utilitarianism, Kantian Duty Ethics, Aristotelian & Thomist Virtue Ethics, and of the main theories of justice (Rawls, Nozick & Sen).
2. Ethical Reasoning - (a) recognize ethical issues in a range of practical business contexts;(b) apply apply sound ethical reasoning using the concepts of Ethical Theory (set out in (1) above); (c) critique decisions, practices, institutions and policies with those concepts of Ethical Theory.

C) Course Content

Key topics taught:

1. Introduction to Ethics: How do we think about Right & Wrong? (Universalization & Rationality)
2. Consequentialism: Act and Rule Utilitarianism; Hedonistic, Eudaimonistic & Preference (Bentham, Mill and Hare)
3. Deontological Theories: The Golden Rule, Kant, Scanlon, Gewirth
4. Virtue Ethics: Aristotle & Thomas Aquinas
5. Natural Law (Traditional and Modern): Thomas Aquinas, J Finnis and Robert George
6. Justice: Theories of Rawls, Nozick, Sen and Natural Law notions of Common Good
7. Law & Morality: The role of morality in Law and vice versa (Mill's theory vs. the Common Good)
8. Markets & Morality: The place of morality in market structures and decisions (M Sandel, M Friedman, Corporate Social Responsibility etc)
9. Application in practical contexts relating to -
   a. Profit - versus safety and health
   b. People - Employment Conditions and rights to equal treatment
   c. Planet - business and environmental protection & sustainability

D) Assessment (includes both continuous and summative assessment)

Component	Weightage	Team/ Individual
1. Written Assignment	40%	Individual
2. Presentations	30%	Group
3. Participation	30%	Individual
Total	100%	

E) Weekly Schedule for BU8301

Teaching Weeks	Topics
1	Introduction to Ethics: How do we think about Right and Wrong
2	Consequentialism and its Critics: Are Results all that Matters? Consequentialism and its Critics: Utilitarianism – Bentham, Mill, Hare, and standard criticism and utilitarianism
3	E-Learning
4	Duties and Moral Obligation: Deontological Theories and their Defence: (Kant, Gewirth and Scanlon), the Golden Rule
5	Virtue Ethics & Natural Law: The nature of virtue Aristotle and the Thomist and Natural Law traditions
6	The New Natural Law: Objectivity of the Right and the Good
7	Justice: Theories of justice: Rawls, Utilitarianism, Nozick and Sen
8	Law & Morality: Criminal and Civil Sanctions: How law supports and complements morailty
9	Markets & Morality – Codes, Certification and Contracts: How markets promote freedom, basic moral and regulatory assumptions & limits of markets
10	Corporate Social Responsibility
11	Ethical Issues in Employment I: Treatment of Workers & Labour Rights
12	Ethical Issues in Employment II: Sexual Harassment & Employment Equality
13	Sustainable Development