



# Trinity College Dublin

Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath  
The University of Dublin

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## Trinity Business School

### Business Ethics 2019/20

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| <b>MODULE CODE:</b>  | <b>BUU22580</b>                    |
| <b>MODULE NAME:</b>  | <b>Business Ethics</b>             |
| <b>ECTS:</b>         | <b>5 ECTS</b>                      |
| <b>Lecturer:</b>     | <b>Dr. Kenneth Silver</b>          |
| <b>Phone:</b>        | <b>TBD</b>                         |
| <b>E-mail:</b>       | <b>silverk@tcd.ie</b>              |
| <b>Office Hours:</b> | <b>TBD, but in Room 213 of TBS</b> |

### MODULE DESCRIPTION

This module considers the source and scope of our moral obligations in business. The first segment of the module involves the different views of why firms exist and what obligations follow. The second segment of the module considers whether firms themselves have moral responsibilities, the extent to which they can be excused, and whether we should hold them criminally responsible. The third segment of the module considers a variety of other ethical issues when engaging in business, from discrimination in the workplace to whether it's okay to invest in immoral companies and beyond.

### LEARNING AND TEACHING APPROACH

The approach taken involves students doing close readings of recent, innovative, and thought-provoking texts from a variety of subfields. This is coupled with detailed lectures for background context and distillation of the main ideas as well as time in class for students to become comfortable discussing these challenging ideas together. Papers and

examinations offer students further opportunities to consider how these ideas interact and, ultimately, how they feel about them.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

LO1: Become familiar with the essential theoretical approaches to business ethics and theory of the firm on national and international levels.

LO2: Learn to apply the major western theories of ethics and political theory to contemporary business ethical contexts.

LO3: Develop critical thinking, reading, and writing skills on contemporary issues in business ethics and society including the role of the firm, the extent of corporate obligations, and the ethics related to other business practices such as paying, selling, and investing.

LO4: Develop an ability to discuss challenging social and political issues productively with peers.

## WORKLOAD

| <b>Content</b>                                                                                                               | <b>Indicative Number of Hours</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>Lecturing hours</i>                                                                                                       | 2 per week for 11 weeks           |
| <i>Preparation for lectures</i>                                                                                              | 1 per week for 11 weeks           |
| <i>Individual assignments</i>                                                                                                | 12                                |
| <i>Reading of assigned materials and active reflection on lecture and course content and linkage to personal experiences</i> | 4 per week for 11 weeks           |
| <i>Final exam preparation</i>                                                                                                | 8                                 |
| <b>Total</b>                                                                                                                 | 97                                |

## TEXTBOOKS AND REQUIRED RESOURCES

### Required core course textbook:

There is no textbook required.

### General Supplemental Readings

All readings will be provided through Blackboard.

### Student preparation for the module

Students should read assigned reading before each class and consider how it connects with readings done before.

## COURSE COMMUNICATION

**Please note that all course related email communication must be sent from your official TCD email address. Emails sent from other addresses will not be attended to.**

## ASSESSMENT

Course participation (10%)  
Regular quizzes (10%)  
Essay 1 (25%) due at the end of week 27  
Essay 2 (25%) due at the end of week 32  
Final Examination (30%)

## REASSESSMENT

Students who fail the Final Examination will have an opportunity to take a further exam for reassessment. Similarly, students who fail one of the essays will have the opportunity to submit a make-up essay on a new topic by an agreed upon date.

### MODULE SCHEDULE

| Term - Hilary |              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|---------------|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Session       | Date & Venue | Lecture & readings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 1             | Week 22      | Lecture: Isn't business ethics an oxymoron?<br><br>Reading: No reading                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 2             | Week 23      | Lecture: What is the purpose of the firm?<br><br>Reading: (1) Selections of Jensen, M. C. 2001. Value maximization, stakeholder theory, and the corporate objective function. <b><i>Journal of Applied Corporate Finance</i></b> , 14(3). <b>And</b><br>(2) Selections of Blair, M., & Stout, L. 1999. A team production theory of corporate law. <b><i>Virginia Law Review</i></b> , 85(2): 248-328. <b>And</b><br>(3) Selections of Ciepley, D. 2013. Beyond public and private: Toward a political theory of the corporation. <b><i>American Political Science Review</i></b> , 107(1). |
| 3             | Week 24      | Lecture: Are corporations morally responsible for what they do?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

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|---|---------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|   |         | Reading: (1) Hess, K. 2014. Because they can: The basis for the moral obligations of (certain) collectives. <i>Midwest Studies in Philosophy</i> , 38: 203-221. <b>And</b><br>(2) Velasquez, M. 1983. Why corporations are not morally responsible for anything they do. <i>Business and Professional Ethics Journal</i> , 2(3): 1-18.                                                                                                   |
| 4 | Week 25 | Lecture: What is the scope of firm obligation and excuse?<br><br>Reading: (1) Hsieh, N. 2017. Corporate moral agency: Positive duties, and purpose. In E. W. Orts & N. C. Smith (Eds.), <i>The Moral Responsibility of Firms</i> (pp.188-205). Oxford University Press. <b>And</b><br>(2) Heath, J. 2004. A market failures approach to business ethics. In B. Hodgson (Ed.), <i>Studies in Economic Ethics and Philosophy</i> (vol. 9). |
| 5 | Week 26 | Lecture: Should we <i>hold</i> corporations criminally responsible?<br><br>Reading: (1) Hasnas, J. 2012. Reflections on corporate moral responsibility and the problem solving techniques of Alexander the Great. <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i> , 107(2): 183-195. <b>And</b><br>(2) Silver, K. Manuscript. The value of corporate criminal responsibility.                                                                          |
| 6 | Week 27 | Lecture: Apart from corporate agency, are there ways of directly infusing normative ethics into business practice?<br><br>Reading: (1) Bowie, N. <i>Business Ethics: A Kantian Perspective</i> . Just ch.2. <b>And</b><br>(2) Alzola, M. 2015. Virtuous persons and virtuous actions in business ethics and organizational research. <i>Business Ethics Quarterly</i> , 25(3): 287-318.                                                  |
| 7 | Week 28 | Study/Review                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 8 | Week 29 | Lecture: Is the workplace itself an unethical exertion of managerial power over worker's lives?<br><br>Reading: Selections of Anderson, E. 2017. <i>Private Government: How Employers Rule our Lives (and Why We Don't Talk about It)</i> .                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 9 | Week 30 | Lecture: Ethical questions around the practice of hiring<br><br>Reading: (1) Goff, S. G. 2016. How to trade fairly in an unjust society: The problem of gender discrimination in the labor market. <i>Social Theory and Practice</i> , 42(3): 555-580. <b>And</b>                                                                                                                                                                        |

|            |         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
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|            |         | (2) Goff, S. 2018. Discrimination and the job market. In K. Lippert-Rasmussen (Ed.), <i>The Routledge Handbook of the Ethics of Discrimination</i> (pp.301-311). Routledge.                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 10         | Week 31 | Lecture: Ethical questions around the practice of paying<br><br>Reading: (1) Moriarty, J. 2014. Compensation ethics and organizational commitment. <i>Business Ethics Quarterly</i> , 24(1): 31-53. <b>And</b><br>(2) Moriarty, J. 2018. Against pay secrecy. <i>Journal of Applied Philosophy</i> , 35(4): 689-704.                                                                   |
| 11         | Week 32 | Lecture: Ethical questions around the practice of selling<br><br>Reading: (1) Ebejer, J. & Morden, M. 1988. Paternalism in the marketplace: Should a salesman be his buyer's keeper? <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i> , 7: 337-339. <b>And</b><br>(2) Brockway, G. 1993. Limited paternalism and the salesperson: A reconsideration. <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i> , 12: 275-279. |
| 12         | Week 33 | Lecture: Ethical questions around the practice of investing<br><br>Reading: (1) Irvine, W. 1987. The ethics of investing. <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i> , 6(3): 233-242. <b>And</b><br>(2) Larmer, R. 1997. The ethics of investing: A reply to William Irvine. <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i> , 16: 397-400.                                                                   |
| No meeting | Week 34 | Revisions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| No meeting | Week 35 | Trinity Week                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| No meeting | Week 36 | Assessment                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:

Dr. Silver graduated with a PhD in Philosophy from the University of Southern California in 2017, following at Bachelors of Arts from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Dr. Silver's research is on a broad range of cross-disciplinary topics including corporate personhood, the nature of causation, financial ethics, and the conceptual foundations of strategic management, and he has previously taught the module, "Are Corporations People?" His work has appeared in venues such as the *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Business Ethics Journal Review*, *Philosophical Studies*, *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, *Mind*, *Philosophia*, and *Thought: A Journal of Philosophy*.