

Philosophy 104, Business Ethics, Queens College, Spring 2007

Russell Marcus, Instructor

email: [philosophy@thatmarcusfamily.org](mailto:philosophy@thatmarcusfamily.org)

website: [http://www.thatmarcusfamily.org/philosophy/Business\\_Ethics/BEHome.htm](http://www.thatmarcusfamily.org/philosophy/Business_Ethics/BEHome.htm)

Lecture Notes, January 30

## I. Review of Syllabus and Requirements

Reviewing syllabus:

Dates are tentative.

Most materials, including lecture notes, are available on line.

Some of the readings are only available on line.

Exams should include no surprises. Questions will be taken directly from the reading guides.

The paper assignment will be detailed.

Office: Powdermaker 350J

(718) 997-5287

Office hours: 11am until classtime on Tuesdays and Fridays.

In quiz books, on first page, write:

Email, or other contact

Student status

Major

Anything else I should know

General Grading Guidelines:

C: What the philosophers say.

B: Why they say it.

A: Whether they are right or wrong, and why.

## II. The structure of this course

We will start out by talking generally about business ethics, and its history.

We will look briefly at Milton Friedman's argument that there is no room for ethics in business.

I envision this course as an extended examination of Friedman's claim.

To get us focused on a particular case, we will spend about two weeks on some of the details of the Enron scandal.

You will read the book about Enron by Kurt Eichenwald, *Conspiracy of Fools*.

It would seem that the Enron case is a counter-example to Friedman's claim.

For, it looks as if people at Enron behaved immorally, at times.

Further, it looks as though if people had behaved morally, then a scandal could have been avoided.

Still, if we are to claim that some of the people at Enron behaved immorally, we must understand the nature of morality generally.

The majority of the course will be an exploration into the possibility and nature of morality.

Ethics, generally, is the study of right and wrong, good and bad, fair and unfair, just and unjust, virtuous

and vicious.

Morality is a set of rights and wrongs, goods and evils.

We probably all think we are ethical people, but what makes us so?

We obey laws? But what if they are unjust?

We obey customs, or religion?

But there are many conflicting customs.

The Aztecs practiced human sacrifice.

The Aghori Hindu sect in India practice cannibalism.

(See <http://philtar.ucsm.ac.uk/encyclopedia/hindu/devot/aghoris.html>)

We follow our instincts? But is this infallible?

We use reason in addition? But still, is this infallible?

Furthermore, do we unwittingly participate in unjust institutions?

Slavery, like capitalism, had many defenders.

Is our attempt to spread democracy like imperialist attempts to civilize barbarian peoples?

This course will not tell you what is right or wrong, but may give you some insight into how to decide that for yourselves: reasons *why*.

### III. Cicero case studies