
The Ethics of Capitalism

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Overview:

This course examines the ethical foundations of capitalism. It will investigate such topics as the justification of private property, the role of corporations, the profit motive, and the source of wealth creation. Further, the course will survey how different ethical theories offer solutions to a handful of major questions in business today—stockholders versus stakeholders; affirmative action and diversity; insider trading and the stock market; corporate social responsibility and the environment; relations between labor and management; government regulation and laissez-faire. The primary focus on the course is on the major ethical theories that have supported or criticized capitalism throughout its history.

Class Structure and Discussions:

Through the course of the semester we will meet together twice weekly. Because an important part of learning is communication, students must come to class prepared to engage the material covered in the readings for that week. The structure of the sessions will be a mixture between lecture and discussion. Attendance is mandatory and you should be prepared to discuss the readings for that week, which includes the possibility of being called upon in class. Unexcused absences will not be tolerated. Because I recognize that unexpected, legitimate crises do sometimes occur in a student's life, I am willing to accommodate *excused* absences—but only if the student notifies me by phone or by e-mail *before* the absence.

Office Hours:

Each week I hold open office hours. During this time I make myself available to answer questions related to topics brought up in the discussions, ideas in the readings, and general topics related to history. If ever there is something that you do not understand, or wish to understand further, do not hesitate to contact me. If these times are not convenient, you may contact me in person or via e-mail to make other arrangements.

Writing Requirements:

During the course of the semester you will be required to write two papers. I have designed these assignments to serve two purposes. First, I want to make sure you leave this course with a clear idea about how to communicate your ideas on paper. A precise, convincing presentation of your thoughts is essential to becoming an effective writer. Second, the assignments will help you to demonstrate your mastery of the required knowledge. My policy for papers is that they must be turned in on time. I do not give extensions except in the most calamitous of circumstances (e.g., severed limb, coma, nuclear war). For each day the paper is late, it will be marked down one full letter grade (e.g., A- becomes B-, not B+). Further information on the assignments will be presented in class.

Grading:

Your papers will constitute 65% of your grade (30% for first short paper and 35% for the final paper). Your participation and performance in class discussions will count for 35% of your grade. I reserve the right to use graded pop quizzes that count toward your

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participation grade in the event that I believe members of the class are not keeping up with the readings.

Improvement over the course of the semester will be taken into consideration. Academic misconduct, as defined by the Clemson Academic Integrity Policy, will not be tolerated, and can be grounds for a failing grade in the course. If you have any questions about exactly what this means, do not hesitate to ask. Remember, ignorance of the rules is not an excuse. See: <<http://www.lib.clemson.edu/Plagiarism/index.htm>> for more information.

Reading List:

Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward, 2000-1887* (Signet Reissue Edition, 2000)
 Karl Marx, *Selected Writings*, (Hackett, 1994)
 Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago Fortieth Anniversary Ed., 2002)
 Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* (Plume Centennial Edition, 2004)

Reading Schedule

Keeping up with the reading is vital if you hope to do well in the course. Read the material for the week *before* you attend class so that you will be able to participate in the discussion. Reading for some weeks is heavier than others. Look ahead and make sure you know what's coming. I have listed readings on Blackboard (BB) by author and title.

Week One (January 11): **Introduction**

Week Two (January 16 and 18): **The Historical Origins and Context of Capitalism**

BB: Selections on the historical background of capitalism.

Week Three (January 23 and 25): **Marxism, Morals, and the Market**

Karl Marx, *Selected Writings*, pages to be announced.

Week Four (January 30 and February 1): **From Marxism to Catholic Social Teaching**

BB: Selections from Pope Leo XIII, "Rerum Novarum"; Pope Paul VI, "Populorum Progressio," and "Octogesima Adveniens."

Week Five (February 6 and 8): **Catholic Criticism and Christian Socialism**

BB: Selections from Walter Rauschenbusch and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Week Six (February 13 and 15): **Utopian Socialist Critiques**

Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward, 2000-1887*

Week Seven (February 20 and 22): **From Utopianism to Nineteenth Century Laissez-Faire**

BB: Selections from *A Plea for Liberty*, ed. Thomas Mackay; William Graham Sumner, "What Social Classes Owe to Each Other," "Socialism," and "The Absurd Effort to Make the World Over"

Week Eight (February 27 and March 1): **Religious Support for Capitalism**

BB: Michael Novak, "Wealth and Virtue"; George Gilder, "The Soul of Silicon," and "The Moral Sources of Capitalism"; Leonard Read, "Economics for the Teachable"

The Ethics of Capitalism**Week Nine** (March 6 and 8): **The Neoconservatives**

BB: Irving Kristol, excerpt from *Two Cheers for Capitalism*; Daniel Bell, excerpt from *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*.

Week Ten (March 13 and 15): **From Neocons to The Chicago School**

Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*

******SPRING BREAK******

Week Eleven (March 27 and 29): **From the Chicago School to Modern Laissez-Faire**

Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, Part I, Chapters 1-6

Week Twelve (April 3 and 5): **Ayn Rand, Radical for Capitalism**

Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, Part I, Chapters 7-10, Part II, Chapters 1-3

Week Thirteen (April 10 and 12): **The Moral Roots of Laissez-Faire**

Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, Part II, Chapters 4-10

Week Fourteen (April 17 and 19): **The Moral Roots of Laissez-Faire (cont.)**

Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, Part III, Chapters 1-6

Week Fifteen (April 24 and 26): **Conclusion**

Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, Part III, Chapters 7-10