

<b>Course title:</b>	<b>Economic Ethics: Can the market be moral?</b>
<b>Instructor:</b>	Dr. Wolfram Bergande
<b>Email address:</b>	w.bergande@fu-berlin.de
<b>Track:</b>	B-Track
<b>Language of instruction:</b>	English
<b>Prerequisites:</b>	Students should be able to speak and read English at the upper intermediate level (B2) or higher.
<b>Contact hours:</b>	48 (6 per day)
<b>ECTS-Credits:</b>	5

---

### Course description

Modern capitalist market economy is an extremely powerful instrument to create wealth and to satisfy human demands – and to exploit, alienate and destroy the very societies it is supposed to serve. How can it be made moral?

Actually, there are quite a number of ways: for example through deliberate lawmaking, responsible research & development (e.g. technology assessment), through enlightened consumer choices and sustainable use of human and natural capital assets. But they often come at a high cost and involve more fundamental questions:

- How can politicians and lawmakers regulate the market for the common good without suffocating it?
- How can big corporations and tech companies continue to deliver innovative services without monopolizing the market and dominating their customers?
- What does a fair distribution of income look like?
- How do we assign value to natural and social goods (like clean air or low crime rates) and how do we measure sustainable welfare beyond traditional economic growth?
- How can consumers harness their own power to make informed choices and act in accordance with their values?
- Are digital business models based on artificial intelligence and machine learning threatening the autonomy of consumer choice?
- What does corporate social responsibility look like in times of crisis?

These and other questions are not only of interest to economists and business people but are relevant to all economic agents (individuals, companies, state institutions, etc.).

To answer these questions, the course equips participants with key ethical approaches to economic behavior (virtue ethics, religious teachings, deontology, utilitarianism, master morality, neo-liberalism), approaches which have been or still are dominating ethical discourses on economic behavior.

These ethical approaches and ideas range from Ancient Greek philosophy to modern economic theory (Friedman, Ostrom, and Game Theory). Since religions, philosophies and social theories are major sources of ethical conduct, the course covers a wide array of these, including teachings of the Catholic Church fathers, ideas from European modern period philosophy (Kant, Mill, Nietzsche) and from modern critical sociology (Veblen, Weber, Adorno, Marcuse).

As a major learning outcome, participants develop ethical frames of reference which allow them to identify and tackle ethical dilemmas posed by today's economy. Particularly, they will learn to adopt strategies that avoid moral hazards and self-harming or self-defeating behavior. Thus, they will be able to act ethically conscious in real life situations, be it...

- as decision-makers in firms and investment companies allocating capital, workforce and bonuses,
- as scientific researchers launching technologies that impact human life and the environment,
- as customers rewarding sustainable or punishing unsustainable business models, production methods or supply chains or
- as lawmakers or leaders of NGOs setting legal and ethical standards and fighting collusion, corruption, fraud, exploitation, overproduction & -consumption, wastefulness, obsolescence, extinction, free-riding or other forms of cost externalizing.

Participants' learning outcomes will be put to test in a hands-on way:

- when we do case studies on contemporary topics in business ethics,
- when we conduct online expert interviews on corporate compliance, digital business models and the ethics of artificial intelligence and
- when we play (and have fun with) a CSR (corporate social responsibility) online simulation game.

Below the line, participants will learn to analyze, interpret and transform economic behavior – first and foremost their own!

### **Student profile**

First year of bachelor's degree or higher (preferably but not necessarily in a humanities or social sciences discipline or in law or economic studies).

### **Prerequisites**

None.

### **Course requirements**

1. Regular attendance and active participation in class.
2. Group presentation in class (about 30 minutes) on a text or a topic from the syllabus.
3. Writing an essay (about 2,000 words) on a text or a topic from the syllabus or on a self-chosen topic coordinated with the course instructor and related to economic ethics (due date: August 2022; please send your essay in PDF format to: [w.bergande@fu-berlin.de](mailto:w.bergande@fu-berlin.de)).

**Required language skills**

The language of instruction is English. Language proficiency on an advanced intermediate level (B2) is a prerequisite for participation. For orientation purposes, you can assess your language skills here (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR): <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168045bb52>)

**Grading**

Fully understanding the complexity of the course topics relies on interactive discussion and debate. Readings of the texts provided are the basis for lectures and discussions and should be completed prior to each session. You should attend class prepared to summarize main points and apply the readings to in-class analysis. In addition, you should be willing to brainstorm based on your own ideas and prior experience to add value to the class discussion. The focus of your grade will be your delivery of the presentation in class and the essay you write.

Participation in discussions, debates, during expert interviews or in the simulation game	25%
Presentation in class on a topic from the syllabus	30%
Research essay	45%

**Readings**

A comprehensive reading list with all mandatory texts (in PDF format) will be provided online.

**Course schedule**

Date	Program*
Tuesday, July 26, 2022	<p><b>Introduction: the disembedding of capitalism and what it does to society today</b></p> <p>K. Polanyi: <i>The great transformation</i></p> <p>P. Ulrich: “Ethics and Economics”, in: Zsolnai: <i>Handbook of Business Ethics</i></p> <p>Introduction to D. Chandler: <i>Strategic Corporate Social Responsibility: Sustainable Value Creation</i> (multi-player, round-based online simulation game on issues in Corporate Social Responsibility)</p>
Friday, July 29, 2022	<p><b>Economic principles in prehistory and in Greek-Roman antiquity: reciprocity, teleology</b></p> <p>M. Sahlins: “The original affluent society”, in: <i>Stone age economics</i></p> <p>Cl. Lévi-Strauss: “The principle of reciprocity”, in: <i>The elementary structures of kinship</i></p> <p>Aristotle: <i>Politics</i>, Book 1</p>
Tuesday, August 02, 2022	<p><b>Theology /European ‘Middle age’ and Early Modern Period: Taming the Passions</b></p> <p>LeGoff: <i>Your money or your life</i></p> <p>Deutschmann: “Profit and interest (Judaism; Christianity; Islam)”, in: <i>The Routledge Handbook of Economic Theology</i></p> <p>Hirschman: <i>The passions and the interest</i></p>
Friday, August 05, 2022	<p><b>Enlightenment/ Modern Period: Morality, Justice, and Alienation</b></p> <p>Kant: <i>Critique of practical Reason; Groundwork of the metaphysics of morals</i></p> <p>Hegel: “Reason as testing laws”, in: <i>Phenomenology of Spirit</i></p>

	<p>Sade: “Yet another effort, Frenchmen, if you would become republicans”, in: <i>Philosophy in the Bedroom</i></p> <p>Marx: “Alienated labor”, in: <i>Economic-philosophical manuscripts of 1844</i>; “Commodity fetishism”, in: <i>The capital (Vol. 1)</i></p>
Tuesday, August 09, 2022	<p><b>Modernity: ethical paradigms between social technology and ascetic idealism</b></p> <p>Nietzsche: <i>Genealogy of Morals</i> (Essays 1 and 2)</p> <p>M. Weber: “Introduction” and “Incidental Remark” to <i>The economic ethics of the world religions</i></p> <p>M. Weber: <i>The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism</i> (Essay 2)</p>
Friday, August 12, 2022	<p><b>Modern &amp; postmodern capitalism: its effects on culture and society; justice in diverse societies</b></p> <p>Marcuse: <i>One-Dimensional Man</i></p> <p>Von Mises: <i>Socialism</i></p> <p>Steiner: <i>The plans that failed</i></p> <p>Expert interview with Prof. Dr. André Steiner &amp; field trip to the “German Democratic Republic Museum”:  <a href="https://www.hdg.de/en/museum-in-der-kulturbrauerei">https://www.hdg.de/en/museum-in-der-kulturbrauerei</a></p>
Tuesday, August 16, 2022	<p><b>Contemporary Capitalism: incentives, regulations and self-organization</b></p> <p>Dixit/Nalebuff: <i>Introduction to game theory</i></p> <p>Singer: <i>Practical Ethics</i>, Chap. 1,2, 8-12</p> <p>Ostrom: <i>Governing the Commons</i></p> <p>Expert interview with Prof. Dr. U. Brückner: “The European Union as a normative actor - Ethics and interests in European politics”</p>
Friday, August 19, 2022	<p><b>Corporate compliance in the face of corruption and organized crime</b></p> <p>Fisman: <i>Economic gangsters</i></p>

*Expert interview with Dr. Stefan Otremba, Partner & Head of Corporate Risk Management KPMG Deutschland and member of the board of the German Network of Business Ethics (Deutsches Netzwerk Wirtschaftsethik)*  
<https://home.kpmg/de/en/home/contacts/o/stefan-otremba.html>

\*Field trips and expert interviews are subject to change depending on the availability of appointments and speakers. On field trip days, class hours may be adjusted.