**Assessment Questions**

Some Suggested Exam Questions

Chapter 1: Right Theory

1. Discuss the benefits and limitations of using stakeholder rights as a basis for identifying business responsibilities.
2. Stakeholder rights are often mentioned in discussion about business ethics, but what resources might we draw on to identify stakeholder rights and how might these relate to practical business contexts?
3. A lot of emphasis is put on property rights in contemporary society. Discuss the relevance of property rights to business ethics.

Chapter 2: Utilitarianism

1. Utilitarians suggest that an ethical action is one which promotes the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Describe some different ways of defining what is good for people and explain how these might relate to the practical application of utilitarianism in business contexts.
2. What practical and theoretical challenges might businesspeople encounter when trying to use utilitarianism as a practical guide to business ethics? How might rule utilitarianism alleviate some of these difficulties?
3. Discuss the benefits and limitations of using the principle of corporate maximization as a guide to ethical business management.

Chapter 3: Kantian Ethics

1. Immanuel Kant’s ethics theory places a great deal of emphasis on good intentions, human reason and freedom. Explain why these notions were so important to Kant and discuss their relevance to business ethics.
2. Immanuel Kant suggested that we should use the categorical imperative to identify our duty. How might we go about applying the categorical imperative to practical business scenarios?
3. How might Kantian theory help a global corporation to ensure that its offshore production is carried out in an ethically sustainable manner?

Chapter 4: Social Contract Theory

1. Using practical examples to illustrate your answer, describe how social contract theory might help to identify business obligations.
2. Compare and contrast person-focused and culture-focused accounts of why unethical business conduct happens and how to avoid it.
3. Using practical examples to illustrate your answer, describe how John Rawls’ theory of justice might help us to judge whether the benefits and burdens of business activity are being distributed fairly.

Chapter 5: Virtue Theory

1. Some virtue theorists have made a distinction between internal relationships and external relationships. With reference to this distinction, discuss some ways in which being virtuous might help businesses and businesspeople to flourish.
2. Describe the relationship that virtue theory draws between purpose and virtue and discuss how different ways of thinking about the purpose of business might lead to the identification of different business virtues.
3. Using practical examples to illustrate your discussion, discuss some ways in which the achievement of excellence in work practices might help people inside and outside businesses to flourish.

Chapter 6: Ethical Relativism

1. Critically discuss the following proposition: ‘There are no universal, objective, rationally derived standards to tell right from wrong. Therefore, ethics is meaningless and businesspeople have no need to take ethics into account.’
2. Friedrich Nietzsche suggested that any particular morality is nothing but a system of values which supports the power agenda of a particular, influential group. Explain how Nietzsche reached this conclusion and discuss some ways in which it might be applied to help us think about business ethics?
3. Using examples to illustrate your answer, describe the relevance of the existentialist notions of bad faith and authenticity to business ethics.

Chapter 7: Discourse Ethics

1. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using discourse ethics as a basis for making ethical decisions in business.
2. Workplace democracy is often advocated in contemporary management theory. However, workplace democracy can take various forms. How might a company ensure that the democratic processes implemented in its workplace conform to the expectations of discourse ethics theory?
3. Discuss the role played by ICT corporations in relation to the public sphere.

Chapter 8: Feminine Ethics

1. Discuss the proposition that there is a characteristically feminine way of thinking about business ethics.
2. Using examples to illustrate your answer, describe some insights offered to business ethics by care ethics and explain how these might challenge perspectives that are more commonly found in business environments.
3. Discuss the following question: should consumer marketers concern themselves with the images of gender portrayed in their marketing material, or should they just focus their attention on selling products as effectively as they can?

Chapter 9: Environmental Ethics

1. Critically discuss the proposition that the natural world only has value for business insofar as it helps them to provide things that humans need.
2. Using examples to illustrate your answer, describe some ways in which businesses that pursue the environmental agendas of the affluent North might be accused of undermining the interests and priorities of people who live in the less-affluent South. What sort of things might global corporations do to avoid these accusations?
3. Supporters of deep ecology have proposed that if we carry on with business as usual it will be hard to find solutions to the environmental problems that confront us. Identify some features of contemporary business practice that that may be undermining environmental responsiveness and suggest some more sustainable ways of doing things.

Chapter 10: The Responsibilities of Business Executives

1. Milton Friedman has proposed that business executives’ only responsibility is to make as much money as possible for their shareholders. Discuss whether Friedman’s statement offers an adequate account of business executives’ ethical responsibilities.
2. It is sometimes suggested that, so long as we take a long-term, enlightened view, there is no conflict between business executives’ responsibilities to maximize shareholder value and their responsibilities towards other stakeholders. Discuss critically the merits of this suggestion.
3. Compare and contrast the respective merits of shareholder theory and normative stakeholder theory as accounts of the responsibilities of business executives.

Coursework Assignment Questions

The precise nature of coursework assignments will, of course, depend on the material that has been covered in a module when the assignment is set. To follow are some suggested essay-style assignments, which can be amended to suit specific requirements:

1. Identify something in a business context that you consider to be ethically contentious. This could be an issue that you have experienced personally or something that you have heard about through the media. It could concern a specific business situation or a more general business practice. Discuss the ethicality of this issue, drawing on [specific ethics theory/theories] to inform your discussion.
2. Compare and contrast the insights offered by [a specific ethics theory] and [another specific ethics theory] on [a topical business-related issue].
3. Ethics theory casts doubt on the ethical desirability of certain practices, structures, and conventions that are common in contemporary business. Using the theories that you have studied, identify some ethically undesirable features of contemporary business and suggest some alternative ways of doing things that are more appealing from an ethical perspective.

Alternative Style of Coursework Assignment

To augment conventional exam and essay-style assessment, I have found that business ethics lends itself quite well to the preparation and display of a group poster. The class is split into groups of three or four and each group is asked to prepare a poster depicting the insights that ethics theory might offer to an ethically charged business-related issue. All of the posters are then displayed together some weeks later on the walls of a conveniently sized room and each group of students is expected to play a part in assessing the posters produced by other groups. You might also be able to persuade other lecturers to participate in the poster assessment event.

I have found it preferable to introduce students to this assignment in their first seminar and to hold the poster-assessment event towards the end of the module. Although the project entails similar challenges to those offered by any group assessment, these can easily be managed. In particular, it helps to introduce some activities into the first seminar to familiarize group members with one another and to get them working productively together. It also helps if students continue to work in their project groups during subsequent seminars.

Should you wish to try this approach, you might like to draw on the following assignment brief.

Task

The output of this assignment is a poster, to be exhibited on [a specific time and place]. Each study group is required to select an ethically contentious issue from business. They must depict this issue, along with the ethical challenges that it presents, on their poster.

The chosen issue may consist of a particular incident or situation that you have heard about through the media. Alternatively, it could concern something more general; something that affects a number of businesses, that affects an entire business sector, or even something that affects all businesses. The chosen issue needs to be agreed in advance by the lecturer.

Your poster must demonstrate that your group has a sound understanding of your chosen issue. This understanding might be gathered from the Internet, written media, TV and radio, personal experience or from a combination of these. You must also demonstrate a firm grasp of the ethical challenges that are involved. Most importantly, you must show that you have considered the issue from various ethical perspectives.

In depicting the ethical challenges that are associated with your chosen issue, you should draw upon ethics theory. You should demonstrate how viewing the issue through various ethics theories might help a viewer to develop a comprehensive understanding of its ethical ramifications.

Assessment

Your poster will be assessed partly by university lecturing staff and partly by your peers. In other words, each group will be expected to give a mark to the posters produced by other groups.

Assessment Criteria

Posters will be assessed against the following criteria, with percentages of the total mark allocated as indicated:

* Shows an understanding of the issue: 30% of total mark
* Illustrates different ethical perspectives: 20%
* Is relevant and informative: 20%
* Is interesting and eye catching: 10%
* Is clear and concise: 10%
* Uses visual, non-textual elements rather than relying purely on text 10%