Course Description and Objectives

This senior seminar is a capstone course for the Ethics Certificate Program. We will examine the relationship between the institution of the market and the moral order of society. The market has variously been seen as a civilizing force in society, a corrosive influence on character, a seedbed of personal virtue, an engine of envy and spite, the foundation of individual freedom, a destructive juggernaut, and a fragile structure liable to break without the right mix of supporting values and institutions. These ideas do not just run through self-consciously ethical arguments about market society, but pervade the social sciences and society at large, too. During the first part of the course we will read some classic contributions to the social theory of the market. We will then move beyond standard “pro and con” debates to consider more closely the relationship between market institutions and the moral categories we use to assess them. From the beginning, we will be focused on writing a high-quality research paper that contributes to debates on this topic.

Readings

Readings for the class will be provided through the course website.

Requirements and Grading

As the semester progresses, you will research and write a substantial paper that brings together the topic of the course, the tools and methods provided by your
major, and your own particular interests. You will choose a research topic early in
the semester and develop it iteratively, figuring out your view, collecting and ana-
lyzing relevant data, and workshopping drafts in class. The specific requirements
are as follows:

- This is a seminar, not a lecture-based course. Attendance and active partic-
  ipation is absolutely vital to the success of the class. Participation in class
discussion and presentations will count for 10% of your grade.

- A one-page response memo with your questions or comments on the week’s
  readings should be emailed to me by 10am on the day of class during weeks
  3–8. These should not be polished essays, but rather be used to engage with
  the material and raise the best questions or lines of discussion you can think
  of. These one-pagers will count for 20% of your grade.

- A four page proposal for your final paper is due on March 5th. You will
  present this proposal to the class on March 16th or 23rd. The proposal counts
  for 10% of your grade.

- You will present a full draft of the final paper to the class during weeks 13
  and 14. Circulate your draft paper by Sunday April 10th.

- You will write at least one page of constructive comments on each draft pa-
  per besides your own. Together these will count for 10% of your grade.

- The final paper (8,000–10,000 words) will count for 50% of your grade. There
  will be no final examination.

Course Schedule

Markets, Morals, and More

Week 1. Overview, Introductions, Agenda.

Week 2.


- Albert Hirschman, The Passions and the Interests (Excerpts).

Civilizing, Destructive, or Feeble?

Week 3.


Week 4.


Week 5.

- Roger Lowenstein. “Walk Away from your Mortgage!” (Link)
- Raghuram Rajan and Luigi Zingales. *Saving Capitalism from the Capitalists*. Excerpts.

*Markets as Moral Projects*

**Week 6.**

• Arlie Russell Hochschild. “The Commodity Frontier.”

• Viviana Zelizer. “Human Values and the Market: The Case of Life Insurance and Death in 19th Century America” ([Link](#)).


• Rene Almeling. *Sex Cells*. Excerpts.

**Week 7.**


**Week 8.** (Catch-up week.) Proposals For Final Papers Due by Friday March 4th.

**Week 9. No Class. Spring Break.**

**Week 10**  Presentation and discussion of paper proposals, round 1.

**Week 11.**  Presentation and discussion of paper proposals, round 2.

**Week 12. TBD. Readings based on paper topics**
Week 13. Final paper presentations, round one.

Week 14. Final paper presentations, round two.