
Business Ethics

Business ethics can be defined as the critical, structured examination of how people and institutions should behave in the world of commerce. It is a *critical* discipline in that it is interested in determining what ethical standards are best and most well-justified, rather than in cataloging the views that people actually happen to have. It is a *structured* pursuit in that it involves providing reasoned arguments, rather than simply stating opinions or feelings, about particular issues. In particular, it involves examining appropriate constraints on the pursuit of self-interest, or (for companies) of profit, when the actions of individuals or companies affect others.

In practical settings, **business ethics** may be thought of, rather than as a topic of intellectual inquiry, as a name for proper behaviour in the world of commerce. In this sense, we might say informally, for example, that a company has “good business ethics,” or that “business ethics requires that a company do such-and-such.”

In many contexts, terms such as [CSR](#), corporate citizenship, or even [sustainability](#), may be used equivalently to “business ethics.” Whether these are reasonably synonymous is a matter of controversy.

See also in CEBE:

- [Corporate Social Responsibility](#)

Further Reading:

- Chris MacDonald, [“Doing the Right Thing: A Brief Guide to the Jargon”](#), July 7, 2011 (The Business Ethics Blog)
- George G. Brenkert and Tom L. Beauchamp, eds., [Oxford Handbook of Business Ethics](#) (OUP, 2009)

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