Business ethics is a perennially controversial topic: Should it be a required course for business students? Can ethical behavior be taught at all? Perhaps more fundamentally, what is business ethics? Does it exist at all, or is it an oxymoron, like “jumbo shrimp” or “military intelligence”?

Since business ethics is a largely normative discipline, asking what decisions we should make in difficult situations in our work lives, it is open to a great amount of disagreement and controversy. Ethical decision-making is grounded in and conditioned by the contexts we find ourselves in, including economic and organizational ones, but it is also guided by our philosophical beliefs concerning what we owe others in society to whom we are not directly connected. Since these differ widely from person to person, and even from society to society, there are bound to be important disagreements concerning what is acceptable in commercial life.

On the other hand, there is widespread agreement that certain things are detrimental to society as a whole and ought to be fought as much as possible. These include business and governmental corruption, environmental degradation caused by industrial activity, exploiting vulnerable populations through fraud or force in order to make a profit, and sexual, racial, religious, and other forms of group-based harassment in the workplace. While there may be disagreement on the larger philosophical level as to what ethical theory should govern human life, there is a great deal of agreement that certain things are harmful or even shameful, and that, on the practical level at least, decent human beings shouldn’t do them.

It may be best then to view business ethics as a discipline that explores the connection between these wrong or harmful activities on which there is widespread agreement and the decisions made by individuals that lead to them. The dominant ethical philosophies of utilitarianism, deontological (Kantian) ethics, virtue ethics, and even the major religious traditions all have an important influence on how we think about ethical dilemmas and problems in the workplace, and no business ethicist or philosopher can offer definitive proof that one theoretical viewpoint has an exclusive right to govern human action. Good business ethics teaching instead guides students through ethically problematic situations to explore: firstly, why we feel something is wrong, and secondly, what sort of decisions we think might lead to ethically better outcomes.

It is in this spirit that Professor Philippe Zgheib has written *Business Ethics and Diversity in the Modern Workplace*. Professor Zgheib’s book covers a broad array of issues in contemporary business ethics, from environmental ethics to corporate social responsibility to financial fraud, concluding with an examination of topics of special concern to his home country, Lebanon. His contribution to the business ethics literature draws on a wide range of sources, including the literary, philosophical, and journalistic, as well as the more standard business ethics and management literature. He illuminates
many of the most pressing issues that leaders in business, government, and academia are grappling with in this time of economic uncertainty and fundamental social change, particularly for the students who will soon be graduating from university classrooms to the “real world” of work and the task of building successful lives in very challenging social conditions.

*Steven McNamara*

*The American University of Beirut, Lebanon*

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*Steven McNamara is a business law professor and an international entrepreneur. His business expertise spans many years of practice of business law in the USA, and many more in academic business law and business ethics. He is currently serving as assistant professor of business law and business ethics at the Olayan School of Business in the American University of Beirut. He holds a PhD in Business Law from Boston College, and a professional postgraduate professional certification from Columbia University. His latest business research interests include moral intuition in the structure of insider trading law, informational failures in structured finance, and legal aspects of international entrepreneurial initiatives.*