

PHI2600: Ethics and Critical Thinking

Syllabus | Spring 2021 | Valencia College

Instructor: Michael Ossman

Course Details:

Course Registration Number: 27862

Term: 10 weeks (02/15/21 – 05/02/21)

Credit Hours: 3.000

East Campus | Online

Instructor Contact Info:

Email: mossman@valenciacollege.edu

(or Canvas Inbox)

Office Hours: By appointment

Introduction: What this syllabus is for



Figure 1: Statue of Socrates

The syllabus lays out all the major rules and expectations and gives us a roadmap for the course. Like the any founding document, it may need to be changed and tweaked as we go – for example, if I (your professor), decide that we need an extra week on a particular topic, I may push back the schedule to reflect that decision. Any time I make a change to the syllabus, I will notify you ahead of time through our course's Canvas announcements tool. These changes are infrequent and generally minor. I suggest [configuring your notifications in Canvas](#) to make sure that you receive these announcements directly in your email.

Each major section of the syllabus is marked by a **bold, dark green header in Times New Roman font**. If you are using Microsoft Word (not sure about other programs), you can [open the navigation pane](#) to see them all at once and move through them (as well as sub-headers) like an outline.

The syllabus is primarily a reference document. You should read it through at least once.

Course Description and Learning Outcomes

Department's Course Description

Study of major theoretical principles on which claims to good life and moral action have been based, such as hedonism, utilitarianism and rationalism. Each theory illustrated by representative selections from works of great philosophers from classical period to 20th century. Gordon Rule course which requires demonstration of college level writing skills through multiple assignments. Minimum grade of C required if used to satisfy Gordon Rule requirement.

Prerequisites: Minimum grade of C in ENC 1101 or ENC 1101H or IDH 1110

The course seeks to strengthen students' skills applicable to Valencia College's Student Core Competencies: Think, Value, Communicate, and Act.

Professor's Course Description

Studying ethics be simultaneously enlightening and frustrating. Enlightening because students often encounter new ways of thinking about moral matters. Frustrating because students may wish to have firm answers about ethics and morality, but often philosophers raise more questions than they answer.

I personally believe the value of studying ethics – let's define ethics for now as the formal philosophical investigation of what constitutes good or right action as well as a good life for a human being – comes from questioning our own assumptions. We study many ethical theories in this class, taken from the long history of (Western) philosophy (over 2000 years old!). Some of these theories may strike you as insightful, others as simply wrongheaded or even dangerous. Investigating and articulating *why* certain approaches to ethics seem fruitful or not to us allows us to gain insight into our own idea about ethics that may even have been hidden from us.

Course Learning Outcomes

- Identify key assumptions and implications of major moral theories and concepts.
- Define moral concepts.
- Identify key assumptions and key arguments in the public debate surrounding contemporary moral issues.
- Evaluate moral arguments in the public debate for coherence, consistency, and plausibility, using understanding of moral theories.
- Construct moral arguments.
- Reflect on the connection between moral perspectives and personal and civic responsibilities.
- Demonstrate college-level writing.

Materials

Required Textbook – You will need it by Week 2!

Mackinnon, Barbara & Andrew Fiala. Ethics: Theory & Contemporary Issues. 8th Edition, Concise. Stamford, CT, Cengage, 2015.

ISBN: 1305077504

You may purchase either the print or the digital option (digital is much cheaper). You must have the textbook by the start of the 2nd week of class. [Visit the online bookstore](#) and enter the course information in the dropdown menus at the bottom of the page.

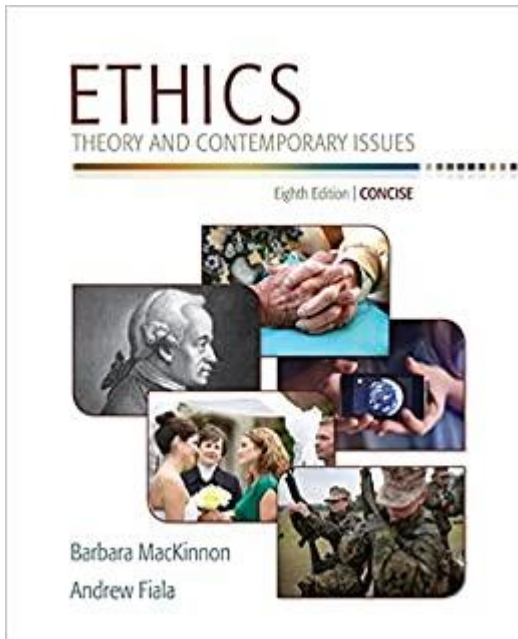


Figure 2: Required Textbook

Technology

You need internet access to complete weekly assignments. All assignments will be submitted through our course's Canvas page. You should also check your student email and/or Canvas frequently for course updates and announcements from me. If you want to live chat with me, you need access to a microphone (camera optional, I have one).

Continued below...

Structure, Assignments, Grading

Course Structure – Weekly Canvas Modules

A new Canvas module opens each Monday at 2 pm. This module contains assignments for the week and any other materials you will need (not the textbook chapters, of course). All graded assignments come with due dates – be sure to pay close attention to these dates, you will often have multiple due dates in a week (for example, you may have a discussion board due Wednesday and a quiz due Sunday). You can see all these due dates on Canvas and I try to post reminders frequently.

You are welcome to work ahead on the reading but otherwise follow the weekly format. I plan to stick to this pattern as closely as possible – little changes may happen here and there, but no big surprises. I will send any changes via the announcements tool in Canvas. I suggest [configuring your notifications in Canvas](#) to make sure that you receive these announcements directly in your email.

My hope is that by following a consistent weekly “rhythm,” we will get into the swing of things quickly and have no trouble keeping up.

General Descriptions of Assignments

Every graded assignment will come with specific instructions – the most important thing is to carefully read each assignment’s specific instructions before you begin. If anything is unclear, please email me! Part of my job is to answer your questions.

Nonetheless, below you can find some general descriptions of what sorts of things you’ll be asked to do throughout the semester. Again, the specific instructions attached to each assignment will (hopefully) give you all the detail you need.

You are welcome to send me drafts of written assignments, but I need them at least 24 hours before the due date to give you some feedback.



Figure 3: Rene Descartes

I: Reading

I assign required reading every week which is specified at the start of the weekly module. This is the first thing you should do each week, as it serves as the foundation for understanding the course material and completing the graded assignments. Most of the time the reading will be out of the textbook (either a part of or a whole chapter). Sometimes I provide supplemental reading on Canvas.

A disclaimer: reading philosophy (or even about philosophy) can be frustrating. Philosophers like using specialized terminology, often with specific meanings that you'll need to get used to (for example, consider the term "metaethical relativism." Oof.). Sometimes you'll need to reread certain sections again and again to even start to "get it" – this is normal, in fact you should be doing this.

It is very important to do the reading each week and to do it *well* – which means setting aside adequate time and finding focus (which can be hard to come by, I know). I don't expect you to simply read and understand everything immediately, but you need to give it a good try on your own, otherwise it is hard for me (or your classmates) to help with confusions.

Oh, and here is [a little write-up by a Philosophy PhD on some good reading strategies for philosophy](#). A strategy that worked well for me as a student is to skim through the introduction and headings and conclusion before reading through the whole thing. It's not like reading a mystery novel, after all – you're allowed to skip to the end! (so long as you eventually read the rest in-between).

II: Discussion Boards

I assign discussion boards every week. I typically ask you to write a short paragraph (3-4 sentences) on a choice of prompts based on the reading. I grade discussion boards based on satisfactory completion according to the specific instructions on the assignment.

Often you are asked to form an opinion on the prompt – opinions are welcome and necessary in this class, but I'll always ask you to explain your reasoning behind that opinion.

III: Reflections

Some weeks, I assign a short "reflection" paper (typically ~1-3 pages). These assignments mainly ask you to do two things: (a) demonstrate understanding of some theory / argument / idea from the textbook reading; and (b) demonstrate critical thinking about this theory / argument / idea. Part (b) could be, for example, applying that theory to a new situation of your own choosing, or criticizing the theory itself.

Reflections are not formal essays, nor do they require outside research. I do expect you to apply good writing practices you've learned in your English classes (paragraphs, grammar, transitions, etc). The reflections are graded on a letter grade system based on a rubric, which will be attached to the assignment. If you do outside research (including Googling), you must cite it properly (whatever style you're used to – MLA, APA, etc).

Again, reflections, like all other graded assignments, will come with specific instructions – pay close attention to what I'm asking you to do! The main way that people lose points on papers is by not following instructions or by plagiarizing (e.g. copying someone else's work – whether a random internet source or another student's work. See 'Academic Integrity' below).

IV: Quizzes

There will be a short quiz covering each of the theory chapters of the textbook (chapters 2-9). This is a way for you to demonstrate your understanding of the material and earn some points. The quizzes also help me monitor your progress in understanding the course material.

My quizzes are meant to be challenging and require *application* of concepts, not simply memorization. This means that you will not find the answers directly in the reading, though the reading will provide the necessary tools for thinking through the answers.

V: Final Paper

The final paper for the course will be like a slightly longer reflection assignment. The rules will essentially be the same (no required research, college-level writing), and it will come with specific instructions. I change up the prompts every semester but generally it gives you an opportunity to personally reflect on what you've gotten out of the course (if anything!) and what specific parts interested you (or didn't). So far, I've found that students enjoy the opportunity to do this at the end of the course. *There is no final exam in this class, the final paper takes the place of an exam.*

Points distribution

There are 100 total points in the course. You can track your progress and review my feedback in Canvas as I get grades back to you. See the table below for the math. Note that since there are only 100 points in the course, each point is like a percentage point. So, every point counts!

| Assignment | How many | Points per | Overall points in the course (same as percentage) |
|-------------------|----------|------------|---|
| Orientation Quiz | 1 | 4 | 4 (basically free points) |
| Discussion Boards | 14 | 2 | 28 |
| Quizzes | 8 | 4 | 32 |
| Reflections | 4 | 6 | 24 |
| Final Paper | 1 | 12 | 12 |
| Total | -- | -- | 100 |

Grading Scale

A = 90-100%

B = 80-89.9%

C = 70-79.9%

D = 60-69.9%

F = 59.9% and lower

Late work / Make-up work / Extra credit

I accept all late assignments throughout the semester, except quizzes (this is because quiz answers become available after the deadline, so theoretically students could collaborate to give each other answers). *It is almost always worth it to do stuff late if you miss a deadline!* However, you will lose more points the later the assignment is submitted, according to the following table:

| Degree of Lateness | Grade Penalty |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Less than 24 hours late | Grace period – no penalty |
| Less than 1 week late | -10% assignment grade (A becomes B) |
| 1-2 weeks late | -20% assignment grade (A becomes C) |
| 2+ weeks late | -30% assignment grade (A becomes D) |

These penalties can add up quickly, so beware of submitting a lot of late work. You do not need my permission or forgiveness to submit late work, you should be able to submit it normally on Canvas (message me if you have trouble though).

I generally do not offer extra credit, though I may excuse or reduce late penalties if you can give me a heads-up and we make a plan to submit the assignment. In some circumstances, such as illness or family emergency, I can also reopen quizzes which have closed, or extend deadlines for a particular student. *It is best to contact me ahead of time if you know you won't be able to complete an assignment on time, in some cases I can forgive late penalties if you give me a heads up.*

Not done yet! Read on...

Course Schedule

Small changes to the course schedule may occur throughout the semester, and I will notify you of any such changes via the announcements on Canvas.

A due date will be attached to each assignment on Canvas. Pay special attention to due dates as you see them come in!

Key:

DB-x = Discussion Board

Q-x = Quiz

R-x = Reflection

| Dates (Mon – Sun) | Topics | Graded Assignments | Notes |
|-----------------------|--------------|------------------------|---|
| Week 1 (2/15 – 2/21) | Primer* | DB-1, Orientation quiz | |
| Week 2 (2/22 – 2/28) | Ch. 2 & 3 | DB-2, DB-3, Q-1, Q-2 | Need textbook by week 2! |
| Week 3 (3/1 – 3/7) | Ch. 10 or 20 | DB-4, R-1 | |
| Week 4 (3/8 – 3/14) | -- | -- | SPRING BREAK |
| Week 5 (3/15 – 3/21) | Ch. 4 & 5 | DB-5, DB-6, Q-3, Q-4 | |
| Week 6 (3/22 – 3/28) | Ch. 13 or 15 | DB-7, R-2 | |
| Week 7 (3/29 – 4/4) | Ch. 6 & 7 | DB-8, DB-9, Q-5, Q-6 | |
| Week 8 (4/5 – 4/11) | Ch. 16 or 17 | DB-10, R-3 | Withdrawal deadline 4/9 |
| Week 9 (4/12 – 4/18) | Ch. 8 & 9 | DB-11, DB-12, Q-7, Q-8 | |
| Week 10 (4/19 – 4/25) | Ch. 11 or 14 | DB-13, R-4 | |
| Week 11 (4/26 – 5/2) | TBD | DB-14, Final Paper | Late work deadline same as final paper due date (no final exam) |

*Primer refers to some non-textbook reading and discussion we do in the opening week, which serves as a first foray into the subject matter.

For the weeks in which the topic includes an "&," you are required to read both chapters listed. For the weeks in which the topic includes an "or," you have the option to read either chapter (of course you may read both if you wish).

Continued below...

Policies

Communications



Figure 4: Joyce Mitchell Cook

I send announcements via Canvas throughout the semester. This includes any changes to the schedule as well as reminders about assignment deadlines. If you have questions for me (e.g. assignments, materials, your grade, my expectations), please feel free to contact me by direct email (mossman@valenciacollege.edu), or through the Canvas Inbox conversations tool. I will generally get back to you within 24 hours of your message, though if you email me on a weekend you may have to wait until Monday morning to hear back. The best time to get an immediate response from me is M-F from about 10:00 am to 2:00 pm. Please feel free to send me a reminder if you feel you've been overlooked!

I am always happy to answer your questions or concerns, regarding for example grades, course material, or your progress in the course. It is especially vital to communicate with me if something in your life is impacting your ability to complete the work (family or technology troubles, etc). I am willing to work with you to help you succeed in a difficult situation, but I can only help you if I know what's going on (or at least that something is going on).

Academic Integrity

All your work must be your own: your thoughts, your research, and your self-expression. Googling something and either copy-pasting directly or copy-pasting and changing a few words is not your own work. Such a thing counts as plagiarism and is not acceptable. The real issue is that doing something like this doesn't demonstrate real learning on your part; instead, it just shows that you are Internet-savvy. Maybe you get it, maybe you don't! I just can't tell unless you submit your own work.

So, whenever you use ideas, wording, or organization from another source, the source should be cited properly with a works cited page. If you submit work by someone else without quoting and citing, whether from the Internet or a friend, even a single sentence, this is plagiarized work. A first offense will result in a zero score on the assignment until you revise it. A second offense may result in an automatic zero without possibility of revision. Any later offense may result in automatic zeroes and referral to the dean (which can lead to automatic failure of the course and academic probation).

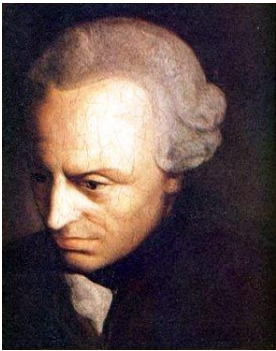


Figure 5: Immanuel Kant

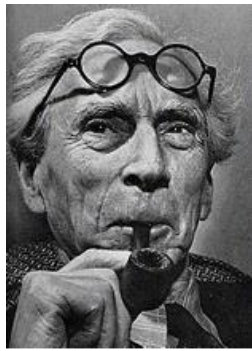


Figure 6: Bertrand Russell

The reason academic integrity is important in a philosophy class specifically is that it is the only way you'll really learn anything! On the necessity of thinking for ourselves, consider the words of German philosopher Immanuel Kant in 1784:

"Enlightenment is man's leaving his self-caused immaturity. Immaturity is the incapacity to use one's intelligence without the guidance of another. Such immaturity is self-caused if it is not caused by lack of intelligence, but by lack of determination and courage to use one's intelligence without being guided by another. *Sapere Aude!* [Latin: Dare to know!] Have the courage to use your own intelligence is therefore the motto of the enlightenment." (Source: Marvin Perry, et. al., *Sources of the Western Tradition*, Volume II (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995), pp. 56-57, third edition.)

And here's English philosopher Bertrand Russell on the special benefits of doing philosophy on our own:

"Philosophy is to be studied, not for the sake of any definite answers to its questions since no definite answers can, as a rule, be known to be true, but rather for the sake of the questions themselves; because these questions enlarge our conception of what is possible, enrich our intellectual imagination and diminish the dogmatic assurance which closes the mind against speculation; but above all because, through the greatness of the universe which philosophy contemplates, the mind also is rendered great, and becomes capable of that union with the universe which constitutes its highest good." (Source: Russell, Bertrand. "Chapter XV: The Value of Philosophy." *The Problems of Philosophy*. 1912. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co, 1990.)

No Show

If you do not log in to the course during the first week AND complete the week 1 assignments, you will be withdrawn from the class as a "[no show](#)." If you are withdrawn as a "no show," you will be financially responsible for the class and a final grade of "WN" will appear on your transcript for the course. Don't pay for a class that you don't even take!

If you can't do the week 1 work for whatever reason (e.g. family emergency) but you want to remain in the class, you must communicate with me by that Sunday. I will send at least one reminder announcement about this.

Withdrawal

Per [Valencia College policy](#) a student who withdraws from class before the established deadline for a particular term will receive a grade of “W.” A student is not permitted to withdraw after the withdrawal deadline (listed below). If you do not intend to complete the course, you must withdraw yourself prior to the withdrawal date.

I reserve the right to withdraw you myself if you have not completed at least 50% of the graded assignments due by the end of the midterm week (marked on schedule). I will send you a warning email before I withdraw you. In some special circumstances I will consider withdrawing you after the deadline has passed.

Note that the general wisdom indicates that a “W” on a transcript is better than an “F.” If you find yourself in a situation where an “F” seems very likely, you may want to consider withdrawal (again, don’t forget there is a deadline). You are welcome to ask me if your grade can be improved prior to withdrawal.

Student Conduct

Valencia is dedicated not only to the advancement of knowledge and learning but also to the development of responsible personal and social conduct. As a registered student, you assume the responsibility for conducting yourself in a manner that contributes positively to Valencia’s learning community and that does not impair, interfere with, or obstruct the orderly conduct, processes, and functions of the college as described in the [Student Code of Conduct](#).

Students with Disabilities

Valencia is committed to ensuring that all of its programs and services are accessible to students with disabilities. [The Office for Students with Disabilities \(OSD\)](#) determines reasonable and appropriate accommodations for qualified students with documented disabilities based upon the need and impact of the specific disability. Any student requiring course accommodations due to physical, emotional or learning disability must contact the instructor and provide a Notification to Instructor form by the end of the second week of class. To obtain a letter of accommodation, contact OSD at 407-582-2229.

Baycare Student Assistance Services

Valencia College strives to ensure all our students have a rewarding and successful college experience. To that purpose, Valencia students can get immediate help with issues dealing with stress, anxiety, depression, adjustment difficulties, substance abuse, time management as well as relationship problems dealing with school, home or work. [BayCare Behavioral Health Student Assistance Program \(SAP\)](#) services are free to all Valencia students and available 24 hours a day by calling (800) 878-5470. If needed, the counselor may refer the student to appropriate resources or to speak face-to-face with a licensed counselor.

Third-Party Software Policy & FERPA Policy

Valencia College has a firm commitment to protecting the privacy rights of its students. Third party software privacy policies will be provided at the point of use within the course.

Statement of support for students with food/housing/financial needs

Any student who has difficulty accessing sufficient food to eat, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect his or her performance in the course, is urged to contact a Counselor in the Advising Center for information about resources that may be available from the college or community.

Helpful Links

[College Catalog](#)

[Valencia Policy Manual](#)

[Student Handbook](#)

[Microsoft Office Instructions for free software](#)

[Course Support](#): onsite, online tutoring, writing help, etc

[College Calendar](#)

Additional Student Support Services

[Virtual Answer Center](#)

The Answer Center can help you with questions about enrollment, financial aid, and other educational needs.

[Library Services](#)

Valencia's library staff can help with research needs and access to library materials.

[Advising and Counseling](#)

Valencia College offers advising and counseling services for students. Advisers can help you with essential college skills, career planning, transitioning to a university, and other things. Counselors can help you with mental wellness, including issues like anxiety.

THE END. Please message me if anything was unclear! I am not all-powerful and all-knowing.