

PHI2600: Ethics and Critical Thinking

Syllabus | Fall 2021 | Valencia College

Course Details:

Course Registration Number:

Term: 16 weeks (08/23/21 – 12/12/21)

Credit Hours: 3.000

East Campus | Mixed-Mode

Instructor Contact Info:

Michael Ossman

Email: mossman@valenciacollege.edu

Phone: (407) 582-7344

Or use Canvas Inbox

Engagement Hours (Online)*:

M: 3 – 5pm

T: 9am – 1pm

W: 9am – 11pm; 5 – 7pm

F: 12pm – 2pm

*Note: Engagement Hours are dedicated hours during which you can be sure I'll be available to respond to messages or calls or to get on Zoom with you. You are free to contact me at any time by email and such, but during these hours you can be assured of a relatively quick response (usually within 10-15 minutes, depending on if I'm working with another student).



Figure 1: Statue of Socrates

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. We study many ethical theories in this class, taken from the long history of (mostly Western) philosophy. Some of these theories may strike you as insightful, others as simply wrongheaded or even dangerous.

I personally believe the value of studying ethics – and let's define ethics for now as the philosophical investigation of what constitutes morally good or right actions as well as a morally good life for a human being – comes from *uncovering and questioning our own assumptions and beliefs about morality*. We gain insights into ourselves by investigating and articulating *why* certain approaches to ethics seem fruitful or not *to 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 3!

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 3rd week of class. [Visit the online bookstore](#) and enter the course information in the dropdown menus at the bottom of the page.

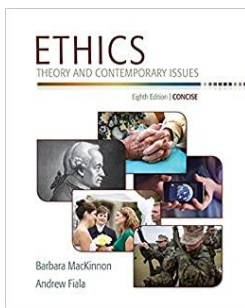


Figure 2: Required Textbook

Technology

You need internet access to complete weekly assignments. Most 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).

Structure

Course Structure: What is Mixed-Mode?

Mixed-mode (aka hybrid) classes combine aspects of both online and in-person classes. So, we will get together on campus for an in-person meeting only once per week (see top of syllabus for time and room number). The rest of our time together will be spent online through Canvas.

In a typical week, some of the online work will precede our in-person meeting. Think of it as preparation. So, for example, if we're studying Chapter 2 of the textbook, I might ask you to complete the reading and a short, low-stakes quiz before coming to class ("low-stakes" meaning not a huge part of the grade). This way, we can use some of the classroom time to clear up any misunderstandings, and then to get into a deeper discussion of the material.

Online: Everything is on Canvas

There will be a separate module on our Canvas page for each week of the course. The module will contain all assignments and material related to that week (besides textbook chapters – remember, you need to obtain that for yourself). All 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 quiz due early in the week and a paper due at the end of the week. 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 you'll have to follow the weekly format. I plan to stick to a pattern as much as possible – little changes may happen here and there, but no big surprises.

In-Person Attendance | On COVID-19

I expect regular attendance at our weekly meetings but there are exceptions – the most important of which right now is illness. Attending class is vital to college success, but health and family are more important. If you feel sick, or anyone you live with feels sick, please do not come to class. Even if it isn't COVID, just stay home. Send me an email or Canvas Inbox message and I will work out alternatives with you, so that your grade doesn't suffer.

For example, if a family member is sick and it's on you to care for them – make that your priority and keep me apprised. I don't need private family details, but if I'm at least aware of your overall situation, I can help. Or take another example – if life is mentally stressful for one reason or another (COVID or otherwise), and completing coursework just seems impossible, we can discuss extensions on deadlines (ideally do this before they pass though!). Simply put, we're all going to have to be flexible this term, especially me. It is ultimately on you to make the effort to succeed, but I am here to help you along the way.

In accordance with CDC and Valencia guidelines – I will be wearing a mask during class and whenever I'm indoors, and I expect you to wear one as well, even if you are vaccinated. It's no fun to wear it, but it's for the common good.

I have been vaccinated and I encourage you to get vaccinated ASAP if you haven't already. The vaccine is the best way to protect yourself and your loved ones from COVID-19. Valencia is providing lots of places and times on campus to get a free vaccine throughout the semester.

If you find yourself feeling unwell and suspect you might be experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, test positive for COVID-19, or have been in close contact with someone who has the COVID-19 virus, please report this to Valencia's COVID-19 case manager Tanya Mahan, at COVIDillness@valenciacollege.edu, so the College can determine how to best support you. They do contact tracing and can provide guidance to you.

Assignments, Grading

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 right away! Part of my job is to answer your questions, and I won't get mad at you for asking them.

So, while the specific instructions will be the most important, below you can find some *general* descriptions of things you'll be asked to do throughout the semester.

FYI: You will be asked to do a good deal of writing in this class. You are always welcome to send me drafts of written assignments for feedback, but I need them at least 24 hours before the due date if you do this.



Figure 3: René Descartes doing his philosophy homework

I: Reading

I assign required reading every week, often (but not always) in the textbook. It is important to do the reading each week and to *do it well* – which means setting aside adequate time and finding focus. The purpose of reading in this class is to grapple with these difficult ideas on our own before we see what others think. This “grappling” is an important part of the learning process.

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”). Sometimes, you’ll need to reread certain sections again and again to even start to understand – this is normal, in fact you probably should be rereading difficult sections. I often need to reread even today, and I have multiple degrees in philosophy! Sometimes it *still* won’t make sense – in that case, make a note and ask me about it in class.

In sum: I don’t expect you to understand it all by yourself, but I do expect you to try it.

II: Online Activities

I assign discussion boards online. I typically ask you to write a short paragraph (3-4 sentences) on one of 2-3 prompts based on the reading. I grade discussion boards based on satisfactory completion according to the specific instructions on the assignment. The purpose of discussion boards is to share ideas and impressions with peers to enrich our discussion. Sometimes discussion posts can spark ideas for papers, too.

Often you are asked to form an opinion on the prompt – opinions are welcome and necessary in this class! – but, per the conventions of philosophy, I’ll always ask you *to explain your reasoning* behind that opinion. Sometimes you may be asked for an opinion even if you don’t really have one yet – in that case, form an argument, even if you don’t believe it 100% (no trolling though). I won’t hold you to the content of your discussion posts for the rest of your life, so treat it like an exercise in making arguments (which, really, it is) if that helps.

III: In-class Activities

You do not earn points simply for attending class. However, during class, we will often do assignments or

activities that will earn you points in the course. Usually, you get the full points if you participate in good faith (sleeping or texting for most of class are examples of “bad faith” participation). Again, I am very happy to provide alternatives if, for example, you are feeling sick and cannot come to class! (see in-class attendance section above).

In-class activities have various purposes, but broadly they allow us to work together and get better at doing philosophy.

IV: Quizzes

I assign short quizzes online. They are usually “low-stakes” quizzes, which means that they aren’t worth a lot of points individually. While they are individually small, they will add up throughout the course of the semester, so don’t make a habit of skipping them.

The purpose of these quizzes is (1) for me to assess your progress in the course and (2) for you to earn some points in return.

V: Reflections

I assign short papers (typically ~1-3 pages) that I call “reflections.” These assignments typically ask you to do two things: (a) show understanding of some theory / argument / idea from the textbook reading; and (b) do some critical thinking about this theory / argument / idea. Part (b) could be, for example, applying a philosophical theory to a real or fictional case of your own choosing, or criticizing / supporting the theory itself.

The purpose of these reflections is to practice (1) analyzing complex arguments and (2) presenting your own thoughts in a clear, organized, and precise way. While you may not spend much time arguing about the actual course material in real life, those skills will be useful in a wide range of fields.

Reflections are graded on a letter grade system based on a rubric, which will be attached to the assignment. I will expect you to follow the specific instructions and apply writing practices you’ve learned in your English classes (paragraphs, grammar, transitions, etc). Clarity and organization are paramount in this class – the most important thing is that I can follow what you’re saying as easily as possible. The main way that people lose points on reflections is by not following specific 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).

Papers in this class do not require outside research. In fact, I kind of discourage you to do it, unless you’ve taken a research writing class already. If you choose to use outside research (including Googling), you must cite it properly (whatever style you’re used to – MLA, APA, etc).

VI: Midterm and Final

The midterm structure is TBD. It will likely be a timed short essay test or a series of short answer questions. Regardless, you will take it online during week 8.

I assign a final paper instead of a final exam. It will be like a longer “reflection” assignment (so doing the reflections will help you prepare for the final). The rules will 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.

The purpose of the final is not a grand demonstration of mastery of the material, but, rather, a demonstration of the skills we are cultivating in this course (analyzing arguments and self-reflection, for example).

Points Distribution (not set in stone)

There will be roughly 100 total points in the course (so every point matters). I enter all grades and feedback into Canvas, so you'll be able to track it there. See the table below for the math. This is a rough approximation – sometimes I will add assignments or combine them, but in the end it'll be something like this.

Assignment	How many	Points per	Overall points in the course
Online Activities	15	1	15
In-class Activities	15	1	15
Quizzes	15	2	30
Reflections	4	5	20
Midterm and Final	2	10	20
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	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 agree on a timeline for you to submit the assignment. *It is best to contact me ahead of time if you know you won't be able to complete an assignment on time.*

Course Schedule

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

Plan to do **all** reading/watching videos before our class meeting for the week. Any required materials besides the textbook reading will be posted on Canvas. All graded assignments come with due dates on Canvas – some will be due before in-person meetings, some after – just be sure to pay close attention to each due date.

There will be an in-class activity worth points every week – on weeks in which our in-person meeting is missed due to holidays or whatever, we'll make it up online or during the following week (I'll let you know).

Key:

OA-x = Online activity

Q-x = Quiz

R-x = Reflection

IC-x = In-class activity

Dates (Mon-Sun)	Topic	Graded Assignments	Notes
Week 1 (8/23 – 8/29)	What is ethics? Why study it?	OA-1, Q-1, IC-1 (Orientation Quiz)	Need textbook by start of week 3!
Week 2 (8/30 – 9/5)	What is ethics? Why study it?	OA-2, Q-2, IC-2, R-1	
Week 3 (9/6 – 9/12)	Chapter 5	OA-3, Q-3, IC-3	Labor Day College Closed 9/6
Week 4 (9/13 – 9/19)	Chapter 5	OA-4, Q-4, IC-4	
Week 5 (9/20 – 9/26)	Chapter 6	OA-5, Q-5, IC-5, R-2	
Week 6 (9/27 – 10/3)	Chapter 6	OA-6, Q-6, IC-6	
Week 7 (10/4 – 10/10)	Chapter 8	OA-7, Q-7, IC-7	
Week 8 (10/11 – 10/17)	Chapter 8	OA-8, Q-8, IC-8, Midterm	
Week 9 (10/18 – 10/24)	Chapter 2	OA-9, Q-9, IC-9	

Week 10 (10/25 – 10/31)	Chapter 4	OA-10, Q-10, IC-10	
Week 11 (11/1 – 11/7)	Chapter 7	OA-11, Q-11, IC-11, R-3	Withdrawal deadline 11/3
Week 12 (11/8 – 11/14)	Chapter 3	OA-12, Q-12, IC-12	Veteran's Day College Closed 11/11
Week 13 (11/15 – 11/21)	Chapter 9	OA-13, Q-13, IC-13	
Week 14 (11/22 – 11/28)	TBD (applied ethics)	OA-14, Q-14, IC-14, R-4	Thanksgiving College Closed 11/24-11/28
Week 15 (11/29 – 12/5)	TBD (applied ethics)	OA-15, Q-15, IC-15	
Week 16 (12/6 – 12/12)	Finals week	Final Paper	

Policies

Linguistic Diversity

There is growing awareness of the need to accept linguistic diversity in college classrooms. Pushing Standard American English (SAE) as the only acceptable way to speak or write can perpetuate racism and the idea that certain ways of speaking and writing are lesser or incorrect. In fact, the origins of SAE are [arbitrary at best](#), and language is constantly evolving. Thus, I believe in accepting wider forms of language – African American English, for example – in spoken and written work for my classes. *What is important is not so much following arbitrary rules of SAE; but, rather, that the speaker or writer is communicating their thoughts and/or arguments clearly.* We will discuss this in the first two weeks of the course, and please feel free to ask questions about this topic.

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.

I am always happy to answer your questions or concerns, regarding for example grades, course material, or your progress in the course. It is 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).

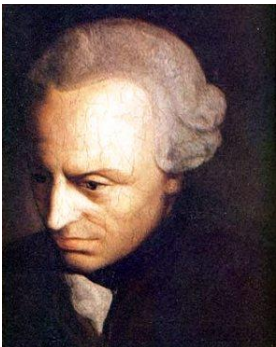


Figure 5: Immanuel Kant

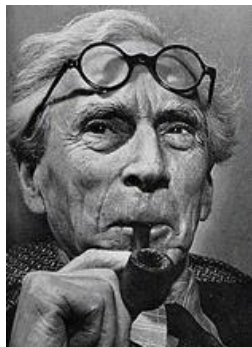


Figure 6: Bertrand Russell

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.