

PHI2600: Ethics and Critical Thinking

Syllabus | Spring 2023 | Valencia College



Course Details

Online | East Campus

Course Registration Number: See Canvas

Term: 16 weeks (01/09/23 – 04/30/23)

Credit Hours: 3.000

Instructor Contact Info

Michael Ossman

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Phone: (407) 582-7344

[Canvas Inbox](#)

Engagement Hours

By appointment: message me on Canvas Inbox and we can set up a Zoom meeting!

Course Description and Learning Outcomes

Structure: Asynchronous Online

For online classes, there are no required meetings. Instead, I will post learning materials and assignments on Canvas, and you will complete the work on your own (there will still be due dates on every assignment and penalties for late submissions). I will then provide grades and feedback through Canvas. Though we are never required to meet, I am happy to arrange to meet with you via Zoom if you have questions or concerns.

My intention is to establish a sort of "rhythm" to the course. I will open a new module each week, containing all the reading, assignments, etc for the week. You complete the assignments throughout the week, and I get your stuff graded during the following week. Rinse and repeat every week until the semester is done.

It is worth noting that I will not open modules early so people can work ahead. You're taking a semester-long course, so the idea is to work on philosophy stuff each week for that semester -- in other words, to learn at a consistent, methodical pace. I do understand the desire for some to knock out all the work for the course in the first few weeks, but that would simply be a different learning experience. Personally, I believe that philosophy is best learned at a slower pace -- give your brain time to digest all these new ideas!

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.

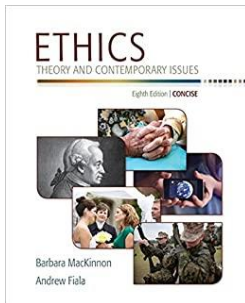


Figure 1: Required Textbook

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).

Assignments, Grading

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.



*René Descartes doing
his philosophy
homework*

I: Reading

I assign required reading every week, often (but not always) in the textbook. Any non-textbook reading will be posted on Canvas. Sometimes the “reading” will include short videos. It is important to do the reading each week and to do it well – which means setting aside adequate time and finding focus, perhaps even taking notes. It is hard to estimate how long it will take you, as people have vastly different reading comprehension skills. But I usually won’t assign more than 20 pages per week (note that these can be dense pages).

The purpose of reading in this class is to grapple with challenging philosophical ideas on our own. This mental grappling is an important part of the learning process, even if you end up feeling confused or frustrated. Keep at it, and bring questions to class! It is part of the process.

II: Discussion Boards

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 understanding. It can be surprising to see just how differently people can approach the same problem/issue. Sometimes discussion posts can spark ideas for papers, too.

III: Quizzes

I will assign short reading quizzes each week on Canvas. They are “low-stakes” quizzes, which means that they aren’t worth a lot of points individually, though they will add up through the course of the semester.

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.

IV: 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/concept from the textbook reading; and (b) do some critical thinking about that theory/argument/concept.

The purpose of these reflections is to practice critical thinking and writing in a clear, organized, and precise way. These are basically the major learning outcomes of the course. 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.

V: Midterm and Final

The midterm and final exams will be take-home tests composed of short answer questions. You will get more details on those as the time approaches, I construct them differently each semester based on our progress in the material and our class discussions.

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.*

	How many	Points per	Overall points in the course (also percentage)
Reading Quizzes	14	2	28
Discussion Boards	26	1	26
Reflections	5	5	25
Midterm/Final	2	10	20
Miscellaneous	--	--	01
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.

Any required materials besides the textbook reading will be posted on Canvas. All graded assignments come with due dates on Canvas, so be sure to pay close attention to each due date.

	Topic(s)	Weekly Assignments	Notes
Week 1 (1/9)	Syllabus/Orientation	Syllabus Quiz, Intro Discussion Board	Reading posted on Canvas
Week 2 (1/16)	Moral Dilemmas I	Quiz 1, Discussion board 1&2	
Week 3 (1/23)	Moral Dilemmas II	Quiz 2, Discussion board 3&4 Reflection 1	
Week 4 (1/30)	Utilitarianism I	Quiz 3, Discussion board 5&6	Need textbook by start of week 4!
Week 5 (2/6)	Utilitarianism II	Quiz 4, Discussion board 7&8 Reflection 2	
Week 6 (2/13)	Deontology I	Quiz 5, Discussion board 9&10	
Week 7 (2/20)	Deontology II	Quiz 6, Discussion board 11&12	
Week 8 (2/27)	Virtue Ethics I	Quiz 7, Discussion board 13&14, Midterm Assignment	Midterm is a take-home test
Week 9 (3/6)	Virtue Ethics II	Quiz 8, Discussion board 15&16, Reflection 3	
Week 10 (3/13)	--	--	Spring Break!

Week 11 (3/20)	Eastern Philosophy I	Quiz 9, Discussion board 17&18	
Week 12 (3/27)	Eastern Philosophy II	Quiz 10, Discussion board 19&20, Reflection 4	
Week 13 (4/3)	Relativism I	Quiz 12, Discussion board 21&22	
Week 14 (4/10)	Relativism II	Quiz 13, Discussion board 23&24 Reflection 5	
Week 15 (4/17)	TBD	Quiz 14, Discussion board 25&26	
Week 16 (4/24)	Finals week	Final Assignment	Final is a take-home test

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 usage is constantly evolving. Thus, I do not believe in holding strictly to “formal” English – *what is most important is that the speaker or writer is communicating their thoughts and/or arguments as clearly, so that anyone can understand.* We will discuss this in the first two weeks of the course, and please feel free to ask questions about this topic.

Communications



Figure 2: 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 learning on your part. 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).

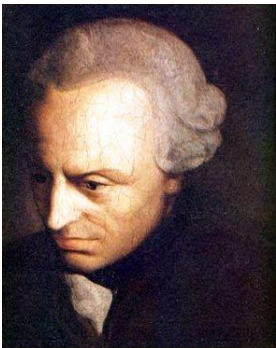


Figure 3: Immanuel Kant

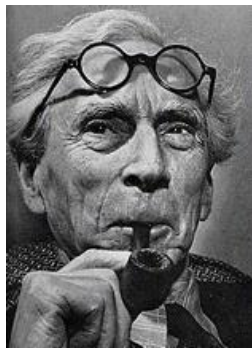


Figure 4: Bertrand Russell

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.