

Syllabus: Ethics and Critical Thinking

Course number: PHI 2600

Meeting Times: Mondays and Wednesdays from 11:30-2:50 p.m.

Location: Building 2, Room 305B

Instructor: William Butchard, Ph.D.

Email: Please contact me through Blackboard messaging

Course Description and Objectives

What makes an action morally right? Most of us have not worked out a developed theory of right action, but we all try to justify our moral judgments, and in doing so we appeal to facts—generally facts about the *consequences* of the action or the *intentions* or *character* of the actors. So, while some people are inclined to say that morality is just a matter of personal taste, our regular attempts to persuade others by pointing to the facts suggests that, in practice at least, we think it is possible to bring reason to bear on ethical matters. I hope this course will persuade you that the view that it is possible to be more reasonable or less reasonable when it comes to ethical matters withstands scrutiny.

We will explore a number of issues in this course. What does it take for a creature to be worthy of moral consideration? Do we have obligations towards non-humans? Ought we to be vegetarians? What are our obligations toward one another? Is it possible to justify the death penalty? If so, on what grounds? Is the mercy killing of a human being ever justified? Is there a moral difference between actively taking a life and passively allowing someone to die? Is torture ever justified? War?

We will wrestle with difficult questions throughout the semester. This is not a course in which you are expected simply to memorize and regurgitate information. The course is mainly about ideas, and our aim will be to think carefully and critically about the topics mentioned and, more generally, to develop a framework for thinking about the arc, pursuits, and priorities of the rest of our lives. We will question our preconceptions vigorously and work together to establish a communal atmosphere that will make the course both challenging and fun.

What this Course should contribute to your Education

I encourage you to view this course—and your other courses—as a contribution to a larger process. College provides an opportunity for you grow as a person. While day-to-day tasks and deadlines can make college feel like mere busy work, it really is about human flourishing. Your college curriculum is designed to promote growth in the following Valencia Core competencies:

- *Think* clearly, critically, and creatively, analyze, synthesize, integrate and evaluate in many domains of human inquiry
- *Value*: Make reasoned judgments and responsible commitments
- *Act* purposefully, effectively, and responsibly
- *Communicate* with different audiences using varied means

This course was designed to contribute to a larger curriculum that revolves around these competencies. Part of Valencia's mission is to provide students with a basic liberal arts education, and education that serves as a foundation for you to develop a mind free habit and prejudice. Valencia's general education program includes goals for this aspect of your education. This course aims to promote the following Valencia General Education Outcomes:

- Effectively analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and apply information and ideas from diverse sources and disciplines
- Demonstrate understanding of the diverse traditions of the world, and an individual's place in it
- Demonstrate awareness of personal responsibility in one's civic, social, and academic life
- Engage in effective interpersonal, oral, and written communication

Ultimately, it is up to you to decide whether knowledge of the humanities is truly valuable. In my view, it is—and I am very excited to be working with you this semester.

Required Readings

1. Barbara MacKinnon: *Ethics: Theory and Contemporary Issues* (seventh edition). Cengage Learning (2011)
2. Supplemental readings I will make available in Blackboard

Grade Determination

You can earn a total of **100 points** in the course. Each course requirement is worth a certain number of points. The distribution of points is as follows:

- Reading Quizzes: 10 quizzes (2 points each for a total of **20 points**).
- Writing: 1 paper (**20 points**)
- Exams: 5 in-class exams (10 points each for a total of **50 points**)
- Presentations: 2 presentations (5 points each for a total of **10 points**)

Here are the details about the factors that determine your grade.

Weekly Reading Quizzes

There will be weekly reading quizzes to be completed in Blackboard in preparation for the coming week's classes. Each quiz will be available to you from Friday afternoon to Sunday night and will need to be completed by Sunday night (11:59) before the school week starts for you to get credit.

Exams

There will be six in-class exams. These will consist of 10 questions (true/false, multiple-choice, and short essay). The exams cover the material in the textbook and what is covered in class. I will post a study guide for each exam in Blackboard. The sixth exam—the final—is cumulative. The

score you get on the final will replace your lowest score of the previous five (unless it is lower than all of those scores).

Attendance and participation

Class attendance should be viewed as a responsibility. I will take attendance every class period, and I consider attendance mandatory, but it will not affect your grade directly. In other words, you will not earn an attendance score. If you come to class, you will get a much better handle on the readings and the issues we discuss. Also, when you miss class on a day when there is an exam, you miss the exam, which will hurt your grade. **Please read the policy below under “Classroom Etiquette and Make-up Work”.**

Presentations

At the beginning of the semester I will divide the class into groups of 4. **Each group will have 2 presentations worth 5 points each.** One of the presentations will be during the first half of the semester, the other will be during the second half. Your task will be to present material covered in the textbook. The presentations will be at least 15 minutes long. I will assign specific content to your group so that you know just what to cover and will ensure that your audience is friendly and helpful. Your group will be graded on a 0-5 scale. You can find a detailed description of the assignment in Blackboard. **Please see the rubric on presentations at the end of the syllabus.**

Writing

There will be one paper. It will require a clear representation of an argument advanced by one of the philosophers we cover in the course and a critical discussion of that argument. Your writing will be graded on the basis of your demonstrated understanding of the course material and your ability to respond to an argument with an illuminating critical observation. You can find a detailed description of the assignment in Blackboard. **Please see the rubric for the paper at the end of the syllabus.**

Grade Scale

The grade scale for the course will be as follows:

- 90% to 100%: A
- 80% to 89%: B
- 70% to 79%: C
- 60% to 69%: D
- 0% to 59%: F

Classroom Etiquette and Make-up Work

I strongly encourage you to be a full participant in class discussion and group work. Don't worry about getting something wrong. If something is unclear to you, it is probably unclear to several other people, and your input may well help us focus in on the difficulty. Voicing your opinion, putting an idea on the table for examination, or just asking a question can be very helpful in a class discussion. **Always remember to be civil towards people who have different beliefs from yours.**

Missing class on a day when there is an exam is not something that can be taken lightly because of fairness and exam security. The final exam is cumulative and can count twice to replace a “0” on an exam. You should consider it very unlikely that you will be able to make up a missed exam. I can allow such make-up work only if your circumstances are truly extreme and you provide proper documentation in a reasonable amount of time. Excusable absences include absence due to documented medical emergencies and deaths in the family. Telling me that you were sick or having a roommate write a note will not count as documentation. A conflict with prior travel plans does not constitute an excuse.

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism includes copying and submitting as your own a passage from a text, the work of a fellow student; handing in a paper prepared by another as your own; using sources for writing your paper and not citing them in the paper. Plagiarism does cover materials found on web-sites. Note that it is possible to plagiarize even if you cite your sources, if, e.g., the wording is too close to the cited text.

If, in writing a paper, you have any questions about what counts as plagiarism or how to avoid plagiarism, please discuss the paper with me before turning it in.

CLEAR EVIDENCE OF PLAGIARISM OR ANY OTHER FORM OF CHEATING WILL RESULT IN AN AUTOMATIC FAILING GRADE FOR THE ENTIRE COURSE, AND YOU WILL BE REPORTED TO THE DEAN OF STUDENTS FOR POSSIBLE FURTHER DISCIPLINARY PENALTY

For more information on plagiarism (and other forms of academic dishonesty), go to

http://valenciacollege.edu/generalcounsel/policy/default.cfm?policyID=193&volumeID_1=8&navst=0

Students with Disabilities

If you have a disabling condition that may interfere with your ability to successfully complete this course, please register with Office for Students with Disabilities:

<http://valenciacollege.edu/osd/>

They will provide you with the proper documentation for you to show your instructors if you request accommodations.

Topics and Readings

Our pace will depend to some extent on how quickly you grasp the material. As a result, it is not easy to predict when a given reading will be assigned. Therefore, the readings will be assigned as we go, and we may not get to every selection listed. Some of the selections are not in your textbook and will be available in Blackboard. Those are marked below with an (e).

1. Moral Reasons and Objectivity

John Stewart Mill: Utilitarianism

Immanuel Kant: *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*
Philippa Foot: *Virtues and Vices*.
J. L. Mackie: *The Subjectivity of Values* (e)
Michael Smith: *Realism* (e)

2. Life and Death

James Rachels: *Active and Passive Euthanasia*
Winston Nesbitt: *Is Killing No Worse Than Letting Die?* (e)
Helga Kuhse: *Why Killing is Not Always Worse—and Sometimes Better—than Letting Die* (e)
Judith Jarvis Thomson: *A Defense of Abortion*
Michael Tooley: *Abortion and Infanticide* (e)

3. Justice and Equality

Peter Singer: *All Animals are Equal*
Immanuel Kant: *Duties toward Animals* (e)
Ernest van den Haag: *The Ultimate Punishment: A Defense*
Hugo Bedau: *How to Argue About the Death Penalty*
Norman Daniels: *Is There a Right to Health Care, and, if So, What Does it Encompass?* (e)

4. Charity

Onora O'Neill: *Kantian Deliberations on Famine Problems* (e)
Peter Singer: *Famine, Affluence, and Morality*

5. War, Terrorism, and Torture

Jean Bethke Elshtain: *What Is a Terrorist?*
Michael Walzer: *The Triumph of Just War Theory (and the Dangers of Success)*.
Howard Zinn: *Hiroshima and Royan* (e)
Howard Zinn: *Vietnam: the Moral Equation* (e)

Scoring Rubric for Oral Presentations

	Satisfactory	Needs Improvement
PRESENCE	1	0
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demonstrated appropriate body language• Maintained eye contact with audience• Spoke with appropriate volume• Demonstrated poise		
LANGUAGE SKILLS	1	0
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Used vocabulary and good grammar• Spoke rather than read• Spoke with appropriate volume• Presented appropriate background information		
ORGANIZATION	1	0
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stated clear objectives• Gave information a logical structure• Used signposting/transitions		
MASTERY OF THE SUBJECT	1	0
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Presented only pertinent information• Provided appropriate depth of commentary• Was able to answer questions		
VISUAL AIDS	1	0
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Used appropriate transparencies, slides, handouts, etc.• Used appropriate audio, video, etc.		

TOTAL SCORE _____ / 5

COMMENTS:

Scoring Rubric for Papers

	Good	Satisfactory	Needs Improvement
FOLLOWED INSTRUCTIONS.....	2	1	0
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explained an argument from one of the specified course readings • Criticized the argument • Considered possible replies • Assessed the replies 			
LANGUAGE SKILLS.....	2	1	0
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used appropriate vocabulary and good grammar • Wrote clearly • Presented appropriate background information 			
ORGANIZATION.....	2	1	0
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stated clear objectives • Gave information a logical structure • Used signposting/transitions 			
MASTERY OF THE SUBJECT.....	2	1	0
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Represented the author’s argument accurately • Presented relevant course material accurately 			
CRITICISM AND COMMENTARY.....	2	1	0
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presented a criticism that engages the author • Addressed possible replies • Furthered the discussion 			

TOTAL SCORE _____ / 10

COMMENTS: