# Ethics: Syllabus (Summer 2021)

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| Instructor | Brendan Shea, PhD (call me “Brendan”.) | Course number | PHIL 1125-72 |
| Contact Info (email preferred) | [Brendan.Shea@rctc.edu](mailto:Brendan.Shea@rctc.edu)  (507) 722-1146 | Prerequisites | None |
| Class Time | Online | Class location | Online |
| Office Hours | M W Th 12 to 1 via Zoom. Link will be available on D2L. | Office location | M2403Q |

**Description.** This course examines the problems that arise when human beings attempt to think systematically about conduct and values. It includes a survey of historical and contemporary views about the right and the good, moral character, and social justice. Students will learn to apply moral theories, concepts, and principles to real-world ethical issues and cases. (3 cr)

**Brendan’s Note:** I know the syllabus is long, but I’ve tried to include the things you might need to refer to over the course of the semester. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns about the class (either while reading the syllabus or later). I’m excited to have you in the class!

**Outline of major content areas:**

1. Introduction to Ethics
   1. Basic Methods of Ethics
   2. Subjectivism, Relativism, and Realism
   3. The Challenge of Egoism
   4. Ethics and Religion
2. Ethical Theory
   1. Consequentialism/Utilitarianism
   2. Deontology/Kantian ethics
   3. Virtue or Care Ethics
   4. Other Theories as Appropriate
3. One or More Topics from the Following Areas:
   1. Applied Ethics
   2. Social and Political Philosophy
   3. Metaethics
   4. Moral Psychology
   5. History of Ethics

**Learning Outcomes (General):** The student will be able to:

1. Identify and explain the major areas of ethical inquiry.
2. Analyze moral concepts, principles and theories.
3. Identify conclusions and premises in moral arguments.
4. Apply ethical theories to concrete situations.
5. Formulate their own moral positions and justify them in written arguments.

**Learning Outcomes (Mntc):**

Goal 6/The Humanities-the Arts, Literature, and Philosophy: The student will be able to:

1. Demonstrate awareness of the scope and variety of works in the arts and humanities.
2. Understand those works as expressions of individual and human values within a historical and social context.
3. Respond critically to works in the arts and humanities.

Goal 9/Ethical and Civic Responsibility: The student will be able to:

1. Examine, articulate, and apply their own ethical views.
2. Understand and apply core concepts (e.g. politics, rights and obligations, justice, liberty) to specific issues.
3. Analyze and reflect on the ethical dimensions of legal, social, and scientific issues.

**RCTC Core Outcomes Addressed:**

*Personal and Professional Accountability.* Students will take responsibility as active learners for achieving their educational and personal goals.

## Course Materials

* All of the course readings are available through <http://www.perusall.com>.
  + You can create a free account here: <https://app.perusall.com/accounts/register>.
  + To join this class, enter the following code: **SHEA-2L2E8.**
  + You’ll need to rent our course textbook through perusall (either by using a code from the RCTC bookstore or by using a credit card). The first few readings are free, so you won’t need to do this immediately.
  + The actual text is: Cahn, Stephen M. 2019. *Exploring Ethics: An Introductory Anthology.* 5th edition (New York: Oxford University Press)
* This course will require that you have reliable, regular access the course D2L site to submit work, get access to course readings, etc.

## Grading and Course Policies

Your final grade is a weighted average of the following:

* **Perusall.com Annotations (20%).**  For each of the class readings, you will have the chance to “annotate” the text together with your classmates. More details on what is required of annotations (and how they are graded) are provided in a separate document. These annotations will generally be due on **Mondays,** **Tuesdays**, and **Thursdays.**
* **Quizzes (20%).** Most weeks, there will be a short D2L quiz covering the week’s reading, videos, and lecture notes. There is no time limit for these quizzes, but they will generally take no more than 1 hour if you are familiar with the week’s material. You’ll have two chances to do each quiz, and only your highest score will count. Quizzes will generally be due on **Fridays.**
* **Two Essay Exams (30% each; 60% total).** There will be two essay exams in the class, each of which will consist of THREE short essays. You’ll have around one week to work on each exam
* **Extra Credit.** There may be occasional opportunities for extra credit, which I will announce to the whole class. For reasons of fairness, I can’t offer extra credit opportunities to individual students, so please don’t ask.

**Plagiarism and Academic Integrity.** Your work should be your own—please don’t use your classmates, friends, parents, or the internet to help you write your papers or answer test questions. If the preponderance of the evidence suggests that plagiarism has occurred (that is, if it seems *more likely than not)*, you will lead to a failing grade for the assignment. A second violation will lead to failing grade for the course. Please consult the school’s policies (search “conduct policies” on the website).

**Attendance.** Students in face-to-face classes are expected to attend class regularly, while online students are expected to participate in the class discussions and activities. If you miss more than two weeks consecutively, or 1/3 of the total class sessions/assignments, you may receive a failing grade of FW. This may endanger your ability to receive financial aid. With this in mind, it is *your* responsibility to withdraw from the class if you decide not to continue. I am willing to make exceptions if circumstances require, but you need to let me know about these in a timely manner.

## Policy on Late Work

If you a quiz or activity due to a brief sickness, work conflict, class trip, computer malfunction, wedding, auto problem, court date, funeral, sporting event, etc., you do NOT need to email me, and it is your responsibility to determine what you missed. Here are my policies for making up missed or late work:

* You can submit Perusall annotations up to TWO DAYS (48 hours) late, with credit declining linearly. So, you’ll lose about 2% (1/48) if you submit annotations an hour late, and 98% if you submit them 47 hours late (47/48).
* Quizzes can be submitted up to 2 days late. If you submit all the quizzes on time, I’ll give you +1% extra credit.
* Take-home exams CANNOT be made up for full credit. Exam 1 (but not exam 2) can submitted late. If it is less than 3 days (72 hours) late, the grade will be capped at 90%. If it is less than 1 week late, the grade will be capped at 80%.
* I will make exceptions to this policy if you can demonstrate a genuine need. Please come talk to me if anything comes up that is preventing you from succeeding in class.

## *RCTC Common Policies*

*This course will be taught in accordance with the following policies, which apply to ALL RCTC courses. If you have any questions about these, please let me know!*

***Academic Integrity Statement***

*The primary academic mission of Rochester Community and Technical College (RCTC) is the exploration and dissemination of knowledge, and academic honesty and integrity are integral to the academic process. Academic dishonesty - cheating, plagiarism, and collusion - is a serious offense which undermines the educational process and the learning experience for the entire college community. RCTC students are expected to understand and adhere to the concept of academic integrity and to the standards of conduct prescribed by the College’s* [*Academic*](https://www.rctc.edu/policies/education/academic-integrity/)[*Integrity Policy.*](https://www.rctc.edu/policies/education/academic-integrity/) *Any act of academic dishonesty attempted by a student at Rochester Community and Technical College is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.*

***Americans with Disability Act***

*Rochester Community and Technical College is committed to ensuring its programs, services and activities are accessible to individuals with disabilities, through its compliance with state and federal laws, and* [*System Policy*](http://www.minnstate.edu/board/policy/1b04.html)*. Appropriate accommodations are provided to those qualified students with disabilities. If you believe you qualify for an academic accommodation, please contact the Director of Disability Support Services, Travis Kromminga at 507-280-2968 or through the Minnesota relay TTY 1-800-627-3529. The office can also be reached via e-mail at* [*DisabilityServices@rctc.edu*](mailto:DisabilityServices@rctc.edu)

***Military Friendly Statement***

*Rochester Community and Technical College (RCTC) is a military friendly campus, pledging to do all we can to help military veterans transition into college to complete their educational goals. RCTC is proud to be a Beyond the Yellow Ribbon campus, serving and honoring our veterans, military service members and their families. Through the Veterans Resource Center, RCTC offers student veterans an on‐campus point of contact with other veterans, and program information to assist them in making a successful transition into college. For assistance, students are encouraged to contact the Veterans Assistant Coordinator, Mark Larsen, at 507‐779-9375 or e‐mail at* [*mark.larsen@state.mn.us,*](mailto:mark.larsen@state.mn.us) *or Othelmo da Silva, RCTC’s VA certifying official at 507-280-7566 or email at* [*VeteranServices@rctc.edu.*](mailto:VeteranServices@rctc.edu)

***Title IX Statement***

*Sexual violence and other forms of sexual misconduct is prohibited at Minnesota State colleges and universities (Minnesota State). Any individual who has been, or is being, subjected to conduct prohibited by the Sexual Violence Policy is encouraged to report the incident. Individuals may choose to file a complaint anonymously using the online reporting tool (*[*https://www.rctc.edu/services/student-affairs/sexual-violence/*](https://www.rctc.edu/services/student-affairs/sexual-violence/)*). Individuals who choose to file anonymous reports are advised that it may be difficult for the college to follow up or take specific action, where information is limited. For additional information please see the RCTC Sexual Violence Policy,* [*http://www.rctc.edu/policies/system/sexual-violence*](http://www.rctc.edu/policies/system/sexual-violence) *or contact Rebecca Peine, Title IX Coordinator, at 507-285- 7195 or email at* [*TitleIX@rctc.edu.*](mailto:TitleIX@rctc.edu)

## Reading and Writing about Philosophy

Reading and writing about philosophy can highly rewarding (and even fun!), but it also can be difficult, even for people with lots of experience (even professional philosophers still find it difficult sometimes!). With this in mind, here are my expectations/suggestions with regard to the level of reading/writing in this class:

1. Philosophy as a discipline doesn’t require any “special” academic background, and philosophers have come from almost every imaginable profession: stonemasons, mathematicians, teachers, physicians, etc. However, philosophy does require the ability to ask “uncomfortable” questions about one’s own beliefs and actions, and to take seriously arguments and ideas that disagree with our own most deeply held beliefs.
2. Before starting this class, you should be confident in your ability to read and understand a college-level textbook. This does NOT mean I expect you to grasp every concept/idea right away (I know that some of this stuff is pretty tricky, and that’s why I am here to help!). However, I do expect that you will read the textbook BEFORE you come to class (or post to the discussion board, etc.), and come away with a basic understanding of main ideas. If you’re unsure about your ability to do this, get in touch with me *early* in the class so we can discuss this.
3. On average, students should expect to spend about five minutes per standard textbook page of philosophical reading, which includes the following:
   1. “Pre-reading” the chapter or article to get a sense of the structure, headings, key terms, etc.
   2. Reading the chapter carefully, stopping to take notes at least every page or so. At the minimum, your notes should include major topics addressed, definitions of key terms, important arguments or objections to arguments, and notable examples.
   3. Taking time to review the material AFTER you have finished reading a section. Basically: spend 5-10 minutes trying to review what you have learned WITHOUT looking at the text or your notes. This can help you get a better sense of what you’ve grasped well, and what you still need to work on. Research has also found that this is a key step in actually being able to remember/use the information in the future.
   4. As a general rule, techniques like highlighting or rereading are NOT very effective unless they are carefully limited. So, you don’t want to be highlighting every other sentence, or trying to re-read a whole chapter. Try to limit your highlighting to just key points, and keep your rereading constrained to parts that genuinely confuse you.
   5. I would recommend taking a brief “reading break” every 20 to 30 minutes.
4. As part of the class, you will be expected to write extended, argumentative essays. While you will be learning a bit more about how to write these, you should already be aware of basic principles of composition such as the use of **thesis statements,** how to organize your essays into **paragraphs,** and the importance of **citing** your sources using standard forms such as MLA, APA, Chicago, etc. If it has been a while since you have done this, don’t worry! There are a number of excellent resources that you can review online. I particularly recommend the Purdue Online Writing Lab (<https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html>). I’d also encourage you to look at the “Guide to Writing Philosophy Papers”, prepared by RCTC Philosophy Faculty (<https://philpapers.org/go.pl?id=SHEHTW&u=https%3A%2F%2Fphilpapers.org%2Farchive%2FSHEHTW.pdf>)
5. All told, you should be prepared to spend around 100 to 150 hours total on this three-credit class (or 6 to 9 hours per week for a 16-week semester). Very roughly (and this will vary by student), this might break down as something like the following: (a) 30-40 hours on reading, note-taking, and completing quizzes, (b) 15-20 hours working on the exams, and (c) 30-40 hours attending class (or, for online students, reading lecture notes and writing discuss board posts, etc.).

## Getting in touch with me (and what to include in an Email)

The best way to get ahold of me is by e-mail, which I will aim to respond to within ONE working day (for simple questions) or TWO working days (for more complex ones). I don’t generally check email on the weekends or holidays. If you don’t hear from me by then, please try emailing me again. In order to help me provide you with quick, effective feedback, here’s a general template for what I expect in an email.

*Dear Brendan (or Professor Shea):*

*My name is [full name], and I’m a student in [this section] of [this class]. I had a question regarding [identify quiz, textbook chapter, etc. Be specific, and include a copy of anything I might need to answer your question, including the full problem text, if applicable]. Here’s everything I’ve tried so far to figure out the answer for myself [looked at the syllabus, notes, textbook, etc.], and here’s my best guess as to the answer. Could you help me by doing the following? [Be specific in what you are asking me to do.] [Feel free to include anything else you’d like here. I’m always happy when students send along ideas/links/whatever vaguely relating to ethics and philosophy 😊]/*

As I rule, I will not respond to requests that you be exempted from class policies without very good reason (e.g., for late-work extensions outside the conditions outlined above), or to emails that lack basic identifying information (your full name, class, etc.). For long or complex questions, I highly encourage you to schedule an appointment so that we can talk (either in person or by phone). Oh, and please don’t call me Mr. Shea (That’s my dad!).

## Resources for Student success

Some helpful resources at RCTC (all of which are included with your course tuition) include the following:

* **Student Support Services/TRIO (SS 159)** provides academic support for first-generation and low-income college students, as well as those with documented disabilities.
* **Drop-in Tutoring (AT 306)** is available free of charge to *all* RCTC students. Please take advantage of it!
* **Online Tutoring** is available at [www.tutor.com](http://www.tutor.com), accessible via D2L (so, don’t go directly to the website—instead, log on to the main RCTC D2L page, and look for the link). This online tutoring option also includes a form where you can submit a paper for review (there is something like a 12-hour turn around).

## Course Calendar

The topics are indicated below. Each topic will have both an associated Perusall assignment, as well as lecture notes.

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| Week Starting | Monday | Tuesday | Thursday | Friday |
| 7/4/2021 | ---- | Syllabus  Plato, “Euthyphro” (due Wed) | Plato, “Crito” (due Fri) | Quiz 1 (due Sunday) |
| 7/11/2021 | MLK, “Letter from Birmingham Jail” | Relativism and Egoism | Kantian Ethics | Quiz 2 |
| 7/18/2021 | Utilitarian Ethics | Virtue Ethics | Natural Law | **Exam 1 Due** (Sunday) |
| 7/25/2021 | Abortion | Animals | Immigration | Quiz 3 |
| 8/1/2021 | Racism and Sexism | The Meaning of Life | Quiz 4 | **Exam 2 Due** |