Ethics (Summer 2022)

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| Instructor | Brendan Shea, Ph.D. | Course number | PHIL 1125-71 |
| Contact Info | [Brendan.Shea@rctc.edu](mailto:Brendan.Shea@rctc.edu)  507-722-1146 | Prerequisites | None (However, this is a college-level class, so you should be comfortable with reading college-level texts and writing responses to these. See below for more details.) |
| Office | M2403Q | Class location | Online |
| Zoom Office Hours | Tu We Th 12 to 2 | Class time | Asynchronous |
| **Class Zoom Link** | <https://minnstate.zoom.us/j/99874991922> Passcode: 312566 | | |

Welcome to PHIL 1125: Ethics! I’m your instructor, Brendan Shea (I prefer “Brendan”; “Dr. Shea” or “Prof. Shea” work if you are feeling formal). This is the syllabus for the course. If you have short questions that are NOT answered here, email is generally the best way to get ahold of me. For more detailed questions about the class, I’d encourage you to talk to me during office hours (either in person or over the phone), or to set up an appointment.

**Course 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. (Prerequisites: None).

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# Course Content and Learning Outcomes

**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.** This course contributes to meeting the following RCTC Core Learning Outcome(s):

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

# Required and Recommended Course Materials

* I’ve written and compiled a free course reader that lives on <http://wws.persuall.com> . You’ll be able to access it directly via D2L.
* This course will require that you have reliable, regular internet access (to complete online quizzes, etc.).

# Grading and Course Policies

**Grading Scale:**: >=90.0 (A), 80.0-89.9 (B), 70.0 -79.9 (C), 60.0-69.9 (D), <60 (F).

Your final grade is a weighted average of the following:

* **D2L Quizzes (15% total).** These quizzes will consist of a number of “objective” (T/F, matching, multiple-choice) questions covering the reading and notes. You’ll have THREE chances to take each quiz; only your highest score counts.
* **Short Essays (40% total).** These 500- to 1000-word assignments will give you a chance to explain and apply class material. More details are provided below.
* **Perusall Reading Assignments (30% total).** You’ll receive credit for taking the time to read and comment on the course textbook on [www.perusall.com](http://www.perusall.com). You’ll receive full credit if you take the time to read each page thoroughly, leave a good comment every few pages, and interact with the comments of other students. See below for more on how these are graded.
* **Final Portfolio/Reflection (15%).** Your final portfolio reflection will offer you the chance to show me what you’ve learned in the class.
* **Extra Credit.** There may be occasional opportunities for extra credit, which I will let you know about. 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, internet sites, etc. to help you write your papers or answer test questions. And when you do use outside sources, make sure to given appropriate citation and acknowledgment for any words, ideas, or arguments. If the preponderance of the evidence suggests cheating has occurred (that is, if the evidence suggests that this is *more likely than not)*, you will receive a failing grade on the assignment. A second violation will lead to failing grade for the course. Please also see the RCTC statement on academic integrity later in the syllabus.

**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, 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.

**Signature Assessment: Ethics in Practice:** The signature assessment for PHIL 1125: Bioethics is a written assignment of between 1200 and 3000 total words. This assessment is part of ALL Ethics classes here at RCTC, though it may be in the form of a paper, a series of discussion board posts or journal entries, or a written exam. In the assignment, the student should demonstrate the ability to:

1. Explain and apply theoretical principles and ideas of ethics. This might include, but are not limited to, ideas about utility, autonomy, theories of justice, legal/moral rights, virtues, or the ethics of care.
2. Present a cogent argument related to a debate within ethical theory, applied ethics, the history of ethics, metaethics, social and political philosophy, or moral psychology.
3. Take into account multiple perspectives, and to recognize potential objections and alternatives.

For this class, the FINAL PORTFOLIO has been designated as the signature assessment (This is NOT an additional assignment, and it doesn’t require that you do anything extra.).

# Policy on Late Work

**Please read the following *before* e-mailing me to request an extension on an assignment.** 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 (though it’s fine if you want to give me a heads up). Here are my policies for making up missed or late work:

1. Quizzes can be submitted up to three days late with no penalty. There will be no further extensions without very good reason.
2. Perusall reading assignments can be submitted up to two days late for reduced credit. Credit declines “linearly” (basically, if you submit it 1 minute late, you get 99.9% of the credit; if you submit it 2.5 days late, you’ll get almost no credit).
3. Short essays submitted up to 3 days late will have the score capped at 90%, and those submitted 3 to 7 days late will have their score capped at 80%.
4. The final portfolio cannot be submitted late.

I will make exceptions to these policies if you can demonstrate a genuine need. Please come talk to me if anything comes up that is preventing you from succeeding in class. NO LATE WORK WILL BE ACCEPTED DURING THE LAST WEEK OF CLASS (again, absent exceptional circumstances).

# 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 to provide quality learning opportunities for students. Acts of academic dishonesty undermine the educational process and the learning experience for the student and our college community. It is the responsibility of the student to complete their academic requirements with integrity and not engage in acts of cheating, plagiarism, or collusion. The College expects that students are submitting work and materials that reflects their individual learning and efforts within their course, program, and college academic requirements. It is expected that RCTC students will understand and adhere to the concept of academic integrity and to the standards of conduct outlined within this policy. Students who are found to have engaged in an act of academic dishonesty may face academic sanctions through the Academic Integrity Procedure and non-academic misconduct sanctions through the Code of Student Conduct.

**Americans with Disabilities 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. 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 [travis.kromminga@rctc.edu](mailto:travis.kromminga@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, or Othelmo da Silva, RCTC’s VA certifying official at 507-285-7566 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/>). 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> or contact Rebecca Peine, Title IX Coordinator, at 507-285- 7195 or email at [TitleIX@rctc.edu](mailto:TitleIX@rctc.edu).

# Guidelines for Perusall Reading Assignments

I’ve developed a free textbook for this class, which combines my lecture notes with selected readings. It lives on [www.perusall.com](http://www.perusall.com), and links to it will be provided through D2L. So, what is perusall.com? Basically, it is “social reading” site, where you can “comment” on texts, and read and respond to the comments left by other students (as well as by me).

Here are some details from their website:

*Perusall helps you* ***learn faster*** *by collaboratively annotating the readings and communicating with your classmates. Collaboration gets you help whenever you need it, makes learning more fun, enables you to help others (which research shows is also a great way for you to learn), and helps the instructor make class better by emphasizing information that you need.*

*If you have a question or information to share about a passage in the readings, highlight the text and type in a comment as an annotation. You can also respond to a classmate’s annotation in threads (Facebook style) in real time or upvote questions you find helpful. Good annotations contribute to the class by stimulating discussion, explaining your thought processes, helping others, and drawing attention to good points. If a particular classmate’s point is relevant, you can explicitly "mention" them and they will be immediately notified, even if not presently signed on.*

*Research shows that the following behaviors on Perusall predict higher end-of-semester grades and long term mastery of the subject. Your instructor may use some or all to determine your formal score.*

1. *Contributing thoughtful questions and comments to the class discussion, spread throughout the entire reading (*[*see some examples*](https://perusall.com/downloads/scoring-examples.pdf)*)*
2. *Starting the reading early*
3. *Breaking the reading into chunks (instead of trying to do it all at once)*
4. *Reading all the way to the end of the assigned reading*
5. *Posing thoughtful questions and comments that elicit responses from classmates*
6. *Answering questions from others*
7. *Upvoting thoughtful questions and helpful answers*

In this class, Perusall assignments will be graded between 0 and 3 points. Perusall will occasionally try to give you “advice” on how to increase your score. You should listen to it!

# 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!).

# Short Essays: How to Write Them and How They are Graded

You’ll have the chance to write a number of short essays for the course. Here’s a bit more about what this will entail, and how they are graded.

1. Each essay should be between **500** and **1000 words.** I won’t penalize you for going over, though please make an effort to be concise as is possible, given the material. Basically, make things “as simple as possible, but no simpler.”
   1. A-level essays are often (though not always!) closer to 1,000 words than to 500 words.
2. Material I’ve provided you with in our “textbook” (which contains both my lecture notes and other readings) can be cited informally by identify the chapter, page, and author (if needed). If you choose to use outside resources, please use a standard citation style (such as APA, MLA, or Chicago), and provide a full citation. As a rule, **no more than 15%** of your paper should be quotes.
3. Please don’t use the words or ideas of others without proper attribution. Please see the syllabus for details on the policy regarding **plagiarism and academic integrity.** I regularly use [www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com) to check for plagiarism or related issues.
4. Since the goal of the exam is to demonstrate how well *you* understand the class material, you should try to **use your own words and examples to explain what you’ve learned.** Essays that simply reproduce the handouts will not receive good grades. Nor will essays that simply “give your thoughts” on an issue (without demonstrating knowledge of the class material, and the ability to apply it to novel cases).
5. Please submit your essays as MS Word files. I will grade them on a **first-submitted, first-graded** basis.

## Essay Grading Rubric

Each essay is worth FIVE points. Your grade will depend on how well you do each of the following:

1. How well are you able to **explain** and **apply** the relevant course material? By the end of the essay, the reader should come away with a clear idea of what you’ve learned in the class, and how it applies to whatever problem/issue you are writing about.
2. To what extent does your essay offer a coherent and creative response to the problem/question? In an argumentative essay, for example, you should make an (evidence-based) **argument** for a **thesis,** and make sure to fully consider any potential **objections.**

Factors such as your paper’s **structure** (e.g. intro/body paragraphs/conclusion) and **language** (e.g. grammar, style) are important to the extent they influence the above. The grading criteria are as follows

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| --- | --- |
| Grade | Description |
| *0* | No answer submitted, or evidence of plagiarism. |
| *3 or below (D or F)* | Fails to meet minimal requirements in terms of content (e.g., addresses a related question) or word count. Essays that simply report what you “believe” or “feel,” without providing an *argument* may receive grades in this range. |
| *C (3.5 points)* | Meets minimal requirements in terms of both content (it offers an answer the assigned question, and attempts to defend this answer) and word count. However, there may be some significant errors or omissions when it comes to the explanation of relevant class material, or providing a detailed, complete response to the question. |
| *B (4 points)* | Fully meets both content and word count requirements, and provides satisfactory explanations of relevant arguments and concepts from class. There are no majorerrors in argumentation or explanatory gaps. However, explanations/examples/arguments may at points suffer from lack of clarity or completeness in comparison to A essays. |
| *A (5 points)* | Meets and exceeds minimal requirements. The essay’s treatment of course material shows a full mastery of the relevant content, and provides a creative, well-thought-out response to it. |

I will grade essays in the order they are submitted (first-come, first-serve).

## Tips on Writing Philosophy

Philosophy essays can be a bit different from other sorts of writing. However, from past students have told me, they’re not actually that bad, once you start writing them! Here are some general tips:

1. You should have an **introduction** that concisely introduces the topic, and a **thesis sentence** that clearly states your position. Philosophy papers often begin with theses of the form “I will argue X because Y.”
2. When discussing tough ethical or philosophical issues, **avoid phrases like “I feel,” “I think,” or “I believe.”** Part of taking these issues seriously involves granting that one’s actions and beliefs have consequences for other people, and that (for this reason) they need to be defended with the sorts of ***arguments*** and ***reasons*** that these other people could actually accept. For this reason, appeals to your *own* emotions, religious beliefs, etc. are generally (though not always) inappropriate.
3. Pretend you are writing to **an intelligent and interested (but relatively ignorant) 12-year-old** who doesn’t know anything about the subject (rather than your philosophy professor). This means you’ll need to write clearly, explain new concepts, and offer interesting, memorable examples. A significant portion of your grade will be based on your ability to explain the arguments/concepts we’ve been studying using your own words and examples.
4. Your essay should have multiple paragraphs, each of which has a clear **topic sentence** that clearly relates back to your thesis. When writing philosophy, it’s easy to get “off topic.” So, always ask yourself: is this paragraph helping me provide evidence for my thesis? If the answer is “no,” it should be cut or revised.
5. You should always consider possible **objections** to your thesis. Ask yourself: “How would a smart, well-educated opponent respond to my argument?” In some cases, this might be a real author who you can cite; in other cases, you’ll have to play your own “devil’s advocate.”
6. The conclusion should help the reader appreciate the way your argument fits into the “big picture.” For example, what exactly do you take yourself to have shown? How does this relate to similar cases? What might be the “next step” of this argument be, if you had more time and space?

# 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

Here is the course calendar. I’ll update you via D2L if anything changes. The chapter numbers refer to the online course reader. Unless otherwise noted, for each chapter you’ll need to complete BOTH a Perusall assignment AND a reading quiz.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Week | Week Starting | Mon | Wed | Fri | Sunday |
| 1 | 7/3 |  | Class Begins (Tuesday)  Syllabus | Ch.1 Intro to Ethics | Short Essay 1 |
| 2 | 7/10 | Ch. 2 Civil Disobedience and Race | Ch. 3 Relativism and Existential Ethics | Ch. 4 Utilitarianism and Animals | Short Essay 2 |
| 3 | 7/17 | Ch. 5 Kant and Deontology | Ch. 6 Virtue Ethics | Ethics at the Movies | Short Essay 3 |
| 4 | 7/24 | Ch 7 Religion and Ethics | Ch 8 Social Contract Theory | Ch 9 Political Philosophy | Short Essay 4 |
| 5 | 7/31 | Ch 10 Sex and Gender | **Final Portfolio Due** | End of Class |  |