

Brief Course Outline

Course Title: Introduction to Ethics & Value Theory

Course Number and Section

PHILOSOP

2700F 550

Instructor Name(s): Emerson Doyle

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Disclaimer: Information in the brief course outline is subject to change. The syllabus posted on OWL Brightspace is the official and authoritative source of information for the course.

Course Description:

Value Theory studies why we value certain things or ideals over others, and ultimately, what we should value most highly. Traditionally this study focuses upon an understanding of “The Good” and our access to it in the most abstract or broadest sense. More recent work focuses upon understanding our use of evaluative language: What makes something better than something else, or the worst? Is Knowledge valuable for its own sake, or only for what consequences it brings about? Similarly for Beauty, Truth, or Pleasure? What about Money and Popularity? Is there a difference in kind between the uses of ‘good’ when I say “You’re a good person” versus when I say “This ice cream is good”?

Ethics is concerned to study and recommend principles of right action. What should we do in such-and-such a situation? What would be the moral thing to do? Some argue that such principles should have an objective foundation. Others argue that our attitudes toward how to act rightly are determined mainly by circumstance—cultures, intuitions, evolution, etc.—so that the principles by which we judge action are not absolute. Presumably in either case, such principles will be somehow related to the values people hold in highest regard.

We’ll examine these issues by considering some of the premier theories of value and of right action in the Western philosophical tradition. We’ll also consider more carefully the relationship between ethics and value theory, and explore applications of our analyses to some of the difficult moral questions facing humanity today.

Learning Outcomes: one outcome per entry

Develop an understanding of some of the most influential and prominent positions on the questions and topics outlined above.

Practice confronting and critically evaluating our own attitudes or intuitions toward morality in general and on some difficult practical moral questions in particular.

Improve your writing, critical analysis, and argumentative abilities.

Learning how to confidently and successfully approach and read academic material -- How to Actively Read.

Textbooks and Course Materials:

All course readings will be posted on OWL.

Methods of Evaluation: one assignment per entry

Assignment	Due Date mm/dd/yy	Weight - %
Weekly Discussion Responses	Weekly	30
Critical Analysis Assignment	11/04/26	20
Case Study Assignment	12/2/26	20
Final Exam	Fall Exam Period	30

Thursday, August 13, 2026

Huron Brief Course Outline 2026/27

In-course Costs \$000.00

For Textbooks and Course Materials (below), you are required to include the cost of each textbook or other learning material.

Note whether there are any restrictions that would prevent a student from using a second-hand copy. Here is some suggested text:

- Required textbook: [author, title, edition, publisher, date]. Cost: [insert amount].
 - Or include the weblink of the textbook’s publisher site that includes the cost information.
- Students need to purchase this edition. Second-hand or older editions will not be sufficient.
- OR Students are welcome to purchase second-hand or earlier editions of this textbook.
- This course has an optional field trip that costs [insert amount].
- This course has a required field component that costs [insert amount].

In solidarity with the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, and Chonnonton peoples on whose traditional treaty and unceded territories this course is shared.