

Intro to Ethics & Value Theory

June 15-July 24, 2026 [6 weeks] (Summer Evening)

Dr. Jonathan P. Marsh jmarsh26@uwo.ca

Zoom Sessions: Tu and Th at 6:30 pm [see comment box at the bottom of this page]

Virtual Office Hours: Directly after our Zoom meetings.

Description

We are going to be asking two questions:

Q1. What is the nature of right and wrong? More specifically, what, if anything, do all morally “right” actions have in common that “wrong” actions lack?

Q2. What, if anything, do all “good” (happy, meaningful) lives have in common?

In response to the first question, we’ll compare answers from UTILITARIANISM, KANTIAN ETHICS, and NATURAL LAW, in **Unit 1**, and apply them to a number of controversies—concerning, for instance, our obligations in connection with the poor, PVS patients, and non-human animals.

In **Unit 2**, we shall survey some recent criticisms of these traditions.

Finally, moving on to the second question, in **Unit 3**, we’ll discuss rival accounts of happiness (aka well-being).

Prerequisite(s): None **Anti-requisite(s):** [Governance, Leadership and Ethics 2002F/G](#).
3 hours. This course is cross listed as [GLE 2002F/G](#) when offered at Huron Campus only.

Technical Requirements

Stable internet connection

Computer, Webcam & Microsoft Office



(Chromebook devices may not fully support PowerPoint voice recordings).

Recording Rule

To respect the privacy and confidentiality of all members of this class, no videos, pictures, or voice recordings please, except where **(i)** recording is an approved accommodation and **(ii)** you’ve received the instructor’s written permission — as the class must be notified, in full confidentiality, when recording is taking place.

Text & Costs

There is no textbook for this course. And there no anticipated course-specific costs other than a possible movie rental. Any readings will be made available



*This fully online course will contain a mixture of synchronous and asynchronous learning methods. All synchronous (i.e., live Zoom) sessions will take place at the Tuesday and Thursday start times above. Zoom meetings will never last a full 3 hours. As an alternative, students will be given material to prepare for those sessions, asynchronously, at their own discretion. Weekly checklists will be made available on OWL Brightspace. **Note:** if you are working outside of Huron’s local time zone, and if joining our meetings would be unduly burdensome (e.g., would take place at 2:30 AM for you), please see the opt-out note below (p. 3).*

Aims /Outcomes

By the end of the semester, every committed student will



1. be acquainted with some of the leading ethical theories and their applications (in units 1 & 2) and (in unit 3) various controversies regarding happiness/well-being (**THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDING**),
2. have carefully reflected on their own value scale, including what they regard as having final worth, with the purpose of making more choiceworthy decisions (**SELF-KNOWLEDGE & PRACTICAL WISDOM**),
3. have presented and defended their own sustained argument on a topic in ethics and/or value theory amid carefully addressing criticisms and alternative perspectives (**PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**),
4. have cultivated intellectual virtues pertaining to argumentation, dialogue, interpretation, research, clear writing, and creative thinking (to help with outcomes 1-3) (**SKILLS**).

Evaluative Requirements

| Assignments | Values | Dates | Corresponding Aims/Outcomes |
|---------------------------------|---------------|--------------|------------------------------------|
| • 1. Ethics Podcast (in groups) | 20% | July 5 | 1 - 4 (see above) |
| • 2. Essay | 30% | July 20 | 3 & 4 |
| • 3. Exam | 30% | July 28 | 1, 2 & 4 |
| • 4. Participation | 20% | Weekly | 1 & 4 |

Ethics Podcast (20%): You will work, virtually, in small groups, including a moderator, that your instructor will assign. After the class population stabilizes, I'll distribute instructions and group numbers via OWL Brightspace. You'll then get a chance to meet each other/make plans. Following that, each group will record a video (or audio) podcast, over Zoom (**July 2**), and submit it (by **July 5**) for a grade.

Essay (30%): It is important for university students to conduct their own research and then defend an argument, in writing, that moves a discussion forward. This is the aim of your essay. I will provide some broad topics, but each student must come up with their own project and thesis statement.

Final Exam (30%): To take place on **July 28 at 6:30 PM**. Students will have 2 hours to complete — and properly submit — the exam, via OWL Brightspace, unless they formally qualify for extra time; in that case, it will automatically be provided. As this exam will be “open book”, and written from home, its purpose is to test the student's integrative understanding of course material. As answers to such questions cannot be unreflectively pasted from the slides, advanced preparation is strongly recommended. To prepare, please follow your weekly checklists (Brightspace) and ask questions during class and during my office hours. Anything we cover in class, at any point, is admissible and hence a proper object of study, unless I explicitly say otherwise in writing. More details will be provided during our review session. **Be sure not to make any irrevocable travel arrangements, or plans, or commitments that conflict with our final exam, as these do not entitle a special exam.**

Participation (20%) Good philosophy requires conversation. As such, the success of our weekly sessions will be largely determined by the overall quality of the comments of the participants. Students are, accordingly, expected to “be present” and take active measures to advance the

discussion. In addition to verbal contributions, submitting all required participation comments, in writing, via OWL Brightspace's forum, if and when prompted. These (typically 1-2 sentence) assignments **cannot be submitted late**, and/or from **outside the Zoom meeting**, and/or by **a surrogate submitter**. Nor will the questions be circulated ahead of time. Any technical difficulties, with OWL Brightspace must be brought to my attention immediately, in class, as submissions, after class or when the window closes, are never permitted.

Note: *if you are working outside of Huron's local time zone, and are unable to attend our live online sessions (e.g. if our classes for you would take place at 2:30AM), please email me [by June 25](#) and write "**Opt-Out Request for Online Participation**" in the **subject title**. I would be pleased to fully accommodate you. Also, I will post slides for the Zoom meetings. These accommodations, which come in the form of a **grade transfer** to remaining assessments, are only for our weekly Zoom classes. Please record your podcast during a time that works for you and everyone else in your group. To keep up with missed content, please review the Zoom slides (which contain written notes, but no recordings, to preserve student privacy) and the prep slides (which, ordinarily, contain recordings from your instructor). Also, this "opt-out" option is exclusively for those with time-zone accommodations, i.e. those for whom our class takes place outside of standard meeting times (e.g., 9:30 AM to 9:30 PM).*

Grading Information and Explanation of Grades

Each assignment will be accompanied with clear instructions. Students will be evaluated in accordance with how well they follow them. What follows is a university wide-grade explanation:

| | | |
|----|----------|---|
| A+ | 90-100 | One could scarcely expect better from a student at this level |
| A | 80-89 | Superior work which is clearly above average |
| B | 70-79 | Good work, meeting all requirements, and eminently satisfactory |
| C | 60-69 | Competent work, meeting requirements |
| D | 50-59 | Fair work, minimally acceptable |
| F | below 50 | Fail |

Formal Considerations: academic considerations for a missed exam or essay that isn't submitted before the final window closes require a formal recommendation from your advisor. To submit a request, and any required documentation, please use the following website: <https://huronu.ca/student-life/student-services/academic-advising/academic-consideration/>. Formal considerations for a missed final exam will ordinarily come in the form of a special exam, which, if missed, cannot be attempted again without additional formal considerations.

Informal Considerations: Students are permitted one (1) academic consideration for this half (0.5) course without formal supporting documentation. This **may not be applied towards a missed final exam, for any course, or a missed essay for this essay course**. Instead, it **may be applied towards your podcast**, provided this is requested in a timely manner (ordinarily within 48 hours of the missed date).

Missed Podcast: Group podcasts contain an essential dialogical/collective learning component. This essential function cannot, by its very nature, be fulfilled with a solo podcast or alternative assessment. For this reason, any considerations, for a missed podcast, will come in the form of a grade transfer (i.e., remaining assessments will be reweighed).

Course Map

Week #1A [June 16]

- Groundwork: Why Study Ethics & Value Theory?
- **First meeting. No readings. Simply sign into Zoom (Zoom info on OWL)**

UNIT 1: CONVENTIONAL ETHICAL THEORIES AND THEIR APPLICATIONSWeek #1B [June 18]

- 1.1. Consequentialist Theories [Utilitarianism & Ethical Egoism]
- 1.1.1. Poverty Ethics

Week 2A [June 23]

- 1.1.2. Animals Ethics

Week 2B [June 25]

- 1.1.3. Population Ethics
- **You will meet your podcast group members.**

Week 3A [June 30]

- 1.2. Anti-Consequentialist Theories [Natural Law & Kantian Ethics]
- 1.2.1. Medical Ethics Part 1: Issues at the Beginning of Life

Week 3B [July 2]

- **Podcast recordings take place, after class, on July 2. Due on July 5.**

Week 4A [July 7]

- 1.2.2. Medical Ethics Part 2: Issues at the End of Life

UNIT 2: CRITICISMS OF CONVENTIONAL ETHICAL THEORIESWeek 4B [July 9]

- 2.1. A Multiple-Principles Critique
- 2.1.1. Sample Application: Climate Ethics

**UNIT 3. DEATH & THE GOOD LIFE**Week 5A and 5B [July 14-16]

- 3.1. What is the Best Way to Live?
- 3.1.1. Pleasure Theories
- 3.1.2. Desire Theories
- **Essay Due on July 20**
- 3.1.3. List Theories

Weeks 6A and 6B [July 21-23]

- 3.1.4. Hybrid Theories
- 3.2. Is Death Bad for Us?
- 3.2.1. Yes—Death Deprives Us...
- 3.2.2. No—Death is Neither Good Nor Bad
- 3.2.3. No—Death is Good for Us...Eventually (Immortality & Boredom)
- Course conclusion + Review Q&A

Final Exam

- **Final Exam on July 28 at 6:30 PM**

Note: The above course map is tentative and may be adjusted through the term.

AI & Cheating-Detection Software

No AI: Within this course, use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools (such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Grok, Claude, translation tools, and grammar-checking tools) is not permitted for written work submitted for evaluation. Unauthorized use of AI will be subject to academic discipline..

Notice of Turnitin Analysis: All written work may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All essays submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of essays subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement.