

Reading Guide #4: Virtue Ethics

These reading guides are provided to assist you in your reading. I encourage you to read the material through, first, then go back to answer the questions. You are not expected to hand in written answers. You are expected to have responses ready for class discussion. Only the boldfaced questions will appear on exams. Page numbers refer to Arthur, *Morality and Moral Controversies*, 6th ed.

Aristotle, 'Nicomachean Ethics', pp 1-8

1. What is the highest of all practical goods?
2. "[N]or do the masses give the same account as the philosophers" (8) Explain. How do their explanations differ?
3. What are the three prominent types of lives? How do people living the first two each define happiness?
- 4. How does Aristotle argue that happiness is the chief good?**
- 5. What is man's particular function? What, then, is human good?**
- 6. "For as one swallow or one day does not make a spring..." (9) Explain. Be specific about the use that Aristotle makes of this statement.**
- 7. Is virtue better as a state of mind, or as action? Explain.**
8. "[H]appiness seems to need prosperity of this kind in addition to virtue." (10) Explain.
- 9. Does Aristotle believe that young people can be happy? Explain.**
10. Describe the happy man, according to Aristotle.
- 11. What are the two kinds of virtues? Describe them.**
- 12. Are the virtues naturally within us? How do we acquire them? Why does Aristotle say, "So the difference between one and another training in habits in our childhood is not a light matter, but important, or rather, all-important." (11)**
- 13. "[V]irtue is a mean state..." (12) Explain. What lie at the extremes from this mean?**
14. Why is it hard to be good, according to Aristotle?

1. What is the Weber/Durkheim view? Why is this not patriotism?
2. "Patriotism is not to be confused with a mindless loyalty to one's own particular nation which has no regard at all for the characteristics of that particular nation." (46) Explain.
- 3. Describe the viewpoint from which patriotism is not a virtue.**
- 4. How may patriotism conflict with the liberal moral standpoint?**
5. How may liberal moralists limit patriotism so as to accept it?
6. How does scarcity of resources lead to a conflict between liberal morality and patriotism?
7. How does disagreement about the right way to live lead to conflict between morality and patriotism?
- 8. Describe the five elements of liberal, impersonal morality.**
9. Has morality always been understood in the liberal, impersonal way? Explain.
- 10. What roles do where and from whom we learn morality play in the liberal conception? What roles do they play in MacIntyre's conception?**
11. How may the goods which justify moral rules differ in different communities?
- 12. "It is in general only within a community that individuals become capable of morality, are sustained in their morality and are constituted as moral agents..." (49) Why? What does this mean for the liberal morality?**
- 13. How does MacIntyre argue that patriotism is a central virtue? (Describe the three if-clause claims.)**
14. Describe the criticism of liberal morality which alleges abstraction and detachment. How does the liberal respond?
- 15. How might the morality of patriotism lead to a fundamentally irrational attitude?**
- 16. What projects or practices must the patriot exempt from criticism? Explain.**
- 17. How does the von Trott example demonstrate that a patriot need not accept his country's current regime?**
- 18. "Each one of us to some degree or other understands his or her life as an enacted narrative, and because of our relationships with others we have to understand ourselves as characters in the enacted narratives of other people's lives." (52) Explain. How does this lead to a morality of patriotism?**
19. How does liberal morality respond to conflicts of interest? Is this a sufficient response?
20. How does liberal morality tend towards the dissolution of social bonds?
21. How does patriotism place our ties to our nation beyond rational criticism?
- 22. How does liberal morality render our social and moral ties too open to dissolution by rational criticism?**