

Reading Guide #1: Meta-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*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed.

Plato, "Euthyphro" (handout)

1. What is Euthyphro's first definition of what is holy?
2. Why doesn't Socrates like this definition?
3. What is Euthyphro's second definition of what is holy?
4. Socrates says, "I certainly did not ask you to tell me what action is both holy and unholy: but now it would seem that what is loved by the gods is also hated by them." Why is this a problem for Euthyphro? How does he respond to this observation?
- 5. What is the final definition of holy (and unholy) that Socrates and Euthyphro propose?**
- 6. "The point which I should first wish to understand is whether the holy is beloved by the gods because it is holy, or holy because it is beloved of the gods." Explain.**

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John Arthur, "Morality, Religion, and Conscience," pp. 15-23.

- 1. "Without God, everything is permitted." (Dostoyevsky) Explain. What does Arthur say about this?**
- 2. How are morality and religion different? Be specific.**
- 3. Why isn't religion necessary for moral motivation?**
4. Why isn't religion necessary for moral guidance?
- 5. What is Divine Command Theory? How does Copleston argue for it?**
- 6. What problems does Arthur cite with Copleston's arguments for Divine Command Theory?**
- 7. "Euthyphro believes that whenever the gods love something they do so with good reason, not without justification and arbitrarily." (20) Explain.**
- 8. How might the rejection of Divine Command Theory be seen as a limitation of God's power, a rejection of God's omnipotence? Is it?**
- 9. What power over morality might we still impute to God, even if we reject Divine Command Theory?**
10. Describe the historical relationship between morality and religion.
11. How is morality inherently social?

Mary Midgley, "Trying Out One's New Sword," pp 33-36.

- 1. Describe moral isolationism. Why do some people accept it?**
  2. How does Midgley argue that moral isolationism is not respectful?
  - 3. What would a moral isolationist say about tsujigiri?**
  4. What would a moral isolationist say about the South American Indian's criticisms of Western civilization?  
What does this show about the supposed isolationist barrier?
  - 5. What does moral isolationism entail about praising other cultures?**
  6. What's wrong with crude judgments of other cultures? Does this extend to considered judgments?
  - 7. Why does moral isolationism lead to a general ban on moral reasoning?**
  8. What is immoralism? What's the logical difficulty with it?
  - 9. "[O]ur involvement in moral isolationism does not flow from apathy, but from a rather acute concern about human hypocrisy and other forms of wickedness." (35) Explain.**
  10. How does Midgley reinterpret the moral isolationist defense of tsujigiri? What does she think the moral isolationist's real goal is?
  - 11. How does the defender of tsujigiri apply our moral standards to Samurai culture?**
  12. How did anthropologists encourage moral isolationism? How does Midgley argue that these studies really undermine moral isolationism?
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William H. Shaw, "Relativism in Ethics," pp 37-40.

- 1. What is ethical relativism? Illustrate.**
- 2. Describe Shaw's two objections to the position that right and wrong are relative to the individual?**
- 3. How does the cultural ethical relativist use examples to support her position?**
4. How do Betty and Sarah have different obligations? How does the ethical relativist explain this?
5. How can a non-relativist account for the Betty/Sarah differences?
6. How does Shaw argue that the condemnation of a society is insufficient to make an act immoral?
- 7. How does ethical relativism prevent criticism of other societies?**
- 8. How does ethical relativism generate problems of majority rule?**
9. What problems of overlapping societies arise from ethical relativism?
- 10. How does ethical relativism conflict with the notion of moral progress?**
- 11. How is reason-giving essential to morality? What does this mean for ethical relativism?**