

### Reading Guide #4: Relativism

This reading guide is 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 submit written answers. You are expected to have responses ready for class discussion. Only the boldfaced questions will appear on exams. Page numbers refer to Louis Pojman, *Moral Philosophy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Hackett.

Plato, "What is Right Conduct?" pp 2-18.

1. According to Cephalus, what makes for a pleasant old age?
  2. According to Cephalus, how does wealth lead to happiness? Be specific.
  - 3. What is wrong with defining right conduct as telling the truth and paying back what you owe?**
  - 4. How does Polemarchus first define justice, or right conduct?**
  5. "The just man then has turned out to be a kind of thief." (5) Explain in detail how Socrates arrives at this conclusion.
  - 6. How does Socrates argue that it is never right to harm anyone?**
  - 7. How does Thrasymachus define justice? Be specific.**
  8. How does Socrates argue that, on Thrasymachus's definition of justice, it will be right to do what is not in the interest of the stronger?
  9. How does Cleitophon attempt to amend Thrasymachus's definition? Why does Thrasymachus reject this change?
  - 10. Socrates concludes, "[N]o other ruler, in any kind of government, insofar as he is a ruler, seeks what is to his own advantage..." Sketch his argument. Why does Thrasymachus resist this conclusion?**
  - 11. How is Thrasymachus's sheep and shepherd analogy a response to Socrates's argument that true rulers always rule in the interests of the governed?**
  - 12. According to Thrasymachus, who has the greater advantage, the just person or the unjust person?**
  13. According to Thrasymachus, what is the difference between the despot and the petty thief?
  - 14. According to Thrasymachus, why do people denounce injustice?**
  15. Why do politicians need to be paid, according to Socrates?
  16. Why does Thrasymachus argue that justice is not a virtue?
  17. Sketch Socrates's argument that the just man is good and wise, and the unjust man is ignorant and bad.
  - 18. What does Socrates say about an army of unjust people? What does he learn about individual people from this?**
  - 19. How does Socrates argue that the soul has a function? What is the function of the soul?**
  20. According to Socrates, what type of person lives the best? Why?
- 

Herodotus, "Custom is King," p 20.

- 1. How did the Greeks dispose of the bodies of their fathers? How did the Callatians dispose of the bodies of their fathers?**
- 2. How can we interpret Darius's experiment as an argument for ethical relativism?**

Ruth Benedict, "A Defense of Ethical Relativism," pp 33-37.

- 1. How is the universality of customs potentially misleading?**
  - 2. How can people we regard as abnormal function adequately in other cultures? How are the berdache an example?**
  3. How are kindness and pleasantry viewed by the Dobu?
  4. How do the Kwakiutl's views about death and revenge differ from ours?
  - 5. Why do different societies end up with different codes of normal behavior?**
  - 6. "We do not any longer make the mistake of deriving the morality of our locality and decade directly from the inevitable constitution of human nature." (36) Explain.**
  - 7. How are habit and moral goodness historically linked?**
  - 8. How is the concept of the normal a variant of the concept of the good?**
  9. How does a society ensure that deviant behavior is minimized?
- 

Louis Pojman, "A Defense of Ethical Objectivism," pp 38-52.

- 1. Describe the diversity thesis in the argument for ethical relativism.**
- 2. Describe the dependency thesis in the argument for ethical relativism.**
- 3. How do the diversity and dependency theses lead to an argument for ethical relativism.**
- 4. How does the weak dependency thesis undermine ethical relativism?**
5. How does subjectivism make morality useless? How does subjectivism lead to solipsism?
- 6. How is conventionalism supposed to be an enlightened position?**
- 7. How does Herskovits argue that we should be tolerant of the moralities of other cultures? What is wrong with this argument?**
- 8. How does relativism prevent criticism of other societies?**
- 9. Why are reformers immoral, according to relativism? What does the relativist say about civil disobedience?**
10. What problems arise for the relativist in a pluralistic society?
11. How does relativism lead to the end of morality? Does this argument commit a slippery slope fallacy?
- 12. Can the cultural relativist, one who accepts the diversity thesis, accept ethical universalism? Explain.**
13. Does the existence of some universal ethical principles refute ethical relativism? Explain.
- 14. How can non-moral beliefs affect the application of universal moral principles? Consider the example of the Sudanese who throw their deformed children into a river.**
15. How does the indeterminacy of translation serve as an argument for strong dependency over weak dependency?
16. Distinguish moral absolutism from moral objectivism.
17. What procedure does Pojman use to refute ethical relativism?
- 18. How would we account for some one who tortured for fun?**
19. Are the core moral principles Pojman lists arbitrary? Explain.
- 20. How is diet analogous to morality?**
- 21. Explain how Pojman argues for objective morality on the basis of a common human nature.**
22. Does objectivism entail the existence of a single ideal morality? Explain.
23. How does the implausibility of absolutism lead to belief in relativism?
24. Distinguish the two types of intersubjective agreement Pojman describes. How does confusion between these types lead to a belief in ethical relativism?
- 25. Should our sensitivity to other cultures force us to be ethical relativists? Explain.**
26. Is the (possible) nonexistence of God an argument against objectivism?