

Learning Guide Unit 2

Reading Assignment

As you read the learning resources, consider the following:

1. How might the concept of moral relativism influence individuals' perspectives on the role of religion in providing objective moral judgments?
2. Reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the Divine Command Theory and Natural Law Theory of Morality discussed in the chapter. Which theory resonates more with your personal beliefs and why?
3. Reflect on the role of religious faith in supporting individuals to live moral lives beyond simply adhering to specific moral rules. How can religious teachings influence moral virtues and ethical behavior in practical situations?

Read:

1. Matthews, G., & Hendricks, C. (2019). Introduction to philosophy: Ethics. Rebus Community.
<https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks/textbooks/introduction-to-philosophy-ethics> Licensed under CC 4.0

- View the Online Book
- Read Chapter 2 - [Can we have ethics without religion? On Divine Command Theory and Natural Law Theory.](#)

In this chapter, we explore how the concept of moral obligation is viewed through the lenses of Divine Command Theory and Natural Law Theory. This chapter also touches upon how religious faith can support living a moral life beyond determining specific moral rules, highlighting the social and philosophical facets of religion that contribute to ethical living. Ultimately, the discussion showcases the intricate interplay between religion, morality, and ethics, inviting readers to critically analyze and reflect on the foundations of moral reasoning within religious frameworks.

Additional Reading:

1. Dimmock, M., & Fisher, A. (2017). Aquinas's natural law theory. In Ethics for A-Level (1st ed., pp. 65–77). Open Book Publishers. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1wc7r6j.8>

This reading explains how Thomas Aquinas navigates the Euthyphro dilemma, positioning God's role in illuminating moral truths rather than arbitrarily defining them. This helps students understand how religious beliefs and ethical thinking can work together to create rules for right and wrong behavior.

2. Wolfe, C. (2003). Understanding natural law. The Good Society, 12(3), 38–42. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20711143>

Reading this article on understanding natural law will help students see how different thinkers have defined natural law and its role in guiding human behavior. It explains how natural law is seen as a set of moral principles that can be known through reason and are inherent in human nature.

NOTE: To access these articles, visit the UoPeople Library and click on the link to JSTOR. Search for the complete name of the article.

Watch:

Miguel Benitez Jr. (2020, June 5). The Euthyphro Dilemma and Divine Command Theory [Video]. YouTube.



This video of Miguel Benitez Jr. offers an alternative interpretation of the Divine Command Theory (DCT). DCT is a moral theory that states that the rightness or wrongness of an action is determined by whether or not it is commanded by God. Critics of the DCT argue that it is caught on the horns of Euthyphro's dilemma, which asks whether something is right because God commands it, or whether God commands it because it is right. If something is right because God commands it, then God's commands are arbitrary and have no basis in objective morality. On the other hand, if God commands something because it is right, then there must be some objective standard of right and wrong that exists independently of God's commands.

Jeffrey Morgan, the author of the chapter in the book, believes that the DCT fails to escape Euthyphro's dilemma. In his mind, DCT makes morality arbitrary because it depends entirely on the whims of God. However, other philosophers, including Thomas Aquinas, would disagree. Miguel Benitez Jr, for instance, argues here that God is not free to command whatever he wants. Instead, he is constrained by his nature or character. God is perfectly good, so he can only command what is good. So, morality is grounded in God's character, not in an arbitrary choice God happens to make.

To illustrate this point, we might think of the kindest person we know. This person will always act in a kind manner because they are kind. It is not as though they could choose to be unkind if they wanted to. Similarly, God, being perfectly good, cannot command something that is evil. If God were to act out of character that would be a weakness of sorts, and God has no weaknesses.

There are other objections to the Divine Command Theory beside the Euthyphro dilemma, but we are focusing on this one in this class.

The Euthyphro Dilemma and Divine Command Theory



Questions for reflection:

1. Do you think the DCT escapes the horns of the Euthyphro dilemma or not?
2. Do we have moral characters that determine our actions?
3. Plato, the author of the Euthyphro dilemma, famously believed that the ultimate principle of the universe was the good itself (the essence of goodness) or beauty itself (the essence of beauty). If God is the good itself, is it safe to assume his commands will simply express the nature of the good itself?