

Learning Guide Unit 5

Reading Assignment

Twain, M. (1994). *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Dover Thrift Editions.). New York: Dover Publications. Available at <http://contentserver.adobe.com/store/books/HuckFinn.pdf>.

Read the [simplified version of Huckleberry Finn](#). This version replaces Mark Twain's use of highly colloquial English with standard English. This version is a public domain version provided by the U.S. State Department's Office of English Language Programs.

Read Chapter 8 in *Huckleberry Finn*. You may have read this book years ago, but this time read it from the *philosopher's perspective* you have matured within yourself in this class.

Try to pick up on the ethical dilemma Twain writes into the story for Huck while he struggles with what is "right" to society and what is "right" to himself. In the .pdf provided for class, this is most clear on page 45 (it may be on a different page if you are using another format of the book).

There are a couple passages in this book worth discussion, be-prepared in the [Discussion Forum](#) this week to discuss what your perspective *allows* you to see.

Now that you are done with Chapter 8 from Mark Twain, check out the Khan Academy Video about *The Divine Command Theory*. Watch this video from Khan Academy:

Darwall, S. "Ethics" God and Morality, Part 1. Khan Academy. Available at <https://www.khanacademy.org/partner-content/wi-phi/wi-phi-value-theory/wi-phi-ethics/v/god-morality-part-1>

- Is this what you found in the *Huckleberry Finn* pages? Were you able to see Huck's reaction to not telling on Jim for being a run-away as an odd argument given that he, himself, was a runaway? See how society, in Huck's mind, would label him a "low-down Abolitionist" if he didn't tell the truth (and therefore lie and break his promise to his friend Jim). Note how Huck felt society was wrong so behaved *unethically* (breaking the law) to be *more* ethical (by breaking it).

Now read Chapter 12 of *Huckleberry Finn*, available at <http://contentserver.adobe.com/store/books/HuckFinn.pdf>

On page 68 (p. 39 of the simplified version), Huck shows that he is not a strong adherent of strong moral absolutism when he justifies stealing food.

"Pap always said it warn't no harm to borrow things, if you was meaning to pay them back, sometime; but the widow said it warn't anything but a soft name for stealing, and no decent body would do it. Jim said he reckoned the widow was partly right and pap was partly right; so the best way would be for us to pick out two or three things from the list and say we wouldn't borrow them any more--then he reckoned it wouldn't be no harm to borrow the others.... [T]owards daylight we got it all settled satisfactory, and concluded to drop crabapples and p'simmons. We warn't feeling just right, before that, but it was all comfortable now." (p. 68)

While their rationalization for stealing appears entirely self-serving, the discussion is not moot for us. Huck is struggling between two moralities just as we all do every day. For him, it is the conventional family and society ethical and moral code versus the one he needed at the time (his own) for survival.

Hopefully, you noticed how this feeling of moral "rightness" for Huck and Jim is punctuated by his feeling good about himself for using a code of ethics (*his own* --- and even if it allows him to feel right about stealing).

Read about Kantian Ethics: <https://web.archive.org/web/20210518060451/https://www.csus.edu/indiv/g/gaskilld/ethics/kantian%20ethics.htm>

- Kant (1724-1804) argues that doing something because it feels right, doesn't make it right. There is no moral imperative of something "feeling right"; Kant is emphatic that even otherwise praiseworthy activity cannot be considered truly moral if undertaken strictly because the individual takes pleasure in it. Think about Kant's description of a *Categorical Imperative* in your life and Huck's life.
 - Can you think of examples that fit into this definition in your culture?

Moral Absolutism tells us that there are some standards that have no need for interpretation. These, like traffic laws, are the ones that everyone has agreed are right and necessary for the good order and discipline of a healthy society. The shape and color of a Stop Sign, or that you have to drive on one side of the road not the other, are absolutes in that sense.

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Read about *Moral Absolutism* at http://www.philosophybasics.com/branch_moral_absolutism.html and note the philosophers you have heard about who discuss it (Plato, Aristotle, Kant, to name a few). Do not skip over the *criticism* part of this reading. As with everything, there are always other points of views which must be respected.

Read about major alternatives to Moral Absolutism - [Utilitarianism and Moral Relativism](#).

Watch this video: https://fod.infobase.com/p_ViewPlaylist.aspx?AssignmentID=XCJTTC

- This video approaches Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) as a strictly ancestral issue in Ethiopia. FGM is also forced upon infant and young girls throughout the world today as part of Sharia Law, as part of devote Islamic doctrine.
- There are current and salient ethical and moral implications of this practice, one of your writing topics may address this.

Warning: This video deals with content that may be upsetting to some. If you are not comfortable watching it, you can skip it.