

## Learning Guide Unit 1

**Reading Assignment**

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As you read and watch the learning resources, consider the following:

1. What objections might be brought against different forms of moral relativism?
  2. How can moral differences exist within a culture, and what factors contribute to these differences?
  3. Does the fact that people disagree mean there is no one right answer to moral questions?
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**Read:**

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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 1 - [Aren't Right and Wrong Just Matters of Opinion? On Moral Relativism and Subjectivism](#)

This chapter is like a deep dive into ethics, where we kick things off by chatting about moral relativism. Moral relativism is the idea that views on right and wrong can shift based on the culture or society you are in. The chapter tackles some weighty issues such as burning grieving widows to death and slavery in the US. Things start to get really intriguing when we see how cultural relativists grapple with defining what actually constitutes a culture. As we will see, they are unsure about the magic number of folks needed to form one. Overall, this chapter really makes us rethink how what's morally acceptable can vary depending on where you stand. (HINT: The majority of quiz questions are drawn from the text, so read it carefully.)

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**Additional Readings:**

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1. Sikka, S. (2012). Moral Relativism and the Concept of Culture. *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, 59(133), 50–69.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41802533>

This paper argues that culture and moral values are influenced by those in power. It explains how cultural norms come from unequal social structure and how morality often hides the self-serving interest of the elites.

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**Watch:**

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1. McCombs School of Business. (2018, Dec 18). *Moral Philosophy | Ethics Defined* [Video]. YouTube.

This video from the University of Texas provides a nice, colorful introduction to moral philosophy, also known as ethics. It has three branches: metaethics, normative ethics and applied ethics. Metaethics looks at the big picture and the nature of ethics itself. Normative ethics provides us with frameworks for making moral decisions, and applied ethics helps us solve real-world problems. Studying these branches of moral philosophy gives us a chance to grapple with ethical dilemmas in everyday life.

**Moral Philosophy | Ethics Defined**

2. McCombs School of Business. (2019, Feb 19). *All is Not Relative | Ethics Unwrapped* [Video]. YouTube.

This thought-provoking video from the University of Texas explores the challenges of moral relativism and the distinction between moral relativism and moral pluralism. Moral pluralism should not be confused with moral relativism. Moral relativism holds that morality is entirely relative, that is that there are no objective moral standards. "Pluralism" is a descriptive term referring to the existence of different viewpoints within the same society. Pluralism does not necessarily imply relativism; it simply implies divergence. Indeed, 'pluralism' is simply another word for diversity. The video offers a valuable discussion of these ethical concepts.

**All is Not Relative | Concepts Unwrapped**