Trying Out One’s New Sword – Mary Midgley

Review Questions:

1. What is “moral isolationism”?

Moral isolationism means that it forbids us to form any opinions on other matters. It also lays down a general ban on moral reasoning.

1. Explain the Japanese custom of tsujigiri. What questions does Midgley ask about this custom?

Tsujigiri or crosscut is practiced by the Japanese samurais. They test new swords on wayfarers. It is important to the samurais that their sword must be able to slice through someone in a single swing, passing from the shoulder to the opposite side. If the sword did not work properly, the samurai would lose his Honor, the respect of his emperor and disgrace his ancestors. The questions that Midgley ask about this custom are the following: Does the isolating barrier work both ways? Are people in other cultures equaly unable to criticize us? Does the isolating barier between cultures block praise as well as blame? What is involved in judging? And lastly, If we can’t judge other cultures, can we really judge our own?

1. What is wrong with moral isolationism, according to Midgley?

According to Midgley, People usually take it up because they think it is respectful attitude to other cultures. In fact, however, it is not respectful.

1. What does Midgley think is the basis for criticizing other cultures?

Midgley think that the basis to criticize other culture is to prove it that it destroys the general moral teachings in order to make favourable judgment or criticism.

Discussion Questions:

1. Midgley says that Nietzsche is an immoralist. Is that an accurate and fair assessment of Nietzsche? Why or why not?

I don’t think it is an accurate and fair assessment of Nietzsche because people have different opinions and that we should respect it.

1. Do you agree with Midgley’s claim that the idea of separate and unmixed cultures is unreal? Explain your answer.

It can happen but saying that unmixed cultures is unreal is not true. We don’t need other cultures to be real.