Study Guide #1 – Ethics

1. What is the difference between ethical relativism and cultural relativism? Can one derive a moral obligation from a statement about how people act or what they believe?

2. Explain the central argument supporting ethical relativism, which claims that there are no objective standards for comparing one ethical system to another.

3. Why do relativists argue that moral value is dependent on cultural context?

4. What are some of the problems with ethical relativism?

5. What is ethical absolutism? Give an example of an absolutist system.

6. Define and explain the differences between the three principle approaches to ethical systems: an Aretaic or virtue-based system, a deontological system and a consequentialist system.

7. According to Aristotle, what is the ultimate good that all people want?

8. Explain the relationship between happiness (eudaimonia), rationality (sophia) and virtue (arête) for Aristotle.

9. Why does Aristotle say that to be virtuous means to “act with excellence?”

10. Aristotle doesn’t think everyone is equal but can everyone demonstrate virtue?

11. Explain the two kinds of reason Aristotle argues are essential to virtue. (sophia & phronesis)

12. Why does Aristotle argue that the courageous person is more rational than the cowardly person?

13. Why does Aristotle argue that virtue “is a kind of moderation inasmuch as it aims at the mean?” Give some examples of virtue as the midpoint between two vices. Can one be too virtuous, for Aristotle?

14. What criteria did Aristotle use for selecting the specific virtues – in other words, why those qualities such as courage, pride, temperance, etc. as opposed to others?

15. Nietzsche called himself an “immoralist.” Does this mean that we are free to do whatever we think we can get away with? Explain.

16. Explain Nietzsche’s master and slave morality. What is the difference? Why does Nietzsche argue that it is appropriate to have two different senses of moral value?

17. Is master morality the same for all the “masters” according to Nietzsche?

18. If Nietzsche’s “masters” are supposed to move beyond considerations of good and evil, how does he define excellence?

19. Nietzsche and Aristotle both argue for a kind of excellence. Does “excellence” mean something different for Nietzsche than for Aristotle?

20. Why did Hume claim that reason must be the “slave of the passions?”

21. What is the role of the conscience for Rousseau?

22. What is the proper role of reason and sentiment for Kant? Explain his argument.

23. Why is the “Good Will” the only thing that can be called good without qualification according to Kant?

24. Explain Kant’s argument that morality must stem from the Good Will.
25. Why does Kant argue that reason is the only objective criterion for morality?
26. Explain why the “categorical imperative” must be categorical and not adjustable in accord with different circumstances? Why must we always act in accord with our *a priori* duty to such laws and not according to our preferences or inclinations?
27. Why do all our actions have to be universalizable? Why can’t we have one set of rules for ourselves and another set for others?
28. What is the practical imperative and how does it relate to the categorical imperative?
29. Kant argued that we must be virtuous in order to be worthy of happiness but he did not think that moral acts could be justified because they make us happy. Why didn’t Kant place much worth on happiness as a goal of morality?
30. Explain the problem of the inquiring murderer for Kant. What was Kant’s position on whether one has a moral obligation to tell the truth to the murderer, even if that looks like it would lead inevitably to the death of another? How does Kant justify his position?
31. Why did Bentham argue that happiness was critical to morality?
32. How did Bentham measure the moral worth of an act?
33. What is the Utilitarian principle? Why should the ends of an act count more than the means?
34. Why did J.S. Mill reject Bentham’s original concept of “the good”?
35. What is “the good” according to Mill?
36. Whose good gets counted for the utilitarians? Does everyone’s good get considered? Does everyone’s good get satisfied?
37. For Mill, does the moral value of the action change if what you thought was going to happen turns out very differently? Do utilitarians place any value on one’s intentions?
38. Why would Kant reject the consequentialist justifications of the utilitarians?
39. Carol Gilligan argues for a different model of moral maturation than her professor, Lawrence Kohlberg. Explain the differences.
40. What is the goal of the Ethic of Care?
41. What are the conditions that obligate us to care for others according to Manning?
42. How does one decide what to do under the Ethic of Care?
43. Is care given only as a reciprocal obligation according to Rita Manning? In other words, must we care just for those who have cared for us?
44. Do Ethic of Care theorists such as Manning & Gilligan support the impartial objective criterion of Kant? In other words, should we always make moral decisions without regard to our personal relationships with others involved or how we feel about those who may be affected by our decisions?
45. Is the Ethic of Care a virtue ethic, a deontology or a consequentialist system?