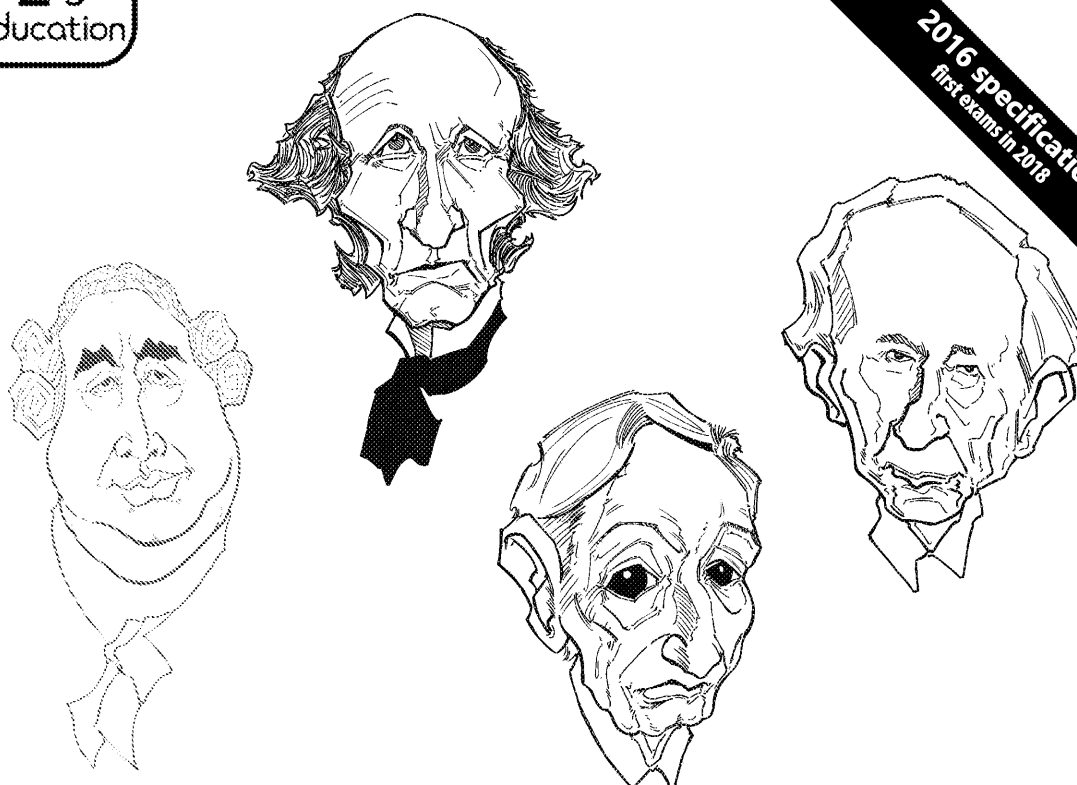


**2016 specification**  
first exams in 2018



# Religion and Ethics Course Companion

for A Level Year 2 OCR Religious Studies  
(Component 2)

[zigzageducation.co.uk](http://zigzageducation.co.uk)

**POD**  
**11342**

Publish your own work... Write to a brief...  
Register at [publishmenow.co.uk](http://publishmenow.co.uk)

Follow us on Twitter [@ZigZagRS](https://twitter.com/ZigZagRS)

# Contents

<b>Product Support from ZigZag Education .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Terms and Conditions of Use .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Teacher’s Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Key Terminology.....</b>	<b>2</b>
Ethical Language: Meta-ethics.....	2
Significant Ideas: Conscience .....	3
Developments in Ethical Thought: Sexual Ethics.....	4
<b>4: Ethical Language: Meta-ethics .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Basic Meta-ethical Concepts.....	6
<b>5: Significant Ideas: Conscience .....</b>	<b>27</b>
Conscience and the Self.....	28
<b>6: Developments in Ethical Thought: Sexual Ethics .....</b>	<b>42</b>
Premarital and Extramarital Sex .....	43
Homosexuality .....	48
Applied Sexual Ethics .....	51
<b>Answers to Tasks .....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Answers to Quick Quizzes .....</b>	<b>56</b>

# Teacher's Introduction

This course companion is written for the OCR A Level Year 2 **Religion and Ethics** part of the specification and is designed to offer students a comprehensive introduction to the material within that academic course. The sections and topics therefore mirror OCR's specification headings, and every care has been taken not only to help students to understand the key concepts and ideas within the course, but also to sharpen their critical thinking skills.

Alongside core written content there are also a number of other features to help students with their learning and revision. Self-guided and group activities are included throughout the writing to better engage students with the material, and I have also provided glossaries, textual references, and information on key thinkers where appropriate.

I hope you enjoy working through this resource and it benefits both you and your students throughout the academic year.

*January 2022*



## ETHICAL LANGUAGE: META-ETHICS

<b>Meta-ethics</b>	A branch of philosophy that looks at the nature, form (and truth value of moral statements).
<b>Normative Ethics</b>	A branch of philosophy that looks at what moral principles should follow and how one should act.
<b>Applied Ethics</b>	A branch of philosophy that looks at the application of moral principles to dilemmas and issues.
<b>Moral Realism</b>	The view that there are objective moral facts that exist independent of beliefs or feelings.
<b>Moral Universalism</b>	The view that the truth of moral facts applies to any person, culture, background or context.
<b>Moral Relativism</b>	The view that the truth of moral facts is relative to the culture or society of a moral agent.
<b>Moral Nihilism</b>	The view that there is no such thing as moral value and that no action has any moral worth.
<b>Ethical Subjectivism</b>	The view that moral truths are subject to or dependent on the opinions of individuals.
<b>Divine Command Theory</b>	The view that what is good is equivalent to what God commands.
<b>Euthyphro Dilemma</b>	A philosophical problem that questions the relationship between morality and the gods.
<b>Naturalism</b>	The view that moral properties are simply natural properties and can be reduced down to a natural, descriptive property.
<b>Fallacy of Equivocation</b>	An error of reasoning that occurs when a person holds a word within an argument to possess one meaning, when in fact it has multiple meanings.
<b>Is-Ought Problem</b>	A philosophical problem that asks how one can move from descriptive statements to prescriptive statements without a leap or an error in reasoning.
<b>Naturalistic Fallacy</b>	A philosophical problem introduced by G E Moore, who argued that one cannot explain the property of goodness in terms of natural properties.
<b>Open Question Argument</b>	An argument put forward by G E Moore which attempts to show that it is meaningful to ask whether goodness is a natural property.
<b>Non-naturalism</b>	The view that goodness is a non-natural property.
<b>Intuitionism</b>	The view that what is good can be known through use of moral intuition.
<b>Prima Facie Duties</b>	A term used to describe basic, self-evident duties that are known through the use of one's intuition.
<b>Emotivism</b>	A non-cognitivist meta-ethical view which holds that ethical statements are subjective statements of approval or disapproval.
<b>Logical Positivism</b>	An empiricist movement which developed the verification principle, which held that whether statements could be regarded as cognitively meaningful depended on whether they could be verified.
<b>Verification Principle</b>	A principle that holds a statement is only cognitively meaningful if it can be shown to be true or false analytically or through sense experience.

INSPECTION COPY

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**





## SIGNIFICANT IDEAS: CONSCIENCE

<b>Conscience</b>	An internal sense of right and wrong that is thought to
<b>Natural Law</b>	A system of normative ethics which holds that moral law is derived from the observation of and reasoning about the natural world.
<b>Practica Ratio</b>	Practical reason, a faculty of the mind for Aquinas which is used to solve moral dilemmas.
<b>Conscientia</b>	Aquinas' term for conscience, a neutral, God-given rationality that enables human beings to practically determine moral guidance.
<b>Synderesis</b>	For Aquinas, is the innate ability of the human mind to grasp basic moral principles.
<b>Vincible Ignorance</b>	Ignorance of a situation or dilemma that could be overcome by one's reason.
<b>Invincible Ignorance</b>	Ignorance of a situation or dilemma that could not have been overcome by proper use of one's reason.
<b>Neurosis</b>	A mild mental illness that often involves symptoms such as anxiety, but does not cause a proper loss of contact with reality.
<b>Ego</b>	The organised rational mind, which mediates between the demands of socialised values of the superego.
<b>Superego</b>	A moral voice or conscience that reflects the internalised moral ideals taught to us by our parents, parental and cultural influences.
<b>Id</b>	A disorganised, unconscious aspect of the mind which contains our basic drives. It is the source of our physical desires and impulses, leading to pleasure-seeking activities.
<b>Psychosexual Development</b>	Freud's framework for how human beings develop through the stages, focused on the development and growing role of the libido.
<b>Libido</b>	The sexual drive or life force that Freud identifies as the primary source of and much of human behaviour.
<b>Defence Mechanisms</b>	For Freud, the various ways human beings rationalise and justify their actions with the id.
<b>Internalisation</b>	The process by which human beings gradually come to internalise values from external sources as part of their internal mind.
<b>Repression</b>	For Freud, the various ways the ego pushes down the unacceptable impulses of the id.
<b>Death drive</b>	An innate urge towards death and nothingness, present in all human beings.
<b>Authoritarian Conscience</b>	For Fromm, the aspect of the conscience governed by the fear of punishment by authority figures.
<b>Humanistic Conscience</b>	For Fromm, the aspects of the conscience governed by the desire for integrity and flourishing.

INSPECTION COPY

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**





## DEVELOPMENTS IN ETHICAL TRADITIONS SEXUAL ETHICS

<b>Heterosexuality</b>	Sexual attraction or behaviour between individuals of opposite sex.
<b>Homosexuality</b>	Sexual attraction or behaviour between individuals of the same sex.
<b>Marriage</b>	A legal or religious union between two people that often has social and personal significance.
<b>Premarital Sex</b>	Sex or a sexual relationship that occurs prior to one being married.
<b>Extramarital Sex</b>	Sex or a sexual relationship that occurs outside of one's marriage. Also known as adultery.
<b>Cohabitation</b>	Two people living together who are unmarried, and in a sexual relationship.
<b>Sacrament</b>	Special Christian ceremonies or rituals which are thought to have spiritual significance towards human beings.
<b>Fidelity</b>	Faithfulness and loyalty to another person, particularly in a romantic context.
<b>Chastity</b>	A virtue that typically involves avoidance of extramarital sexual intercourse.
<b>Celibacy</b>	The state of abstaining from all sexual relationships, in particular by religious figures.
<b>Secularisation</b>	The process by which previously religious societies and institutions become more secular, separating social/political concerns from religious ones.
<b>Harm Principle</b>	A principle put forward by Mill which holds that the actions of individuals should only be limited or restricted where such a limitation is necessary to prevent harm to others.
<b>Natural Law</b>	A system of normative ethics which holds that moral principles are discovered through observation and reasoning upon human nature.
<b>Situation Ethics</b>	A system of normative ethics put forward by Joseph Fletcher which holds that the right action is the one which demonstrates the greatest love for others.
<b>Kantian Ethics</b>	A system of normative ethics credited to Immanuel Kant which holds that the right action is one that can be meaningfully conceptualised as a universal imperative.
<b>Utilitarianism</b>	A system of normative ethics which holds that the right action is the one which generates the greatest utility from its consequences.

INSPECTION COPY

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



## 4: ETHICAL LANGUAGE: META-

### What you will learn in this section:

The philosophical discussion around the nature of ethics and other meta-ethical

- The philosophical position of **naturalism**, whether ethical statements can be statements about the natural world and whether ethical statements have a
- The philosophical position of non-naturalism with a focus on **intuitionism**. What intuition is and whether it can help us fully grasp or connect to our common and moral statements.
- The philosophical position of **emotivism**, whether ethical statements are just approval or disapproval and whether ethical statements should be regarded
- The strengths and weaknesses of each of the above positions and which align or intuitive understanding of ethics.
- The debate around the meaning of the terms 'good' and 'bad', and whether the primary focus of meta-ethical analysis.

### Starter Activity:

Pick one of the normative ethical theories you studied in Year 1. What does it mean to be ethically true in this theory and what implications do you think this has when thinking about morality? Write down a few notes and compare them with your studies through

### Key Thinker

Name	G E Moore
Born	1873
Died	1958
Key text	<i>Principia Ethica</i> (1903)
Why are they important?	Moore was a key figure in twentieth-century philosophy, partly because his criticisms of naturalism paved the way for many realist and non-naturalist theories to be discussed today.
Did you know?	Moore has his own paradox named after him, which draws a contradiction between asserting truth and disbelief at the same time, such as 'it is snowing but it is not snowing'.

### Key Thinker

Name	A J Ayer
Born	1910
Died	1989
Key text	<i>Language, Truth, and Logic</i> (1936)
Why are they important?	Ayer was one of the chief thinkers behind the logical positivism movement, influencing future empiricist philosophers and greatly influencing the philosophical relationship between philosophy, science and metaphysics.
Did you know?	Ayer was heavily involved in left-wing political activity, supporting the Labour Party, campaigning against nuclear war, and involvement in the Vietnam War. He was also a vocal opponent of discrimination against abortion and homosexuality.

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED



## Introduction: What is Meta-ethics?

Throughout your Year 1 studies, you will have primarily focused on both **normative** and **descriptive** ethics. The former is concerned with the moral principles we *ought to* or should follow, and the latter is concerned with applying these moral principles to real-world ethical dilemmas and situations. However, there are broader questions about what ethics is. Are moral principles objective or subjective? Are they determined by the whims of a deity or by ends derived from human nature? Or perhaps are they even just misleading statements of emotion? These questions are central to the philosophical discipline of **meta-ethics**, which focuses on analysing the foundations of moral principles, how we tell what is good from what is bad and, perhaps most importantly, the ethical language we use in our everyday lives.

Although meta-ethical questions have been brought up by philosophers since the beginning of time, the field that people only really came to the fore in the twentieth century, when many people began to question the assumptions behind the study of normative ethics. Most importantly, the decline of religion in the Western world raised the problem of what philosophical foundation ethics might have. If there isn't a deity to guarantee the goodness of certain actions and the badness of others, how can they really correspond to truths about how we ought to act? Maybe human beings have no objective truths, so that moral principles held any truth or meaning at all.

Yet, at the same time, the increased emphasis on meta-ethics has been controversial. Some people think that principles really matter compared to ensuring that human beings live good lives. Others think that the question of whether we should hold normative ethics is a distracting philosophical question, compared to the practical implications of our moral beliefs. But to ignore meta-ethics perhaps also imperils the practical implications. For if our moral principles turn out to be erroneous or simply a matter of emotion, how can we be supposed to trust them when applying them to ethical dilemmas? It may be that the study of meta-ethics reveals deeper issues with normative ethics that challenge how we approach ethics. If this is the case, then meta-ethics as a field is not to be understood, for fear that it will lead to conclusions that are unsupported, erroneous or meaningless.

## Basic Meta-ethical Concepts

Approaching the most basic meta-ethical questions is not an easy task. In normative ethics, we primarily rely on a nuanced analysis of **ethical language**. The basic question is: how do we talk about ethics and how we develop moral principles, and how can we arrive at a decision about whether ethics is altogether. It is this idea which highlights why meta-ethics is seen to be so difficult. The question of ethics is to some degree incomprehensible, or maybe our ethical language isn't clear enough to express truths. Yet, this idea is what meta-ethics needs to get going in the first place!

So, what are the basic meta-ethical concepts we will refer to throughout this section? We will introduce them, and at first they might seem a tad confusing. However, as we progress, they will become clearer as we analyse them in conjunction with normative ethical systems. Moreover, we will explore internal issues, which can help highlight the various incoherencies and philosophical problems.

To begin with, let's contrast two opposing approaches that are key to understanding meta-ethics.

- **Cognitivism**, which holds that ethical statements are **truth-evaluable**, and so can be described as true or false.
- **Non-cognitivism**, which holds that ethical statements are not **truth-evaluable**, and so cannot be described as true or false.

These two positions, as stated before, are claims about the *nature* of ethical language. Cognitivists claim that ethical statements are facts that are either true or false. If I made the claim 'murder is wrong', you would agree that it is true, or disagree and say that it is false. Thus, moral statements are factual statements that we might use to describe the world, such as 'tigers have stripes'.

However, non-cognitivists present a slightly more confusing and nuanced position. They claim that ethical statements do not express facts and cannot be described as true or false. Thus, if I said 'murder is wrong', you would not agree or disagree with me, but you would say that I was expressing a feeling or a preference.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**





wrong', what I am really doing is expressing a subjective opinion about murder. It is not true or false because it does not describe anything in reality, like a statement such as 'murder is wrong'. For emotivists, all ethical statements are reflective of our current states of approval or disapproval, not truth-evaluable facts about the world. When one is actually saying something like 'I feel that murder is wrong' or 'I disapprove of murder', the second important distinction concerns whether there are real moral facts or not.

- **Moral realism** – This is the view that moral judgements refer to **mind-independent** facts about the world.
- **Moral anti-realism**, as the name suggests, is the view that moral judgements refer to mind-dependent features of the world.

On the surface, this distinction can appear very similar to the cognitivism distinction. A lot of overlap exists between most cognitivists about ethical language are realists. If ethical statements are true or false is because their status as true or false can easily be assessed by looking at features of the world. There are some cognitivists who are also *anti-realist*. Most notably, the philosopher J.L. Mackenzie's theory of **error theory** about ethics, which holds that moral statements are truth-evaluable but false.

Yet, it is most common for moral anti-realists to be non-cognitivists. For if ethical statements are not truth-evaluable, they are generally unlikely to correspond to mind-independent facts about the world. Nevertheless, the difference between these terms is important to note and it is likely that all cognitivists are always realists and that non-cognitivists are always anti-realists.

Finally, let's note some other key concepts that you may well run into during your studies. You will often cross over into debates about cognitivism and realism, as depending on which side of the fence these ideas often follow on from more basic arguments about the nature of moral facts.

**Moral absolutism** – This is the view that all actions are either intrinsically either right or wrong. If one states that 'murder is wrong', this means that murder is *intrinsically* wrong regardless of the circumstances. A good particular act of murder might be necessary to produce a good outcome. Kantian ethics is generally seen as a form of moral absolutism, whereas utilitarianism can be absolutist depending on the kind of act or principle involved.

**Moral universalism** – This is the view that ethical principles (or a particular system of ethics) are true regardless of an individual's culture, nationality or characteristics. Thus, the statement 'murder is wrong' is always true for any individual, irrespective of their distinguishing features. Now, if one is a moral absolutist, then one is necessarily a moral universalist. However, there are some who believe that moral universalism is right, even if moral absolutism is wrong. For example, if one adheres to utilitarianism, it can be argued that all human beings should follow the principle of utility, which states that an action is intrinsically right or wrong based on this principle.

**Moral relativism** – This is the view that ethical principles do not apply universally to all individuals. Instead, they are relative to an individual's culture, nationality, or other distinguishing characteristics. Despite it being an unattractive meta-ethical position to hold, there are plenty of philosophers who defend it. There is a variety of normative ethical systems. For instance, Alasdair MacIntyre proposes that what is virtuous and what is vice-like is relative to a particular culture.

**Moral nihilism** – This is the most extreme view, holding that nothing is ethically right or wrong. It is most commonly associated with nihilism, a philosophical theory but occasionally is proposed as a meta-ethical position. It is often seen as unattractive. However, some nihilists do not necessarily argue that ethical language should be abandoned. They see it as useful or pragmatic tools to order societies and are often criticised by other non-cognitivist theories on the basis that they lead to moral chaos. These criticisms are contentious, as we shall note later in this section.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



### Discussion Activity:

What meta-ethical position would you tend towards holding? Realist or anti-realist? Cognitivist or non-cognitivist? Universalist or relativist? Discuss in small pairs or groups.

## Naturalism

The first meta-ethical position we will study (and arguably the best starting point) is **naturalism**. It is one of the most common meta-ethical positions and underwrites many different secular ethical theories, including utilitarianism. For naturalism is a **cognitivist** position. It is the view that what is right and wrong can be discovered through analysing or reasoning upon the natural world and human nature. Importantly, this means that terms such as 'good' and 'bad' can be reduced to descriptions of natural properties. When we make a claim such as 'murder is wrong', we can change around the language of this claim to express it using ordinary descriptive language that we use in our everyday lives.

Naturalism is seen as quite an attractive meta-ethical theory for this reason: could we detail what is right or wrong with reference to an agreed upon set of observable everyday experience? While it will inevitably lead to debate about the right kind of means that moral disagreements are potentially resolvable, so long as we're all agreed on our understanding of the natural world. Thus, moral statements cease to be strange or mysterious, similar to any other statement we might make about the world.

But how does this work? As we've seen in Year 1, moral statements are inherently prescriptive statements about what ought to happen in a particular situation or context. Yet, naturalism expresses such an 'ought' and simply attempts to assert what *is* the case. So, if naturalism is to be a good reason to believe that prescriptive statements can be turned into descriptive statements, there must be a reliable process for doing so. In other words, we can reasonably base our moral claims on certain facts about the world. This means that naturalists typically have no argument or foundation for their particular system of ethics.

These foundations vary from philosopher to philosopher and system to system. For example, a classic example of a naturalistic ethical theory, hedonism, holds that moral statements can be reduced to descriptions and calculations of pleasure and pain (or, in some cases, other phenomena). On the other hand, utilitarianism contends that moral statements can be reduced down to descriptions of the consequences of actions, which can be reduced to descriptions of the character that comprises our understanding of virtue. Finally, **natural law** is perhaps the most religious example of naturalistic ethics, holding that there is a natural moral order that we can observe and deduce moral principles from. In each case, through analysing and understanding the world, one can also increase our moral knowledge.

### The Advantages of Ethical Naturalism

So, we've seen the basic advantages to ethical naturalism in that moral statements can be reduced to descriptive facts. Many naturalists, as a result, hold that naturalism can provide a more realistic **moral realism**. For not only are moral statements understandable as cognitive statements, but they can easily be checked according to their relationship to the observable world. This gives us a good idea about how **moral progress** might occur as human beings develop a greater understanding of the world. Moral statements are true and what are false as history progresses. Our development of the natural world and human nature may well lead us to greater ethical knowledge.

This undoubtedly is a simplified and optimistic view about naturalism but it chimes with our current understanding about morality today. Do we not often reckon that modern scientific perspectives on human behaviour, provides us with deeper insights into what is ethically right and wrong? If so, a position, it may be that naturalism is in line with **moral universalism**. For if there is some shared characteristic that human beings all possess, then moral principles that apply to all human beings. Yet, naturalism might well be challenged if the foundation of our ethical statements is natural characteristics not shared by all human beings.

It may be thus that naturalism supports a wide variety of different meta-ethical stances, but it is not inherently cognitive in nature. Moreover, even if we are forced to adopt a naturalistic moral framework, the advantages of ethical naturalism are still present. Moral statements are not some mysterious or sacred truth, instead are like any other kind of descriptive language we employ when talking about the world.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



## Naturalism and Utilitarianism

For an easy example of how naturalism functions in practice, we can look at utilitarianism in Year 1. As you should know, utilitarianism is a normative ethical theory that in its simplest form, the right action is the one that produces the greatest amount of **utility** for the greatest number of people. Therefore, is that each person throughout their lives should seek to maximise utility. Utilitarian philosophers such as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill was equivalent to the presence of pleasure and the absence of pain. Good actions are thus those which increase happiness through maximising pleasure and minimising pain.

However, in equating utility with pleasure, utilitarianism is also a **hedonistic** system. We are most interested in this when discussing meta-ethics. For happiness is a naturalistic concept, measured according to the amount of pleasure and pain present in a situation. Utilitarianism turns all statements into purely descriptive ones. If I proposed a statement 'murder is wrong', I would be effectively saying that 'murder results in decreased happiness, which is equivalent to what maximises happiness, when one is saying something is good, it means that something increases happiness. Simply put, the terms 'happiness' and 'good' in utilitarianism are **synonymous**; they can be exchanged with each other without any loss of meaning.

Now there certainly are different ways of calculating pleasure in utilitarianism and utilitarianism is about whether what is good can be reduced to what is pleasurable or painful. But we can provide a meta-ethical argument for their naturalism that at heart roughly takes the form of:

1. All human beings desire happiness.
2. What is happiness for human beings is, therefore, what is good for human beings.
3. One therefore ought to act so as to produce the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number.

Now, obviously this is a simplified version and we shall look at Mill's more complex version of utilitarianism for utility soon. But what is key to note is how utilitarian philosophers seek to move from a universal fact about the human person to a prescriptive statement about what humans ought to do. It is taken as a naturalistic or empirical fact that human beings do desire happiness and consider it good. If this is the case, then it is not a significant leap to then argue that human beings therefore should seek to maximise pleasure and minimise pain wherever possible. In short, since human beings are primarily **motivated** by pleasure and pain, these can be considered as the appropriate foundations for any ethical theory. Thus we arrive at the **principle of utility**, succinctly put forward by Mill in his well-known text *Utilitarianism*:

*Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness is intended pain, and the privation of pleasure.*

Yet Mill did not simply wish to assume the truth of this principle based on basic or common-sense facts, or call 'human nature'. Instead he offered a 'proof' of utilitarianism, which can be summarised as follows:

1. Each person, in so far as he believes it is attainable, desires his own happiness.
2. Since people desire their own happiness, for each person it is a good to them.
3. Therefore, general happiness is a good to the aggregate of all persons.
4. Happiness is the only good end of human conduct; all other ends are pursued only as a means to happiness.
5. Therefore, what is good is what promotes the greatest happiness for the greatest number.

There are two key premises to note that will become a matter of debate in the next section. The first is premise 2. Here Mill jumps from saying that people desire happiness to saying that people ought to desire happiness. But is saying that people desire happiness the same as holding that people *ought* to desire happiness? That human beings desire their happiness is arguably not the same thing as happiness. As we have seen, it may be that Mill is making an unwarranted leap from a **descriptive** claim about what people do to a **prescriptive** claim that people ought to desire their own happiness. The second key premise won't cover in much detail (but still worth noting), is the move from premise 2 to premise 5. If it is true that people ought to desire their own happiness, does this mean that they should also desire the happiness of others? What Mill may only show is that people should pursue what maximises happiness for themselves and not anyone else's.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



Mill's proof thus is a useful case study in examining some of the early pitfalls faced by naturalism. It is certainly appealing to believe that moral statements can be reduced to natural ones, but performing such a reduction is far from simple, and, as we shall analyse in the next section, it raises some difficult philosophical problems which any naturalist might struggle to overcome.

### Task:

In your own time, research another example of a naturalistic ethical theory such as utilitarianism. In your ethical view attempt to prove that its respective moral principles or laws can be reduced to natural facts. Write down a few notes and assess the ethical theory in light of the criticisms we have just seen.

## The Problems with Naturalism

We noted that in premise 2 of his proof, Mill potentially made a jump from the descriptive one that happiness is desirable to people to the prescriptive one that happiness ought to be desired. Philosophers such as G E Moore have argued that Mill is committing the **fallacy of equivocation**, which is when a person holds a particular term or word within an argument to possess one meaning but then uses it to mean multiple meanings. In this case, Mill is potentially guilty of the fallacy of equivocation as 'desirable' in 'people desire' is the same thing as 'desirable' in 'ought to be desired'. But why is this a proper philosophical criticism? Well, we can dig into this connection from observations of human behaviour? Well, we can dig into this by analysing a long-standing question hanging over naturalism, often termed the **is-ought problem**.

### The Is-Ought Problem

The is-ought problem is a meta-ethical issue originally outlined by David Hume in his *Nature* (1739). There he describes it as such:

*In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remarked, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surprised to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, **is**, and **is not**, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with **ought**, or an **ought not**. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this ought, or ought not, expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it should be observed and explained; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it.* (A Treatise of human Nature Bk III Pt I Section 1 – emphasis own)

In short, Hume notes that there is a gap of sorts between sentences which describe the world and those which prescribe action. For why does any fact about the world necessarily impel us to act in a certain way? The fact that cats enjoy having their fur stroked gives no reason for me to argue that people ought to stroke their fur. The problem is that if we attempt to move from descriptive facts about the world to prescriptive statements about what we ought to do, we are making an unwarranted philosophical leap. Mill has no philosophical justification for connecting our desire for happiness to the idea that we ought to desire our happiness. We maybe ought to be desiring happiness.

The potential ramifications of this gap can easily be seen. If Hume is correct, then we are left with a flawed premise: the belief prescriptive statements are deducible from descriptive ones. If this is the case, then naturalism as a meta-ethical position fails from the outset. We should instead be sceptical of the possibility of such a cognitive position or at least question whether it is right to suppose that moral facts can ever be reduced to natural facts. Hume himself leaned towards such a scepticism, moving closer to expressions of sentiment than it was to a system of moral facts. It is thus not surprising that he provided the basis for emotivism, which we shall analyse later. However, we will now provide a critique of naturalism by looking at an influential argument given by the philosopher G E Moore upon Hume's critique.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



## The Naturalistic Fallacy

The naturalistic fallacy is often viewed as an extension of the is–ought problem posed by Hume and is most associated with the work of G E Moore, who criticised one of the fundamental beliefs of naturalists: the notion that moral properties can be meaningfully reduced down to natural properties. In fact, what Moore claimed is that any such reduction commits a fallacy in reasoning, similar to the original problem pointed out in premise 2 of Mill's proof of utilitarianism.

Moore sought to demonstrate this fallacy through what we called the **open question argument**. This is a simple but devastating objection to naturalistic ethical theories such as utilitarianism which sought to equate what is good with properties such as happiness.

The form of the open question argument is simple but can be a little difficult to grasp based on the **semantics** of moral language. The way we use terms such as 'good' appear to possess, shows that they cannot be directly reduced to natural properties. Below we present the summarised form of Moore's argument followed by its application to utilitarianism.

1. If 'x' is equivalent to 'good', then asking 'is it true that x is good?' is meaningless.
2. Asking 'is it true that x is good?' is not meaningless.
3. Therefore, x is not equivalent to good.

Let's delve into this a little further. Now, hopefully you recall that if naturalism is right, then good and bad with talk of natural properties. In the case of utilitarianism, this might replace happiness, such that we could easily make the claim that 'happiness is equivalent to good'. If correct, we could reasonably replace every instance of the term 'good' with corresponding natural properties without any loss of meaning. As we stated before in the previous part on utilitarianism, good is happiness.

However, what Moore notes in premise 1 of his open question argument is that if the question 'is it true that happiness is good?' would be meaningless. We would in effect be asking 'is it true that happiness is happiness?', since happiness is equivalent to good. Such a statement is true by definition and pointless to ask. If we ask the question, 'is it true that happiness is good?' isn't really meaningless at all. In fact, it's an open question. This question can't be derived from the terms involved in the definition of happiness. If happiness is good, the two things are conceptually different and can't be equated.

Thus we arrive at the core of the naturalistic fallacy; just because we can attribute 'good' to the same things, this does not mean they actually attribute the same quality. What Moore highlights through his open question argument is that any attempt to equate moral properties to natural properties is bound to fail, as the ability to ask open questions about this equation shows that these properties are still different. If we asked the question, 'is it true that virtue is good?', we would arrive at the very same problems. For Moore, the term 'good' can never be properly reduced to any particular natural property or set of natural properties.

Hopefully, now you can see meta-ethical discussion truly in action. In the introductory part of the course, we saw how meta-ethics proceeds is by analysing ethical language, in the belief that such analysis can reveal truths about what ethics is. Moore here, through his open question argument, is doing exactly this, arguing that if we look at the concept of *good*, we find that it is in a deeper sense than any natural property comparison to other non-moral properties.

For the moment, though, let's substitute in our original example of utilitarianism based on happiness. The argument we presented earlier was:

1. If happiness is equivalent to good, then asking 'is it true that happiness is good?' is meaningless.
2. Asking 'is it true that happiness is good?' is not meaningless.
3. Therefore, happiness is not equivalent to good.

Can you see any issues here? If Moore is correct it does appear to be a serious problem for utilitarianism. Nonetheless, Moore's analysis did not spell the end for naturalism, and in the final part of the course we will explore some responses to both the is–ought problem and the naturalistic fallacy.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



## INSPECTION COPY



Why is this important? Well, despite these two terms being equivalent as to what is substituted into Moore's open question argument. Thus, if we ask the question, 'Does *good* mean *that which is desired*?' it doesn't exactly seem to be a closed question despite the two terms fundamentally being equivalent. That is because the equivalency claim '*H<sub>2</sub>O is water*' is not analytically known. In other words, we know the equivalency through empirical investigation (**a posteriori**). But of course, once it is known, it is impossible to claim these two terms aren't equivalent, for they refer to the same thing. Moore's assumption about analytic equivalency is perhaps what is mistaken.

This second issue is particularly pertinent for naturalists as it suggests that we can discover what *good* means through **a posteriori** means. While we can't be sure what the good is currently, the world it may be possible to discover what natural properties are in fact equivalent to *good*. If this is made, definitions according to these natural properties. Naturally this is a possibility that could occur, and, so long as it is a possibility, it demonstrates that Moore's argument isn't quite as decisive as he makes it out to be. The idea that *good* could be defined in a posteriori identity claim in the same manner as '*H<sub>2</sub>O is water*'.

### Overcoming the Is-Ought Problem

So, we've seen how there are grounds to criticise Moore's framing of the open question argument. It may be possible that we can discover what *good* means through a posteriori observation. This may be a good fit for the naturalist who wishes to show how moral properties are reducible to natural properties, but it doesn't tell us how the is-ought gap arises in the first place and how prescriptive statements can in practice be translated or connected to descriptive statements. We need a strategy outlined in the beginning of this section and think about how we might overcome the nature of ethics beyond how we define things as being good or bad.

### Utilitarianism and the Is-Ought Problem

Let's turn back to utilitarianism for a second. Now, throughout this section we've been using utilitarianism as a reference point when talking about naturalism. And we noted that one problem in moving from a descriptive fact about human beings desiring happiness to a prescriptive 'ought to desire happiness' is that it's important to acknowledge that Mill did not claim that the 'ought' of the principle is logically valid. In other words, Mill was not claiming that the 'ought' of the principle is derived from 'is' statements about how human beings do seek happiness, but that from a consideration of human nature and behaviour, we can easily arrive at an understanding of good and bad. Why is this important?

Well, a lot falls on how we construe the nature of ethical statements in the first place. If we say that ethical statements are about abstract entities but are real beings that regularly exhibit **goal-directed behaviour**, then we can see that survival needs or towards more complex activities such as the building of a house or a car. We can then craft prescriptive statements that are directed towards various goals. As such, if we can identify a goal, we can leap to say that we ought to do actions that move towards completion of this goal.

Here we can refashion ethical statements in terms of **hypotheticals**, such that we can say 'if person *x* wishes to achieve goal *y*, they ought to do action *z*'. *Oughts*, in this sense, are a special kind of statement but simply occur whenever we are talking about certain goals. Moore might well simply contend that this only proves the naturalistic fallacy further. For we still have to argue what makes a particular goal 'good' or 'bad'. But the 'good' maybe isn't a term that can be attached to a sentence and made meaningful. The term is only meaningful when attached to a particular goal, or hypothetical situation.

Now, this could lead to moral relativism if there aren't any universal goals identified. But like our previous discussion of the open question argument, it potentially perhaps attaches too much significance to the notions of good or bad. It may even misinterpret the meaning of good or bad completely! But since utilitarianism is a theory that naturally accommodates hypothetical thinking. We can fashion statements such as 'if person *x* wishes to achieve goal *y*, they ought to do action *z*'. Good, therefore, just arises when this condition is met.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



## Virtue and the Is-Ought Problem

Virtue ethics is a normative ethical system that holds that good arises when an individual acts virtuously (working towards positive character traits) and bad arises when an individual acts unvirtuously (working towards negative character traits). For its founder, Aristotle, acting virtuously leads to **eudaimonia**, which is generally translated from Greek to English as **flourishing**. This is seen as the conceived end of ethical action rather than happiness, incorporating a broader sense of achievement.

You won't have studied virtue ethics in your studies, but it's useful to think about it. For in contrast to concepts such as good or happiness, virtues are often termed **thick** ethical concepts. What does this mean? Well, key to understanding virtue is the analysis not just of what is good or bad, but of the behaviours and character of an individual. So, take, for instance, the character trait of courage. To hold that courage is a virtue or a vice and hold that it is correspondingly good or bad, is to really explain what courage is. To properly detail courage we also have to outline the conditions that effectively provide a foundation for understanding when a person has been courageous. This is important? Well, the philosopher Philippa Foot argues that to provide a full understanding of a virtue is necessary to use both descriptive and prescriptive elements, and it is the combination of these that makes virtue a **thick** ethical concept.

The easiest way to understand this idea is through an example. If I state 'Edith is honest' this means that Edith has or displays behaviours that are characteristic of honesty, such as telling the truth. In other words, to assess this sentence, we have to employ descriptive statements that explain what honesty is. However, since honesty is a virtue in the eyes of many, in stating that Edith is honest, I am also making a prescriptive statement. I am naturally asserting that Ellen is of good character or her actions are good, and, therefore, I am making a prescriptive statement. Even if we don't regard honesty as a virtue, it is hard to ignore the prescriptive element. Thick ethical concepts might pose a difficulty for the is-ought problem. There is a clear distinction between descriptive and prescriptive statements; both are contained in our use of the term 'virtue'.

Now, it might be that if we broke down virtues further, we might once again find that virtues can be reduced to simple hypothetical statements. For example, 'Edith is an honest woman' might be broken down into 'Edith always tells the truth' and 'Edith is a woman'. A virtue ethicist might argue that such a reduction misrepresents what virtue is. Virtue is not just a set of principles but the cultivation of moral character that manifests itself in actions. For example, Edith might well be an honest person but not always tell the truth if it is in her best interests. Either way, it may be that Hume's is-ought problem is an oversimplification of the moral life. The moral life of human beings does not consist in simply declaring things to be good or bad above our descriptions of the world. Rather it is perhaps naturally intertwined in our thoughts and behaviours as human beings.

So, altogether we've seen not just how notions of good or bad might have a broader context, but also how discussing them in terms of hypothetical statements or as part of thick ethical concepts, but also how discussing them in terms of thick ethical concepts might well not be the defining issues when studying ethics. Moore might well have overestimated the power of naturalistic ethical theories. But in order to really judge the effectiveness of naturalistic ethical theories, we need to explore Moore's own alternative to naturalism. For if there is such difficulty in reducing virtues to natural properties, maybe it is worth exploring the possibility that good is in some sense **non-natural**. This was the position Moore put forward and we will analyse it in more detail in the next section. This is a discussion of **intuitionism**.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



### Discussion Activity:

Do you believe that there is a satisfactory answer to the naturalistic fallacy and the is-ought problem? Discuss in pairs or small groups.



## Intuitionism

In the last section on naturalism, we looked at G E Moore's open question argument which sought to show how moral properties such as good could not be meaningfully reduced down to natural properties. However, despite our discussion on the strengths and weaknesses, we didn't ask the obvious question: what if Moore is correct? If moral properties aren't equivalent to a natural property or set of natural properties, what could they be? Well, Moore held that the answer was equally as simply **non-natural**. Whatever we think good and bad mean, they are not terms equivalent and can't be explained by descriptive statements about the natural world.

This is a little strange at first, but to say a property is non-natural is grasping. It compares terms such as 'goodness' to the concept of colours. The definition of red is not the colour red is. Sure, we can point out the various ways it can potentially explain how it arises, but our understanding of what colour is rests in our sense perceptions. For while we can perceive the colour red, it is not a real feature of the world (holding that red is strictly the interactions between light waves and our visual system is a bit reductive). The point of this comparison is not to draw an exact analogy but to help us appreciate concepts which cannot be reduced to natural properties. Goodness and badness are instances of these non-natural concepts.

But in contrast to the more straightforward naturalist stances we analysed, this means that goodness and badness can't be discovered through analysis of the natural world. How do we gain an understanding of what is good or bad, right or wrong? Well, just as the name suggests, we gain knowledge of good and bad through **intuition**.

### The Role of Intuition

But what does talk of intuition here mean? First, it is important to clear up any confusion. When Moore is talking about intuition, he is not using it in the more general sense that we might use the term to describe a general instinct for things, a feeling that something is right or an understanding of what is right that needs to be fully thought through. But Moore is reaching for a philosophical understanding of intuition, as a special faculty through which human beings can grasp natural concepts such as 'good'.

This still might seem a little strange, and rightly so. As we shall discuss throughout the course, it is not clear what intuition is or how it is able to grasp non-natural concepts. Yet, if Moore is right, good is **simple, non-natural, indefinable and irreducible**, then we can't talk about good in terms of observation or reasoning. There has to be some other human capacity capable of grasping good and bad. But still, what is intuition exactly? Is it a kind of mental state, a belief, or a reasoning? It's at this point those critics of intuitionism often found themselves frustrated. The concept of good itself, intuition resists an easy description or definition.

Nevertheless, leaving aside such questions for the moment, we can gain some understanding of Moore's work *Principia Ethica*, where he does outline the nature of these intuitions, if not exactly how they work. Perhaps the most important idea Moore puts forward in this work is that moral intuitions are basic statements that exist without being proved or disproved. They are not arrived at through the thinker's understanding of the concepts involved. One comparison sometimes made (by those termed rationalists), was with mathematical truths such as ' $2 + 2 = 4$ '. These kinds of truths are proved or inferred from other truths or belief but are still intuited by human beings to be true. Moral truths are also not the result of a psychological process. For intuitionists, it was often the idea that intuition was a purely psychological capacity, for this would give intuition

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



## The Character of Intuitionism

Despite the strange character of moral intuitions, G E Moore's intuitionism is a firm defender of the potential strengths of intuitionism is that it potentially provides an answer to the question of what morality is. Many human beings, including maybe even yourselves, do believe that certain beliefs are inherently good or bad, and intuitionism gives a simple explanation for these moral beliefs. It may even explain to a degree how certain moral principles naturally manifest themselves in certain moral principles (e.g. 'do not murder') that often appear to be universally accepted.

As such, if one can overlook the initial strangeness of intuitionism, there is a lot to be gained from it. One doesn't just think about intuition as some kind of basic natural process but think of it as something that explains the special qualities of ethical language and reinforces basic intuitions that have persisted throughout history. Moreover, if all human beings are able to intuit moral truths, intuitionism also potentially supports a strong understanding of moral universalism, where the same moral principles may well apply to all people. In this sense, it is important to understand the basic character of intuitionism, proposing intuition as a source of ethical beliefs. Even if it is difficult to spell out exactly what intuition is, it potentially also provides a solution to some of the lingering meta-ethical problems we've noted throughout this section.

However, not all is as rosy as it seems for the intuitionists. In the next part, we will look at the problems that have plagued intuitionism since its conception.

## The Problems with Intuitionism

The first problem we can raise is one noted at the very start of this topic. What is intuition? It's a word often thrown around in philosophy, generally referring to the way we know things without the need for different ideas. Yet, it is clear that intuitionists require a concept to do a little better than just intuition. Human beings with novel moral ideas, not having prior access to understanding is not enough. Intuitionism is from experience or observation. That's the problem is the most immediate hurdle intuitionism has to struggle to overcome.

G E Moore also never gave a full account of what intuition was, often calling it a kind of self-evident truths. The problem is, such a sort of awareness doesn't really explain the way human beings come to know things. In the case of experience, we can explain things in terms of perceptions, mental states and mental processes. With Moore, we're pushed into a position requiring some distinct faculty of the mind, which generates such an intuitive awareness. If this is the case, where is this special faculty located and how does it arise? If we try to explain it in naturalistic terms, using biological or psychological descriptions, we arguably risk losing the nature and location of this special faculty isn't defined, then intuitionism appears to be an incomplete ethical account of morality.

This problem caused somewhat of a split among those supporting intuitionism. Some intuitionists had to be committed to some special faculty of the mind, while many others tried to avoid this commitment, with some maintaining it was not necessary. Despite this, many intuitionists have tried to define intuition as a kind of psychological or mental state or even moral truth. However, if moral truths can be known through experience, then they do not require justification. If they are self-evident in the same way that our other perceptions might be, then intuitionism is not a special faculty of the mind.

But even here, we can regress when we start outlining the nature of intuition. If intuition is just a mental state, then any other mental state should be explicable in terms of brain activity and neural activity. If intuition is just a mental state, how do we distinguish what is an intuitive belief from just a normal belief? If intuition is just a mental state, or have we just designated some kinds of belief or states as intuitive? The main problem facing intuitionists is that if we make our explanations of intuition precise, we are left with explaining it away!

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



## Moral Disagreement

In our list of strengths, we noted how intuitionism may help account for the variety of different ways societies across human history have overlapped in their moral beliefs. We even noted that intuitionism may support an easy understanding of moral universalism! But beneath these strengths is also a weakness if we turn the question around. For if all individuals can intuit self-evident moral truths, why do we arrive at very different systems of normative ethics? It can be argued that a special kind of intuitive awareness or moral sense should provide us with significant moral consensus. Yet there have been many cases where human beings have significantly disagreed about what is right\* (more than there have been agreements, many would argue).

There are two issues to this. The first follows the objection we explored previously of intuition, then the intuitionists have to explain (in non-naturalistic terms) not only intuit moral truths but also how this faculty might go wrong. For if intuition produces how do humans produce contradictory self-evident beliefs? It could be that we are intuiting different moral concepts and beliefs without understanding what intuition is intuition in the 'right' way.

However, the second part is a more epistemological issue. It asks whether, if intuition truly resolve moral disagreements. For instance, if one person, Smith, claims that intuition that 'murder is wrong' and Jones claims they have a self-evident intuition we pick one side or the other? The naturalist may refer to descriptive facts about to these claims, but intuitionism cannot do that. Instead, it would have to talk about wrong and another's is right. But as we already know, moral truths are self-evident. So, it appears there is no way of discerning who is right and who is wrong.

This is another difficult issue for intuitionism that is handled in a number of different ways. Some argued that intuitions could not offer us direct guidance on actions. All they reveal are concepts we ought to pursue. For example, if one was, therefore, a **consequentialist** when it held that intuitionism revealed that we simply ought to pursue certain self-evident beauty, truth and justice. However, others, such as W D Ross, did believe that intuition truths and principles, which we shall explore later.

### Discussion Activity:

Is moral disagreement particularly troubling for intuitionism? Or is it a problem equally face? Discuss in pairs or small groups.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**





So what does Ross propose these prima facie duties are? Well, he never claimed a conclusive list but offered seven key examples: fidelity; reparation; gratitude; justice; maleficence; and self-improvement. The idea is that all of these duties incur obligations but ultimately are also flexible. As such, certain duties may be sidelined if a higher or more important duty at a particular time. For example, fidelity or truth-telling in order to fulfil the duty of beneficence, in caring for someone's welfare. Thus Ross advocates **deontological pluralism with flexible duties**. Intuition still tells us what kinds of actions are following but equally does not demand that we follow a duty absolutely.

The clear upshot of Ross's system is that there is potentially, at least in principle, no final disagreements or conflicts of duty. If there is not a complete solution, one can potentially refer to the relative importance of the prima facie duties with another who also has some intuition about the duties. Nonetheless, many have still criticised Ross's intuitionism for still being unclear when it comes to ethical decision-making. For ultimately, there still is no external standard to tell us what duties are more important than others, and the flexibility means that one can justify almost any actions under his system. Nonetheless, it provides an important alternative and challenge to consequentialism and shows how non-naturalism can give rise to a variety of different positions.

### The Nature of Intuition

A final point we might make concerns the nature of intuition itself. We saw how intuition was a kind of psychological process in the brain. The basic concern is that if intuition is explained in naturalistic terms, it no longer could be termed a non-naturalist approach and would fall victim to the open question argument. However, should we resist this reduction of intuition just be a special neurophysiological process that is able to grasp certain moral truths? We can think of this as the moral centre of the brain, a way that the organ captures certain moral truths rooted in our ordinary behaviour.

Now, it is potentially true that this kind of thinking does fall victim to the naturalistic fallacy. However, we have still conceded that intuition is a kind of moral sense, versus the more rationalist approach. If we hold that we can grasp moral truths like we do other rational intuitions (e.g. basic arithmetic), then we can take this empirical route in intuitionism, then we can draw some interesting conclusions which are more grounded in our conventional understanding of the world. For instance, the way we perceive beauty or aesthetics in the world, or even just the way we react to certain situations. Rather than having to draw very abstract comparisons, we can make more concrete comparisons. Intuition (as a moral sense) might be.

The trouble is, however, that we may arrive very far away from what the original intuitionism was intended to do. Instead of developing a non-natural way of understanding ethics, we end up in the lap of naturalism. But if intuition is understood in this more empiricist sense, then the problems we analysed in trying to discern exactly what intuition is and how it connects to moral truths. Whether or not this is a viable project, however, is something for you to evaluate. The rationalist or empiricist direction of intuitionism fails to develop an effective answer to the open question argument. Moreover, in the next section, we shall analyse a very different theory that arises from the naturalistic fallacy: **emotivism**.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



#### Discussion Activity:

Is intuition simply too vague a concept to be useful in understanding the nature of moral truths? If not, how might it be described? Discuss in pairs or small groups.

## Emotivism

Throughout this section, we've analysed terms such as 'good' and 'bad' as, in some ways, *non-cognitive*. While we haven't assumed that there are specific moral facts, we've looked at how intuitionism often lead to a realist stance on ethics. For if ethical statements are thought to be a state of affairs in which certain ethical statements are true. And terms, such as 'good' or 'bad', really do refer to something *descriptively moral*.

However, we've also analysed some difficult philosophical problems that naturalism bridge. For the former, both the is-ought problem and naturalistic fallacy loom large. It is difficult to meaningfully connect non-natural properties and intuition functions. In light of these problems, there is arguably an easy solution. What if there aren't moral facts in language itself? What if, when we're declaring our moral statements, we're only expressing some other kind of sentiment which, due to the quirks of our language, is taken to be a fact or truth? This is the position of philosophers who identify as **non-cognitivist**. We will now explore one of the most prominent non-cognitivist theories: **emotivism**.

### The Philosophical Basis to Emotivism

Cast your mind back to the is-ought problem we outlined earlier in this companion. Of David Hume, who identified that **prescriptive statements** cannot be derived from descriptive statements without a jump in reasoning. Now, we explored a number of ways that naturalism bridges the gap between is and ought statements but, for a subsection of philosophers, Hume's argument was a way in which ethical statements were not really cognitive. Why is this the case?

Well, if we cannot derive prescriptive statements from descriptive statements, then any prescriptive statement we make. For instance, raising our old example of 'murder is wrong', this statement alone cannot be proved true or false unless it relates to some set of descriptive facts. Yet, if this set of descriptive facts is not available, then the utterer isn't making a statement that is as simple as 'murder is wrong'. For the non-cognitivist, ethical statements instead reflect some subjective sentiment of the person uttering them. They do not reflect some descriptive claim which can be verified by observation, reason or logic.

### A J Ayer and Emotivism

This all might sound a little strange at first, but we can clarify these initial thoughts by looking at the work of the philosopher A J Ayer. You may remember Ayer from studying the verification principle. As a thinker aligned with the logical positivists, Ayer claimed language was only cognitively meaningful insofar as it was either:

- a) *Analytic* (that is, tautological, e.g. 'All bachelors are unmarried men')
- OR
- b) *Synthetic* (that is, subject to empirical observation or experimentation, e.g. 'There are fourteen blue cars in the car park today')

Ethical language is clearly not tautological, neither can it be synthetically verified. This is the problem. Thus, ethical statements were cognitively meaningless. They could not be verified and instead represented some subjective sentiment held by the utterer. Nor did they reflect any intuition somehow, due to the conflicting intuitions people held about different moral issues (a problem we explored in the last section). Ayer himself states his position firmly in *Language, Truth and Logic*:

*The presence of an ethical symbol in a proposition adds nothing to its factual content. "You acted wrongly in stealing that money," I am not stating anything more than "You stole that money." In adding that this action is wrong I am not making any further statement which can be proved or disproved. I am only expressing my moral disapproval of it. It is as if I had said, "You stole that money,"*

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



written it with the addition of some special exclamation marks. ... If now I generally say, "Stealing money is wrong," I produce a sentence that has no factual meaning, a proposition that can be either true or false. ... I am merely expressing certain moral attitudes.

But if we do accept, as Ayer does, that moral statements reflect subjective sentiments, might this be? Just as for the intuitionists defining the nature of intuition, this was left to the emotivists to answer and one for which multiple responses arose. Ayer holds that certain subjective attitudes held by the utterer, which he typically talks of as attitudes of approval or disapproval. So, when I say, for instance, that 'murder is wrong', what I am really saying is that I disapprove of murder.

Thus, although they are critical of the emotivists, it is key not to simply state that the nature of emotion is subjective. Instances of approval and disapproval might be quite complex, not simply being angry or happy about something. Yet, there is perhaps still room for ideas about moral sentiments. For instance, C L Stevenson, another emotivist who followed Ayer, held that ethical statements were not mere statements of approval or disapproval but had an *imperative* component, which works to win over a person to a particular attitude. When I state, 'murder is wrong', I really am stating 'I disapprove of murder, and you should too'.

Why is this important? Well, think about any moral debate or discussion you've had. Do you repeatedly stating feelings of approval or disapproval until you all go home? No! Instead, we are trying to get individuals to feel, act and view the world in the same way we do. The imperative component reflects how we will give reasons for why one should act in a certain way. The imperative component of an ethical statement can somehow be proved (Stevenson would say). Instead, the reasons we use to back up moral claims just involve getting our opponents to agree with their own attitudes, the consequences of their attitudes and whether they cohere with our own. Stevenson, imperatives can't be proved but they can still be *supported* by reference to facts.

## The Character of Emotivism

We've seen how the emotivists, by treating moral statements as subjective sentiments, offer a non-cognitivist perspective on ethics as a whole. Moreover, we've seen how emotivism can account for such things as the is-ought problem. Yet, there are other strengths to the emotivist worldview. It can account for moral disagreement throughout history. Although this was a problem for certain externalist naturalists, it is given an easy explanation within the structure of emotivism. Disagreement is certainly to be expected when ethical statements aren't truth-evaluable expressions of approval or disapproval. And the possibility of agreement is still not a problem. Stevenson's addition of an imperative component to the nature and purpose of ethical statements helps here.

What this means perhaps is that there hasn't been any real moral progress where we've gained a greater understanding of moral facts. Rather, all that's happened is that our values have changed with our perception of what one ought to do changing alongside them. In this sense, emotivism is **pessimistic**. But the emotivist can argue here that they are just being honest about the nature of ethical statements. That ethical statements aren't truth-evaluable doesn't mean they aren't a key part of our moral lives. We should take care with, however, is talking about ethical statements as if they are facts. They have a status that they do not possess.

Yet, emotivism still potentially rests on some shaky grounds. For we explored a variety of problems with naturalists and intuitionists might overcome their philosophical difficulties. If there is a way to bridge the is-ought gap, is there still a strong case for emotivism? The fact that moral statements cannot be proved for descriptive statements is not itself evidence that they are subjective in nature. And this is where emotivism struggles. For, as we've seen, there are a number of problems with emotivism and how it characterises ethical statements.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



### Discussion Activity:

Do you think Ayer's analysis effectively shows ethical statements to be cognitively meaningless? Do you think there are problems with applying the verification principle to ethical statements? Discuss.

## The Problems with Emotivism

In *Contemporary Moral Philosophy*, Warnock argues that one major issue with emotivism is that it fails to properly distinguish ethical language from other forms of language, which creates problems (for example, the impassioned speeches that are the hallmark of melodrama). In other words, the nature of emotivism comes down to very basic ideas about emotive approval or disapproval. What differentiates a 'moral' statement from any kind of 'emotional' statement? If I say 'I am bored', I might express this statement in a variety of verbal and non-verbal ways. But the statement 'I am bored' is not necessarily the same as saying 'I approve or disapprove of being bored'.

In this sense, critics of emotivism have highlighted that proponents have often struggled to explain what are moral statements, which are used in ethical senses, contexts, and situations, and how they differ from other kinds of emotive statements. The most difficult cases are where ethical language is used to express kinds of attitudes that Ayer and Stevenson identify. Are moral statements always expressions of approval or disapproval? And do they always possess an imperative component? In this section, we will explore some issues raised by these questions and see whether we can find a good response.

### The Circularity of Emotivism

One criticism, made by the ethicist Alasdair MacIntyre, is particularly troublesome. He asks that if we happen to accept the emotivist's claims about moral statements, 'what emotions do moral statements really express?' When we make moral statements, we are expressing some kind of attitude. But we can press the question further and ask, 'what kind of approval are we expressing in these statements?'

For clearly, when I state, 'Ice cream is good' I am expressing something different from 'Ice cream is good'. In the former I am not trying to persuade anyone of the general goodness of ice cream, but I am making the radical and abhorrent moral claim that ice cream is more in my approval than anything else is being expressed here; what we might call a moral element. This is identified as being troublesome in the introduction to this section.

For when we take a broader view of ethical language and the terms within it, we see that there are different kinds of approval. This means that when MacIntyre asks what kind of approval is being referenced, the emotivist is arguably required to specify what separates the kind of approval being talked about from other kinds of approval that are regularly expressed throughout life. The problem facing the emotivist is that one cannot simply distinguish 'moral approval' from other kinds of approval. It is a 'moral' kind of approval. For the use of moral here doesn't explain why these statements are different from attitudes of emotional approval without assuming some prior understanding of what moral means.

It's a subtle point, but what MacIntyre highlights is that the emotivists have pulled a bit of a trick on us. They've reduced moral statements to attitudes of approval without explaining what makes them moral in the first place. And when we ask what makes them moral, they can't detail a technique or a set of characteristics without assuming some idea of what 'moral' means in the first place. You can see this circularity a little more clearly in the diagram opposite!

They are unjustifiable or unverifiable states of approval

What makes these statements of 'moral approval' and not just ordinary approval?

What does this all suggest? Well, the emotivist ultimately wants to contend that moral statements are different in some kind of way, such that we can reduce them to emotional states of approval or disapproval.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**







difficult to see how a moral consensus could be formed not just between individuals and cultures during ethical dilemmas.

For example, imagine a friend uttered the statement 'it is acceptable to eat babies' and you vehemently reject this proposition. But would you be doing so simply due to a knee-jerk disapproval? Would there not also be certain other ethical and rational elements at play? The Golden Rule, or even the categorical imperative, noting that if everyone did this, the world would be likely to become extinct or at least extremely unhappy. You might even be motivated from compassionate when we can eat other animals without such problems. These reasons don't really seem to apply to subjective states, but different facts that we can understand, *even if they are not felt the same way*.

What this still highlights is that moral discussion and disagreement often entail rational arguments about what it means to be moral, whether it be the laws we should follow or the values we should aim for. If this is the case, then the emotivist's characterisation of morality is empty. It doesn't really capture what morality is or why it is important to human beings. If you are supporting emotivism, it is vital to be very careful in outlining the foundations of morality. If adopting an emotivist perspective, it is not simply enough to criticise certain aspects of morality; you have to also show how we can make sense of moral discussion if moral language is understood in terms of subjective states of each different person taking part in a discussion. If this is not possible, then the emotivist framework actually captures the nature of ethics and why it is or is not important.

### Anti-realism and Moral Nihilism

The next criticism we might turn to is the argument that emotivism effectively collapses into moral nihilism. But what is moral nihilism? We briefly mentioned it before, but it is best defined as the complete rejection of the view that moral truths or facts exist. Moral nihilists have often contended that if one is a moral nihilist, then it means that one also rejects the importance of moral discourse in human life. However, it should also be distinguished from amorality, which simply refers to a state of not caring about morality. Nihilism instead is a potentially much more severe position, saying that human beings should not engage in moral discourse at all. If this is true, we should no longer speak of things as being morally good or bad, and not say that any particular action is morally right or wrong.

Nihilism in many ways, though, is a loaded term, and is often bandied around when individuals or societies have stopped caring about morality as a whole; it is generally seen as an undesirable situation in the moral landscape of humanity as a whole. From the German ex-band Autobahn in the film *The Big Lebowski*, nihilism is often used to describe a state of apathy with performing acts or holding beliefs we would consider to be morally unacceptable. If anti-realism descends into moral nihilism has to be taken seriously. If there are no moral facts, then we abandon the conventional ways we even engage in moral discourse?

Some anti-realists claim that simply because there are no objective moral facts does not mean we should continue our current ways of ethically discussing beliefs and facts, only that the way we approach these dilemmas requires a few tweaks. However, others go further, arguing for a middle ground between conventional ethics. This is what J L Mackie generally argues, contending that we should move away from our understanding of error theory, such as we have, and arrive at new ways and concepts of morality as a whole. Anti-realism is, therefore, not so much to suppose that we have to initially reject all moral facts, but to build a vision of how ethics can survive and flourish without objective moral facts.

The same is true for emotivism. If, when we are engaging in moral discussion, we are simply expressing approval or disapproval, shouldn't we just do away with moral talk altogether and be less disingenuous to simply say 'I don't approve of x' instead of saying 'x is wrong'? If we are right we are not really morally required to be straightforward or truthful. But if we are wrong, we argue that we should continue discussing our behaviour in ethical language when we are not. In other words, if we are to be emotivists, let's be serious emotivists and get rid of the moral talk altogether.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



Now, the difficulty is of course that this seems quite an extreme option, one that can be seen as nihilistic! At the same time, the criticism of moral nihilism isn't necessarily a strong argument that they are only being realistic. Moreover, there is a more general sense that even if we are committed to nihilism at all. After all, the nihilist argues that there are no moral facts, that all is meaningless, whereas the emotivist argues that moral statements are just states of mind. The claim of realisation that moral statements are just these doesn't mean that we don't have to live by them; they might well play an important and useful part in our lives, such that changing them

In this sense, the criticism from nihilism is misplaced, and it is important in the context of emotivism (although not accepting!). While it is perfectly reasonable to explain moral discourse in this way, this does not necessarily mean that emotivists engage in moral discourse and use moral language, even if these activities are all

## Moral Progress

The final criticism we can look at for emotivism, and more generally all anti-realist progress. It is not an uncommon view to hear those who have just started analysing there's so much disagreement primarily because morality is just subjective'. However, much more difficult to uphold coherently, it also is without justification, a rather view the role of ethics in our lives. Moreover, very few people in the world are w principles, especially if they are on the receiving end of someone else's vindictive two key things to initially note when thinking about the nature of moral disagree

1. The mere existence of disagreement about what is right and wrong is not firm evidence of moral facts.
2. The mere existence of disagreement about what is right and wrong is not firm evidence of moral progress.

The first thing is key to note because there is disagreement on almost every discipline. Scientists disagree about aspects of the world. For instance, they don't exist or they have not been discovered yet, and there may or may not be true for moral facts. Second, it is not linear. It occasionally is very slow and at other times is very rapid. Moreover, a new idea at the time of a confirmation, even if it turns out to be correct!

These two facts are particularly important when thinking about emotivism. For there has been no real moral progress. Instead, only our attitudes of approval and disapproval have changed. If some sense of moral progress does form a potential problem for emotivists, much more so if we disagree. For the simple argument for moral progress is that growth occurs because we reject wrong practices of our ancestors, and we do so not because those practices were wrong, but because we regard such practices as morally wrong. To take the example of slavery: people who illegally enslave others, and even if these slavers offered individuals the chance to escape, likely most would turn down such an opportunity, even if it potentially would bring

### Discussion Activity:

Do you believe there has been significant moral progress throughout history? Discuss in pairs or small groups.

Now at this point the anti-realist might turn round and say, 'well this is just an expression of emotions, not a reflection of moral reality'. But such a view is still difficult to come to terms with. For example, about the United States Declaration of Independence, you might know of the famous following rights to all people in the US: 'Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness' written in 1776. But almost certainly wasn't applied to everyone in the US. Slavery, economic discrimination were not set up such that everyone could be free and pursue happiness. That while the Founding Fathers had moral ideals, they did not yet realise what that meant. That over time, as understanding of these concepts grew, it was realised that it was a right for all people while keeping slavery legal.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



Many philosophers argue here that the easiest way to explain such a change is the moral facts, and that throughout history moral growth has at times occurred such societies are better and closer to these objective morals than they were previously. It is not easily with naturalism. For naturalistic theories haven't remained static. They've had to better reflect the connections between moral statements and natural statements. With a deeper understanding of the natural world, we've also gained a deeper understanding of moral progress, not just shifted our subjective preferences.

This is far from an easy conclusion to draw, however. Even if one does not accept the existence of moral facts, one may well still hold a form of moral relativism, arguing that this moral growth is relative to a particular culture. The abolition of slavery in the US as such can only be understood to those important moral ideals that were already part of the culture of the US and not by comparing them to other cultures which hold vastly different ideals. Yet, even if we accept this, it is a strong challenge to the emotivist. They are, in effect, required to show why it seems like moral progress despite this progress just being changing attitudes of approval and disapproval.

This challenge is complicated by the potentially messy changing of moral principles over the course of multiple generations, different societies have traded in ideas and practices in different ways from the influence of other traditions and cultures. For example, Christianity, not just by the words of Jesus, but also Jewish traditions, Greek philosophy and many others that adopted it as their official religion over the years. In this way, it might not be possible to attribute moral growth to a particular culture, for no culture is really static, and many evolve rationally in part due to ideas introduced by other cultures around them.

Secondly, an important point to make is that simply because there is moral growth does not mean that people are always bound to morally grow. Instead, this course may be interrupted by periods of moral decline, even start at all. History may well be full of periods where moral lessons are forgotten and people become literally morally worse. What this means in particular is that there is no isolated part of human history which one can point to and definitively argue is definitively proof of moral realism.

Overall, the evidence of moral growth does not give wholesale support to moral realism, but it does make it difficult for emotivism. Beyond simply saying there is disagreement about moral facts, why instances in which it seems societies and people have morally grown have so often been better fit an anti-realist narrative. It may well be such a task is impossible, but it is often ignored.

### Discussion Activity:

Which of the problems studied poses the greatest issue for emotivism? And can you discuss this in pairs or small groups.

### Quick Quiz

1. What is naturalism?
2. Give two examples of naturalistic ethical systems.
3. What natural property does utilitarianism hold? Is it reducible to?
4. What is the is-ought problem?
5. Who put forward the open market argument?
6. What is ethical intuitionism?
7. What naturalistic movement is A J Ayer typically associated with?
8. What is the main problem for emotivism?

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



## 5: SIGNIFICANT IDEAS: CONSCIENCE

### What you will learn in this section:

- The philosophical discussion around the nature of conscience and its reliability, including:
- Aquinas' theological approach to conscience as the central point of rational decision-making, including concepts of synderesis, and vincible and invincible ignorance.
  - Freud's psychological approach to conscience as the interactions between parts of the psyche, including their relationships to psychosexual development and neuroses.
  - A comparison between the two approaches examining whether conscience is a reliable guide to moral decision-making.
  - An analysis of the concept of conscience itself, asking whether the term is still viewed as a stand-in for various environmental factors that influence our moral choices.

### Starter Activity:

Is conscience a rational activity or an irrational one? A useful moral guide, or a hindrance to one's attachment to authority? Think of a time when conscience has steered you, and write down your thoughts on the nature of conscience and its value. Compare your thoughts throughout this section.

### Key Thinker

Name	Thomas Aquinas
Born	1225
Died	1274
Key text	<i>Summa Theologica</i> (1265–1274)
Why are they important?	Aquinas is one of the most influential Catholic scholars and is still influential today upon modern Catholic doctrine, writing on everything from natural law to Christian ethics.
Did you know?	Aquinas also composed hymns, which are still a part of modern liturgical practice.

### Key Thinker

Name	Sigmund Freud
Born	1856
Died	1939
Key text	<i>The Ego and the Id</i> (1923)
Why are they important?	Freud is the founder of psychoanalysis and also one of the most influential figures in psychology for many, even if his ideas have fallen out of favour. Many popular ideas such as the ego, the superego and the id, which continue to endure within public and literary imagination.
Did you know?	Freud in his early career was an avid supporter of cocaine as a treatment for mental health issues. However, as you can imagine, this soon became discontinued using it by the end of the nineteenth century.

### Introduction: The Nature of Conscience

It can be said from the outset that conscience is a funny thing. You are likely to have experienced it throughout your life, particularly when faced with ethical dilemmas. Yet it is not always clear what conscience is and why it operates in the way it does. And we often have more questions than we might expect. For although we all seem to possess conscience, it is a phenomenon which is experienced by everyone, nor is it something which always points in the same direction. At the same time, it would be wrong to suggest that this intuitive moral guide is a mere illusion. For even if it is purely psychological in nature, it may reflect the kinds of values that are internalised throughout our lives, and unpicking our conscience may be a way of understanding ourselves and the world around us.

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED



What is clear is a divide between religious and non-religious views of conscience: conscience is not just some psychological principle but a God-given way of understanding the world. A straightforward interpretation here has often been that conscience is the voice of God within human beings. But when we come to analyse the thought of Aquinas, we shall see the picture change to how a more nuanced (but still resolutely religious) understanding of conscience is developed.

On the other hand, non-religious views of conscience have generally stressed the psychological aspect of conscience. It is not necessarily a guide to what is objectively right and wrong but a set of principles and concepts that have been instilled in us by our parents, society and culture. Throughout this section will be the influential psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, whose theory of the mind as a psychological phenomenon formed by competing aspects of our unconscious mind offers a different interpretation of its nature and function.

But what is the best way of beginning a comparison between these two figures? We need to consider what conscience *intuitively* appears to be and what role these intuitions hold in our lives.

## Conscience and the Self

The most common way human beings seem to typically experience conscience is as a response to our past actions. It produces feelings, often those of guilt or satisfaction, about the way we have acted and how this coheres with or contradicts our perceptions of our moral self. If I cheated on an exam, my conscience when I look at my successful results. For even if I have achieved my aim, it may seem to internally clash with the perception of myself as an honest person. This is why we might say 'I have a guilty conscience' to reflect the way this faculty seems able to judge our past actions.

However, this basic sense of conscience perhaps overlooks a more important sense of conscience that is present-facing, and even guided towards our future actions. It arises often on the basis of a feeling that motivates us to not perform those acts that seem to go against our character or principles. This aspect of conscience reflects times in which we are faced with choices such as 'that action is wrong' or 'my conscience wouldn't let me do that'. Combining these two senses, conscience is more than just an emotional response to our past actions. Rather, it also seems to have a rational aspect that can appraise the rightness or wrongness of actions and guide us according to our inner moral compass.

So altogether, we might note three potentially important aspects or roles of conscience:

- It's a source of moral guidance for future actions.
- It's a source of moral knowledge about what are right and wrong actions.
- It's a motivation to act in a good fashion throughout our lives.

But is this intuitive appraisal of conscience really correct? There are many cases where it is highlighted how our intuitions about our inner lives differ from the way our mind works. The process of introspection doesn't reveal the essential nature of conscience and how it works. It is important to probe the possibility that conscience isn't reflective of any real moral truth. If conscience itself is so vital to how we judge human beings to be **morally responsible**, then it would be less inclined to punish someone who claimed they were just following their intuition. It is more likely to punish someone who displayed little conscience when performing immoral actions. We need to consider not only how conscience affects ourselves but how it is manifested generally in the world to ensure we are judging human beings correctly.

With this in mind, we can turn to the first figure in our study surrounding conscience: Thomas Aquinas, a religious but also a firmly rational philosopher on the faculty.

### Aquinas and Conscience

We've noted a simple religious interpretation of conscience is that it is the voice of God within human beings. If we follow this interpretation through, then if a person feels the weight of an ethical dilemma, it is perhaps a sign that their actions or choices may be going against God's will. Conscience is effectively a way for God to guide human beings towards correct moral choices in their lives. We might even say that in the strongest interpretation of this view, conscience is a form of revelation, where God's word or will is made known to human beings seeking moral guidance.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



However, there are some easy issues to point out with such a strong interpretation of why many prominent theologians have resisted such an interpretation. For one, it does not seem to possess a sense of conscience at all, or why do we not always feel the weight of ethical dilemmas? It would seem that if it were the voice of God, it would be a constant. Moreover, if we did have access to God's will so easily, what is the need for ethics in the Church? Could we not just follow our conscience in all situations? And why do we seem to conflict or present different right courses of action?

Such questions essentially reveal not only problems with the voice of God view but also a concept of conscience that all religions and cultures have to grapple with. Conscience, on one account, in some way has to reflect the will of God, yet it also has to have the potential to be in conflict with the will of God. This tension is inherently unresolved when God is thought to be perfect, benevolent, and all-knowing. The voice of God view just doesn't stand up when we are seeking to understand how conscience seems to work within human beings across the world.

So, what's plainly needed is a more complex, nuanced account of conscience. It is here that Aquinas attempts to provide by focusing on conscience not as an aspect of God but as a part of human rational faculties directed towards what is good. In this way, conscience is the product of human reason since human reason has the possibility of being wrong, so conscience can lead us to the right. This more to say about how Aquinas develops his views and how he seeks to resolve the tension between conscience and a religious world view. We can start by unpicking two important concepts: **conscience** and **ratio**.

## Conscience and Ratio

When we think of reason, we typically think of the abstract way in which we logically examine different principles and ideas. But for Aquinas this understanding of reason was too narrow. It only covered part of the way in which human beings rationally thought about the world. Just as important was the way human beings reflected on their own actions, and how they understood the moral principles that guided their lives and how to apply them to real-world situations. This broader sense of rationality was a central theme of Aquinas's **natural law**, which upheld that it was possible to discover what was right and wrong from observation and reasoning about human nature. Thus, natural law reveals the moral principles and concepts which human beings ought to live by.

But Aquinas expanded this basic idea into a detailed and complex system of ethics. His natural law eventually became a body of moral principles that reflected the natural order of the world. For Aquinas, human beings are created by God for spiritual purposes, and both through **special revelation**, teachings God has directly given to human beings, and through **general revelation**, teachings which human beings come to know through observation and reasoning. Natural law, in an important sense, fills in the gaps between scripture, allowing us to gain a sense of moral obligations human beings possess beyond the knowledge God has revealed through prophets.

But why does Aquinas believe that general revelation is possible? Well, because human beings are created in the image of God as rational beings. The ability to reason is what separates human beings from other animals and allows us to reflect upon the world and our actions. Aquinas uses the Latin term **ratio** to describe the ability to reason, and divides it into two parts: **speculative reason** and **practical reason**. **Speculative reason** is the philosophical, abstract reasoning which we use to understand the world and discover the truth. **Practical reason** is the kind of grounded reasoning we use to apply the principles of natural law to real-world situations. For Aquinas, practical reason is the key to understanding the nature of conscience, as it shows how conscience is the product of the engagement of human beings in moral decision-making.

We can also illustrate this division in the kinds of reason with a basic example. The difference between **speculative reason** and **practical reason** is like the difference between knowing the correct way to make an arrow with the correct forces applied. However, actually making said bow requires **practical reason**: knowing what materials to use, how to cut them to size and finish, and how to ensure accuracy. Simply put, practical reason is put to the test whenever we have to apply a principle to the real world. Speculative reason is employed only when we are comparing general, abstract principles.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



## Conscience and Synderesis

At this point, you might think that something is missing from this account of conscience: the application of reason, why would human beings be specifically **morally** engaged? Aquinas argues that every human being within their consciousness possesses a kind of innate inclination towards what is good and restrains them from what is evil. Aquinas himself describes it *because it is a habit containing the precepts of natural law...* (Question 94, Reply 0).

Synderesis was not a new concept at the time that Aquinas wrote the *Summa Theologiae*, scholastic philosophy, stretching back to the ancient Greek period. But it is a deeply important concept when fleshing out his concept of conscience. For synderesis by itself does not reveal merely a kind of universal principle or principle that underwrites our moral engagement; there is something more to it. There is a natural capacity that drives human beings towards doing good things, but it is not clear difficult to apply because human actions are naturally singular, contextual and practical reason is essential; other rational capacities are needed to make sense of it.

This is ultimately where conscience fits in. Aquinas defines it as ‘the application of practical reason’ (*Theologiae*, I-II, 1), it is the employing of practical reason to discern how best to act in a particular situation. For while synderesis as a kind of innate habit cannot be wrong, our human fallibility means when we do wrong, it is not because of our inability to apprehend or understand them and apply them correctly. Conscience is thus not a source of moral knowledge, but our reason making moral judgements about the world. This means that it is **morally** good to come to translating our moral knowledge into moral action.

### Discussion Activity:

Do you believe human beings have a natural inclination to do good and avoid evil? Discuss this with your class or small groups.

## Ignorance and Conscience

Hopefully, now you can see the place of conscience in Aquinas’ ethics and how it fits with what we talk about in our lives. At heart, if we’re following our conscience, we’re following what our reason is telling us in a particular ethical dilemma. Thus, the tension we’ve seen in this section seems to be resolved. While human beings have the God-given faculties to discern right and wrong, these faculties can also err due to our human fallibility. Conscience can lead us to choose right actions depending on whether we’ve reasoned correctly about an ethical dilemma. We can err throughout our lives by engaging with our rational faculties throughout our lives.

This leads us nicely on to talking about how conscience can err. For ultimately, if we follow our reason, a wrong action is only performed because of **ignorance**. Aquinas holds that there are two kinds of ignorance that can cause conscience to choose immoral actions: **vincible ignorance** and **invincible ignorance**. The former concerns ignorance that it is likely could be overcome through reason while the latter is that no human being could reasonably overcome.

As an example, imagine a ski lift operator controlling access to a very difficult, steep slope. If the operator has the lift with the right gear and ability, reason might dictate that they would be allowed to let them up. But if the operator lets them up and they have an accident, it is not one of the operator’s fault, making their ignorance *invincible*. However, if a person barely wearing skis and unsteady on their skis wishes to go up the lift and the operator lets them, any accident that occurs would be an example of *vincible* ignorance.

The important point is that in cases of vincible ignorance, a person can be held morally responsible for their actions. If they had truly attempted to apply reason to the ethical dilemma, they might have chosen a different action. Their actions might transgress God’s law. However, we cannot hold people morally responsible for actions resulting from invincible ignorance for no amount of reasoning could have allowed them to avoid the outcome of their actions. In this way, Aquinas emphasises the importance of **prudence** in moral action. We are instinctively but must properly attempt to reason what are good and bad actions.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**





## The Relationship between Conscience and Natural Law

So far, we've seen how conscience, for Aquinas, can be summarised as the application of reason to moral judgements. Although in practice this is a bit more complicated, requiring both a certain level of expectation that reason can be effectively applied (see last section on ignorance) and a belief that Aquinas has dissolved many of the tensions typically present in viewing conscience as a God-given faculty. Where it fails is due to our own failure to apply our reason properly and not due to a flaw in God himself. In this sense, Aquinas' view of conscience as an application of reason to moral knowledge reserves a strong claim to its status as a God-given faculty. We can choose to do good if we apply ourselves to reasoning on what is right and wrong, and we can choose to do evil if we fail to do so. Although our conscience can err, it is, in the end, a reliable guide to what is good and what is bad.

Yet, what's also to note is that conscience, for Aquinas, is not a free-floating moral faculty. It is understood in the context of a wider moral system: **natural law**. For Aquinas argues that if we reflect on human nature and the world, we can arrive at a set of moral laws based on **principles**, better known as **the primary precepts**. These all connect to the single goal of human life, and out of the general goods dictated by the primary precepts, we can develop more specific rules, better known as the **secondary precepts**. For while the primary precepts are more teleological, focusing on the purpose of human life, the secondary precepts are the deontological rules which dictate what is right and wrong. Thus, when we're thinking about conscience as the application of reason to moral knowledge, we're also thinking about the application of these precepts to our lives. In other words, conscience is the application of reason to moral knowledge, and the application of these precepts to our lives.

This is important to note. It is perfectly possible to accept Aquinas' view of conscience as an application of reason to moral knowledge, but if conscience is the application of reason, then it has perhaps to a certain extent, the ability to discover what is right and wrong through reason itself. If one is a Kantian ethicist, then conscience is the correct application of the categorical imperative to an ethical dilemma, while for a utilitarian, it is the correct calculation of pleasure and pain. Of course, neither of these are religiously motivated, but they are useful to compare to Aquinas' natural law which is talking about a rational view of morality. In this sense, when we're talking about **vincible ignorance** and **invincible ignorance** it is this kind of knowledge that we're talking about: the right or wrong of a situation and whether we should have foreseen some particular action.

But what's also to note is that when we're thinking about the relationship between **practical reason** and **natural law**, we're also thinking about **absolute laws**. Aquinas does often identify **absolute laws** as examples of secondary precepts which cannot be contravened. These include theft or the murder of innocents. Yet, there are also **prima facie laws** which may not be absolute and may require practical reason to assess whether they are applicable in a particular situation; whether they do truly fulfil the goods identified by the primary precepts. For example, the primary precept to *preserve human life*. But if allowing a pregnancy to continue may end up affecting the health of the mother, then this would indicate that abortion may be acceptable in these circumstances. Thus, even if we have a knowledge of what is right and wrong, there is still plenty of room for conscience to determine the right course of action in a particular situation.

### Discussion Activity:

What issues can you foresee in Aquinas' concepts of **vincible ignorance** and **invincible ignorance**? Discuss in pairs or small groups.

## The Issues with Aquinas' Approach

When thinking about Aquinas' approach to conscience, we can roughly divide criticisms into two main categories. The first are those of **practicality**. Simply put, does Aquinas' account solve the tensions we identified in the last section? The second are more foundational, questioning the status of conscience as a God-given faculty. The first are more practical, questioning whether Aquinas simply made a mistake in assuming that conscience is a God-given faculty in the first place. The second are more foundational, questioning whether there is a better account of conscience which explains why it so often errs and why it often provides moral knowledge or guidance.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



What is key to note, though, is that, for many Christians, Aquinas' view of conscience in holding it is not the voice of God or the will of God acting through human beings causes, some more fundamentalist or conservative Christians may argue that religious application of reason may be understating its importance to our everyday ethical life. Worship and prayer are said to involve communication to God, and many Christians believe God intervenes in the world through both religious experience and miracles. Is it so far-fetched to think God can directly communicate to human beings at times of ethical difficulty? Or could it be that God and humans share in some greater sense of what is good, and humans may be giving a philosophical problem that has an easy religious solution.

But we shall leave these kinds of criticisms aside for the moment to focus on the problems of coherence.

### The Coherence of Aquinas' View of Conscience

One of the main internal problems facing Aquinas' account of conscience is that of the tensions that arise in religious accounts of conscience. For instance, if conscience is the voice of God, why would God create some individuals with a greater rational capacity than others, or people up for moral failure? And why are plenty of people who are able to reason about a variety of matters so able to ignore or diminish their conscience where necessary? In such questions we can pose about how Aquinas' view actually connects with wider Christian beliefs about goodness and moral responsibility. For even if we use his distinction between venial and mortal sin or ignorance to explain various individual problematic decisions, this distinction potentially pushes philosophical problems further down the line, rather than truly solving them.

The greatest issue surfaces when we consider individual decision-making under uncertainty. If we trust in our conscience comes from believing that it is a good source of moral guidance. In the past, when we have performed a good action, our conscience has been satisfied; when we have performed a bad action, we have felt a pang of guilt arising from our conscience. If conscience can be either correct or erroneous. Moreover, its error-prone nature undermines its ability to guide us, but rather our ability to question about a situation. Simply put, if we cannot reason properly or in possession of a conscience that can be (and often is) erroneous, then we cannot trust our conscience.

Why is this a problem, though? Well, it places the error-prone person in a bit of a bind. If we are human beings, we are obliged to follow their conscience, as a God-given faculty and source of moral guidance about practical moral judgements. In this sense, Aquinas' rational account of conscience presumes that by somehow engaging with our conscience we will eventually arrive at the truth. Judging the efficacy of our conscience by its past judgements then we should have confidence that conscience can be mistaken, and we'd be better suited simply following absolute moral principles or rationally work out what is better for ourselves.

What this potentially indicates is that Aquinas has pushed the initial conflicts in his account of conscience further down the line. For if conscience is just the neutral engagement with moral matters, this still doesn't tie in easily with a requirement that we ought to follow it. It may be that we are also taking too narrow a perspective on Aquinas' world view. Divine law is only one side of Aquinas' ethics; there is also the **divine law**, which we come to know through revelation. In many cases this does give us moral guidance and, for Aquinas, divine law generally overrides natural law. This means that practical reason doesn't rest on close examination and reflection of the laws that we come to know through revelation.

Moreover, we might even argue that just because conscience can sometimes err, then we are not to follow it. Aquinas himself holds that one is only committing a sin if one follows one's conscience in a state of invincible ignorance. For if our conscience steers us wrong here, it is our fault for not being in a state of invincible ignorance, we might well choose not to follow our conscience. But how can we know if it is right! This is a curious solution to the problems of coherence we've identified. We still have cause for worry. How can we judge in any situation what we ought and ought not to do? This is a greater problem facing Aquinas' views, one we shall look at in the next part.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



## Foundational Criticisms of Religious Conscience

Over the last hundred years, we've been able to probe and study the brain in all previously impossible. As we've done so, views of the mind have shifted further towards a materialist interpretation. There is nothing special happening when we think or feel; it's just interactions of matter inside the brain. Yet, what happens when we consider the mind in a religious manner? What interactions between neurons and circuits in the brain produce the feelings of conscience? What, if any, can we learn anything about conscience from studying human behaviour?

This final question is important. Although we have made great advances in neuroscience, there is still a very important role given to **psychology**, which in its traditional forms relies on individuals reporting their feelings or thoughts (interviews) or analysing their behaviour. The central idea is that through a detailed examination of our thoughts and actions, we can develop systematic explanations of our mental states and how they correspond to behaviour. In other words, for a concept such as conscience, we can look at other associated concepts, such as guilt or shame, and work out how they arise depending on our thoughts, environment and behaviours.

Why is this important? Well, even just adopting this approach is a challenge to religion as it assumes in part that a concept such as conscience can be explained from purely naturalistic terms. It is required to invoke actions by God or others to make sense of it. Moreover, it posits that conscience is something inherently rational or trustworthy. For if conscience is just a product of interactions between human beings and their environments, it is also dependent on those environments. Conscience may differ from person to person, and may even not exist properly in those considered to be sociopaths or psychopaths.

In the next section, we shall analyse an influential account of conscience in psychology that reaches very different conclusions from those of Aquinas. Yet, there is an important note to be made when thinking about Aquinas. For it may well be that God does not create each individual with the same capacity of conscience. It may be something that develops within each individual through upbringing. Even without this, conscience may well sharpen it as a tool for moral growth. However, as we shall see, it may mean that conscience is a way of life, especially if one does not attempt to apply one's principles to all situations.

What this indicates is that simply looking for alternative explanations for conscience is not enough. Aquinas. However, it does potentially highlight the flaws in Aquinas' view, and if it cannot be meaningfully reconciled with a psychological view, it may be necessary to consider whether it provides the explanation for the concept and the human behaviour that arises from it.

## Freud and Conscience

In the last section, we noted that among the problems of coherency with Aquinas' account of conscience, it rests on the assumption that reason is a God-given faculty. Now, for a religious account of conscience this is unsurprising, but at the same time it doesn't necessarily lead to a view of conscience that reflects how the faculty works in everyday human life. Most pointedly, we still face problems in explaining why conscience can err and why the kinds of moral guidance given can vary so widely from culture to culture. Well, here the secular psychologist can step in and simply say, 'well, in some way, determined by the culture, or by God?' In fact, what if conscience was not a God-given faculty but instead a psychological phenomenon, one that arises due to the interactions between ourselves and our environment?

Now, this isn't to cast doubt on the existence of conscience itself. It is likely that certain neurological states associated with the production of conscience in our brains are parts of the brain that are hardwired to respond to or give rise to ethical concerns. However, conscience can take many forms, and a complex number of factors are likely to contribute to its development. For each individual, all of which may be better explained by reference to psychological and

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



through observation of our behaviours and attitudes, and the way these interact with words, by studying the various ways our conscience interacts with our internal and external emotions such as guilt or shame or the direct influence of key figures such as our parents. In fact, there is a very different conception of conscience, one that is very different from our ordinary conception of conscience, one that is very different from our ordinary conception of conscience. One key figure who was deeply important to the development of a radical new conception of conscience was the psychologist Sigmund Freud, who shall be the focus of this chapter.

## Freud's Psychological Approach

Freud was an early twentieth-century psychoanalyst and philosopher who is credited with the development of psychoanalysis, a clinical method for treating mental illnesses through constructive dialogue with a trained doctor. Naturally, in the early development of psychoanalysis, Freud came to propose a new way of understanding the human mind. He believed that human beings believed and acted as they did and how mental problems manifested themselves in the human psyche. Many of these ideas were novel and derived from Freud's own experiences treating patients who presented themselves with various mental issues, such as depression, obsessive behaviour, stress and anxiety. In fact, Freud came to hold that human beings generally suffered from varying degrees of these low-lying mild mental illnesses, which he referred to as **neuroses**.

Now, these neuroses certainly are common – there are bound to be times in your life where you have been anxious or stressed, for example. But what Freud puts forward is that these visible aspects of the mind arise from the interaction of underlying structures or constructs in a person's psyche. Many of these structures also form what was referred to by Freud as the **unconscious** mind; the workings of the mind that aren't available to us on conscious reflection or introspection. These include different motivations, desires, interactions and processes that for one reason or another are hidden and can only be learnt about through certain psychoanalytic procedures, behavioural 'slips', and other phenomena such as dreams.

How, though, does all this relate to conscience? Well, Freud held that conscience feelings of **guilt**, which manifest in different ways depending on a person's upbringing. But what causes this guilt to arise is the various interactions between the conscious mind and the **ego**, the **superego** and the **id**.

## The Ego, the Superego and the Id

Freud's tripartite division of the human psyche came about due to his perceived difficulty when talking about the conscious and unconscious minds. These ideas were difficult to grasp, though now most people have come to terms with the idea that there are certain parts of the mind that are largely inaccessible. The existence of an unconscious part of our mind naturally challenges the 'conscience' as put forward by Aquinas, for it presents the possibility that our moral actions are influenced by an underlying psychological impulse we aren't even aware of!

To start, though, we can outline what Freud means when he talks about the ego, the superego and the id.

- **The ego** – The ego is the organised rational mind, which mediates between the conscious and unconscious minds. It is the part of the mind that we are aware of and is also partly unconscious as there are various unconscious functions it performs that we are unaware of.
- **The superego** – The superego is the moral voice or conscience that reflects the principles and ideals that we are taught by our various parental and cultural influences. It is the part of the mind that is accessible to the conscious mind but a significant amount resides in the unconscious. It monitors and criticises and punishes desires, feelings and habits that are considered morally wrong.
- **The id** – The id is a disorganised, unconscious aspect of the mind which controls the basic drives and impulses. It is the source of our physical desires and impulses, especially towards pleasure. It holds the human **libido**, which seeks these pleasure-seeking activities regardless of their destructive influence. This generates the internal chaos of the id, as it strives to satisfy its desires irrespective of the cost to our lives.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



So, we can instantly see that the conscience is equivalent to the superego in Freud's model. It is the part of our mind which seeks to align our behaviour with the values we have internalised during our upbringing. Here, a key idea is **internalisation**. This is the process by which the values of our lives come to be part of our own moral outlook. This typically occurs through socialisation, especially during our early years. As such, any influence that rewards or punishes behaviour shapes the development of our superego, and so our conscience. For any individual, this is a personal process, but these influences can also be cultural or religious. If a person internalises certain moral values, their conscience is likely to reflect the moral rules of that culture or religion's scripture. On the other hand, in a secular environment, their conscience is more likely to reflect much more the moral values of the wider society. What's important to note is that, in Freud's view, the conscience is *not* morally neutral. In fact, it really only represents the moral values we have come to internalise, how we might consider them, and how we might act on them.

## Guilt and Conscience

So, we've explored the nature of the superego and how it develops. However, we haven't yet seen how it interacts with the ego and id. For as you might well have guessed, the relationship between these aspects is less than harmonious. The superego as a moralising force is often naturally opposed to the id's pleasure-seeking activities that are commonly held to be immoral, such as lying or stealing. The superego does not just wish for these activities but wishes to pursue them to the point of self-destruction or what destruction it causes. So, we have these two different forces in our brain, one seeking pleasure and perfection and the other aiming for a certain degree of moral self-destruction.

This is where the ego comes in. Its role as the more rational centre of the brain is to mediate between the opposing impulses and try to develop courses of action that at least appear to bring a balance of benefit for an individual. In essence, the ego allows human beings to function in the real world. For example, imagine you're looking for a new pair of shoes but the ones you desire are too expensive. The superego might demand you steal the shoes there and then in order to fulfil that desire. The superego might also tell you to give one pair to a person in need. However, the ego is likely to tell you to wait for a pair of shoes, wait until you can afford the desired pair and then just buy them.

This is a simplified example, of course, but it's the kind of interaction that occurs in the mind in the case of most moral dilemmas. The issue, though, Freud claims, is that the superego is often too forceful. The force in most individuals as the desires of the id are typically easier to gratify. While the superego is an important force, achieving moral perfection is a difficult, effort-filled endeavour. The id's desires are often easy. This means more often than not, Freud claims, that the ego tends to side with the id. It acts that, while of benefit to an individual, may be more self-destructive or harmful in the long run without consequence, though. The pressures of the superego when the ego sides with the id, the superego mentally punishing or admonishing an individual, producing strong feelings of guilt. The action of **conscience** for Freud; it is the superego making itself felt when one's actions conflict with the action of the superego during an ethical dilemma and succumbs in some way to the desires of the id.

### Task:

Pick two moments in your life when you have felt guilty for actions you've committed. Consider this feeling as a product of your superego and the other parts of your unconscious mind. Write down the potential thought process according to Freud's tripartite model of the mind.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



## Psychosexual Development and the Libido

Beyond discussions about the way conscience arises, there is a little more we can say about Freud's overall picture of the human mind and how it develops through childhood. For Freud proposed some quite radical ideas, in particular about the **psychosexual development** of human beings and how this relates not only to the different neuroses that spring up through human life but also the workings of conscience. Two key concepts here are the notion of **libido**, a person's sexual drive or energy, and the **ego**, which we looked at previously. However, what is to note is that in contrast to our contemporary use of the term 'libido', Freud employed it in a much broader sense, using it to refer to an instinctual energy, force or even human nature that drives our actions and is the basis of the **id**.



Freud held that the libido develops throughout one's life in different ways, focusing on a person depending on the stage they are at in their psychosexual development. In his discourse, there were often supposed to be five different stages (the **oral**, **anal**, **phallic**, **genital** and **latency**), each corresponding to a different stage at which sexual development and interests have. The most important stage for Freud was the third stage, the phallic, at which the libido focuses on the genitals. This results in young children between the ages of three and six beginning to show gender differences and sexual attraction, although this is rudimentary until they reach adolescence.

What Freud also held, though, was that individuals can become fixated on the various pleasures associated with each stage if their natural tendencies towards sexual exploration are frustrated by a parent or caregiver. If a small child, for instance, in the phallic stage of their development is reprimanded for playing with their genitals, then they begin to associate such actions with anxiety and guilt. Thus, in some sense, they never quite move past this stage of development. Throughout their lives, their **id**, **ego** and **superego** constantly clash when it comes to the genitals. In other words, thinking about an activity such as masturbation may be considered sinful if such an act is a natural part of psychosexual development as a whole.

However, in Freud's ideas were more complex, and often strange, when it comes to the different forces at play during psychosexual development. One of the most famous theories is the **Oedipus complex**, which also arises during the phallic stage of a child's development. It refers to a child's (in this stage) unconscious desire for their opposite-sex parent and a corresponding jealousy or hatred for the same-sex parent. In the case of a boy, this results in a direction of the libido towards his mother and a corresponding jealousy or hatred for his father. Yet, these desires are suppressed by the ego, with the father being the stronger individual, and eventually, through means of repression and identification, the child becomes closer to his father, adopting his characteristics and beliefs despite the various conflicts of the psychosexual stage of development.

## Conscience and Neuroses

If Freud is right here, though, why aren't we feeling constantly guilty? For it is certainly the case that in our lives we're certainly not acting strictly according to our moral ideals, and, if the psychoanalytic perspective is correct, as if we are constantly suppressing our **id** (or libido) in different ways throughout our lives. However, that the ego isn't just idle during these feelings of guilt. Instead, it develops what Freud called **mechanisms**; different ways we repress or justify the siding of the ego with the **superego**. These mechanisms include **repression**, **denial**, **fantasy** or **projection**. For instance, if you have a strong dislike for your favourite flavour and you sneakily steal a few extra slices of cake. Now, your **superego** might well punish you for this act with feelings of guilt, but your **ego** might get away by saying to yourself you deserve the cake after a long, hard week or that you've earned it that much. This kind of reasoning alleviates guilt but also means we often tend to consider immoral behaviour without meaningful remorse.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



Moreover, this kind of tension can result in various neuroses, such as stress or depression. The tension between the ego, the superego and the id. This can even occur the other way round. The ego constantly acts according to their superego but in turn suppresses the constant demands of the id. The repression of conflicting desires and feelings is what Freud calls **repression**. Repressed behaviour is more unpredictable. For example, if one represses the desires of the id, they may suddenly act out in sudden acts of violence or aggression as a person fails to acknowledge the strain. The ego acts in accordance with the wishes of the superego. Another defence mechanism we referred to previously is **identification**, where to resolve the tension with one's conscience, one assimilates the characteristics or attributes of another.

### Freud's Later Views

Freud was a developing character in the sense that his views were never static. He was adding more concepts and more ideas to his views on human behaviour, meaning his theory of the conscience in terms of internalisation and repression was never abandoned. In particular, Freud's later works began to compare two fundamental forces in the human mind: the **life-drive (Eros)** and the **death-drive (Thanatos)**, although Freud did not use this term). For at heart, we all have a will to live, they also seem to have certain self-destructive aspects of their personality. Freud noticed that soldiers with war-associated trauma would often re-enact their traumatic experiences in their personal behaviour or dreams. Similarly, his patients would often relive or repeat traumatic experiences regardless of whether the consequences were materially harmful.

Thus, Freud came to hold that there was an innate death-drive in human beings, a force that can take over our subconscious thoughts in stressful times. It's a strange idea, but it was admitted was in part speculation, but the push and pull between our will to live and our death-drive potentially play havoc with our conscience and behaviour. Freud, for instance, considered one of the major roles of civilisation is to repress this death-drive and its associated violent impulses. However, this means that internalised values in the superego come into conflict with the death-drive and manifest once more as neuroses. In this sense, the natural opposites of the will to live and the death-drive cause deep anxieties and show once more how our conscience is a psychological construct, a guide to what is right and wrong.

### Discussion Activity:

Do Freud's theories about the ego, the superego and the id seem accurate to you? Are they just unscientific psychological fiction? Discuss in pairs or small groups.

### The Issues with Freud's Approach

Freud's picture of conscience is not a pretty one, but it does perhaps better explain the differences in the way it manifests itself in everyday behaviour. For, on the one hand, the superego as our conscience can pressure us to do better actions. Yet at the same time, we can easily disobey conscience, and perhaps importantly how people could perform better or worse according to their conscience, whether this be the result of different internalised values or the repression of unconscious desires.

However, Freud's views were controversial, even at the time of his academic career. Many people distance themselves now from his work for a variety of reasons. One important criticism is that his views are ultimately unscientific. We cannot test for the existence of the ego, the superego and the id, nor can the existence be falsified. For any behaviour could be explained by their interaction with the unconscious. The only evidence is phenomena such as dreams or aberrant behaviour. Freud's subjects were taken from a very narrow section of middle-class Austria, which may not reflect the nature of conscience within the rest of humanity.

### Freud, Science and Falsifiability

Let's probe this first problem a bit more. What does it mean for a theory to be scientific? It's a philosophical problem that has been discussed endlessly, but many scientists and

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



criterion is that the theory must be falsifiable. This means that we can conduct experiments to prove that a certain theory is wrong. If it is impossible to conduct these tests, then the theory is not falsifiable. The result would be that we could never update our picture on the basis of having no bearing on our empirical investigations into the world.

But why is this important to consider with Freud? Well, the philosopher Karl Popper argued that the unconscious mind couldn't really be falsified. Think for a moment of the classic Freudian concepts of the ego and the id. How could we test for the existence of these concepts when they are internal? We might say that there are certain behaviours which human beings might exhibit or actions which contradict the existence of these concepts. For instance, a person might be happy if they suffer severe psychological distress or shame or guilt induced by their parents during childhood.

But if you read Freud, he doesn't actually say that all individuals develop neuroses. Various phenomena such as **identification**, **repression** and other **defence mechanisms** successfully move past the difficulties in their upbringing and lead healthy lives, even if it's not as common. Altogether, Freud's concepts are so flexible that *we can end up explaining any behaviour using them*. In other words, they cannot be falsified by experimentation. As Popper, are ultimately unscientific.

This criticism has stuck throughout the years and is one key reason why Freud's ideas are not as popular as they once were. It's not any more by mainstream psychology, which at the minimum aspires to be as scientific as possible. This doesn't mean that Freud's central belief that there is an unconscious mind which influences behaviour is wrong. It just shows that we need to be careful when analysing the mind and that not all psychological investigations are truly scientific and not just imposing one's own ideas onto the world.

## Moving beyond Freud

So, we've seen there is a problem with actually testing Freud's views. But we've also seen that ideas about an unconscious mind have proved deeply influential and that many of our moral ideas and conscience is likely to be due to the interactions between an individual's internal thoughts and actions, even if such interactions are not as simple as concepts such as the ego, the id, and the superego. An example we can turn to is Lawrence Kohlberg, an influential psychologist who identified moral development as an emergent phenomenon that develops alongside a person's moral development. To him, conscience is a developmental phenomenon as Freud proposed, but without the same emphasis on the unconscious mind. Furthermore, he divided this development into six stages, these being:

1. **The preconventional level** – where morality is externally controlled and a person's actions are guided by what they can get away with.
2. **The conventional level** – where morality is focused around conformity to social norms. The scope moves from self-interest to the interests of larger social groups.
3. **The postconventional level** – where morality is focused around abstract principles and societies.

Kohlberg argues that only at the postconventional level (particularly stage six) do moral principles determine people's actions. In this sense, conscience is not a mere interaction between the mind and the world, but instead is the end stage of a process of general moral development. In instances where conscience is active, but it is not fully fledged as their moral sense is still developing. In fact, Kohlberg notes that some might never reach the higher stages of moral development and remain at a lower stage of conscience at all.

This idea also has empirical support. Although many have questioned Kohlberg's theory, there is plenty of experimental data that shows that older individuals tend to employ more complex moral reasoning than younger individuals and that comprehension of this development increases with age. Higher stage moral reasoning can understand lower-stage approaches but not vice versa. Those who argue that this data is cross-cultural; the development of a conscience or moral reasoning is something that exists across the world, not just within a narrow subset of a society. This suggests that we can see how these factors may make Kohlberg's view more favourable than Freud's, and that it's not just underlying beliefs about how conscience arises.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**





Another thinker influenced by Freud, but who departed from his views, was Eric Fromm. He introduced the **authoritarian conscience** and the **humanistic conscience**. The former idea was developed in German society in the 1930s under the Nazi Party and refers to the aspects of conscience that are imposed by authorities, whether they be parents, teachers or other community figures. Most of our conscience is governed by the idea of rules and punishments, which are internalised as a sense of right and wrong. However, Fromm also elaborates on the humanistic conscience, which is an evaluation of our behaviour that stands outside its authoritarian counterpart. It is not about our behaviour not according to internalised rules and punishments but with a more holistic view of whether we have succeeded in being a successful, flourishing person.

What we get with Fromm is a kind of integration of Freud's views with a more sociological perspective. Conscience can't just be analysed person to person; the important thing to consider when we look at how conscience exists on a societal level. Fromm's sociological interpretation of conscience is a necessary counterpart of a psychological one. Freud, especially in his early years, was quite pessimistic when it came to human behaviour, seeing the prominence of the authoritarian conscience and held that for the most part humans are driven to a state of obedience. The conscience in effect is predetermined by wider social structures that rule our lives and make us feel guilty about our own personal desires or moral aims.

Such analyses are important to consider as they expose the potential flaws in Freud's theory. Freud doesn't fully consider conscience properly as a developmental phenomenon. When we think of conscience in terms of defence mechanisms, is it not just as plausible that conscience is a defence mechanism in an individual with a poorly developed moral sense? Or how would one distinguish between a defence mechanism and ones involving a poorly developed conscience? Freud's theory does not accommodate the importance of society and culture, and how conscience may develop. It is arguably necessary to consider how conscience arises in different societies and cultures, and whether these influence human behaviour in interesting ways. For the moment, we will make a comparison between our two main figures through the rest of this section: Aquinas and Freud.

### Discussion Activity:

Should we celebrate Freud's influence on psychology, even if we reject his theories of the unconscious? Discuss these questions in your discussion.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



## Comparing Aquinas and Freud

We've explored two different views of conscience throughout this section, both in nuance. So, before we conclude, let's do a direct comparison of Aquinas and Freud, defining and outlining the key aspects of conscience.

### Aquinas

- For Aquinas, conscience is a neutral, God-given rational faculty that enables us to determine moral guidance in any given moral dilemma.
  - It builds upon the human natural inclination to do good and avoid evil (the existing moral knowledge), using practical reason to apply it to particular situations.
  - Where conscience thus errs is due to ignorance, either vincible or invincible. We naturally formed conscience but develop it as their rational capacities.
  - The feelings of guilt that emerge from conscience, in Aquinas' view, occur when we go astray and failed to adhere to our natural inclination to do good and avoid evil.

### Freud

- For Freud, conscience is a psychological, pre-rational process caused by the unconscious mind, most notably the ego, the superego, and the id.
  - It does not offer reasonable moral guidance, but instead reflects a weak, internalised set of values informed by our upbringing, whether they be environmental, societal, cultural, or religious.
  - Where conscience errs is thus not due to ignorance but due to impacts of childhood that cause issues within our psychosexual development, resulting in neurosis and difficult behaviour.
  - The feelings of guilt that emerge from conscience are the result of the superego's influence on the ego and the id when they cause behaviour that goes against the internalised values.

These are the main ideas that it will be useful to really get to grips with when this comes to the end of the section. There are both obvious and less obvious values in which Aquinas and Freud differ. We'll look at the more straightforward conflicts to begin with.

- Aquinas' view of conscience is essentially a rational process, whereas Freud's can be traced back to the idea that conscience is a God-given faculty, and so reflects the image of God. However, Freud is a secular thinker and begins by viewing conscience as a psychological process, finding that it is not a function of our rational mind (the ego) but of our driven mind (the superego) clashing with its mental counterparts. Conscience is not rational; it just reflects what we've been brought up to think and believe during psychosexual development.
- For Aquinas, conscience is a neutral faculty. It cannot be steered wrong except by ignorance. On the other hand, for Freud, conscience may steer us wrong by reflecting values that are contradictory or detrimental to our own health and well-being, causing shame and guilt where there should be none and cause us to behave or act in ways contrary to our upbringing. It therefore doesn't have a strict value as a moral decision-making tool, as human beings have a duty to follow it.

These are the main two differences you should be noting at this stage. However, there are some interesting differences that emerge once we probe each thinker's views a little more deeply. Let's look at some of these below:

- In both thinkers, God is to varying degrees definitively absent from the moral framework. For Aquinas, this is essential to preserve the independence of conscience and its rationality. For Freud, a secular view of conscience is necessary to explain its psychological nature. One might contend that God still created human beings with a superego and internalised values. The theist might still contend that even with a psychological approach, there is a God-given faculty!

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



4. However, we can also question under Freud's view whether it is right to call Aquinas almost assumes it is a singular faculty or capacity, whereas when we becomes apparent that it is difficult to locate anything that we might definitely becomes a kind of umbrella term for the various influences on our upbringing, dispositions and how they affect our mental states. We thus might even question whether conscience exists at all and whether we would be better simply talking about factors influencing our thoughts and behaviour.
5. Finally, we might note one key similarity between both Aquinas and Freud, concerning developmental phenomena. It is not surprising to see individuals with unduly scrupulous consciences who would hold that many people don't sharpen their consciences will consequently be living in continual states of ignorance. Freud, on the other hand, the development of many individuals' consciences becomes stunted by traumas to a person's psychosexual development, with different neuroses emerging depending on what traumas occurred. It might seem a vague similarity, but it is important to note that we've analysed throughout this section!

#### Quick Quiz

1. What is the difference between speculative reason and practical reason?
2. What is synderesis?
3. What is the difference between vincible ignorance and invincible ignorance?
4. What is the difference between the ego and the superego?
5. What is the id?
6. What role does the libido play in Freud's thought?
7. Give two examples of defence mechanisms in Freud's thought.
8. What is the authoritarian conscience?

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



## 6: DEVELOPMENTS IN ETHICAL THOUGHT ETHICS

### What you will learn in this section:

The philosophical discussion around the sexual ethics surrounding:

- The philosophical and religious discussions surrounding the goodness or badness of and same-sex relationships.
- The development of ethical thought on these issues, from traditional Christian theology to modern secularisation.
- The impact of secularisation on issues of sexual ethics and how the declining Church has resulted in social and political change.
- The application of normative ethical systems to issues of sexual ethics, including Kantian ethics, and utilitarianism.

#### Key Thinker

<b>Name</b>	John Stuart Mill
<b>Born</b>	1806
<b>Died</b>	1873
<b>Key text</b>	<i>On Liberty</i> (1859)
<b>Why are they important?</b>	Mill is one of the most important figures in nineteenth-century philosophy, refining Bentham's utilitarianism and applying it to a wide number of problems in philosophy.
<b>Did you know?</b>	Mill started learning Greek at three years old and Latin at 10. He was fluent in both by the time he was a teenager!

#### Starter Activity:

How much influence does the Church still have on issues of sexual ethics? In particular, how much influence does the Church still have on the legitimacy of same-sex relationships?

In your own time, research both the Catholic and Anglican perspectives on same-sex relationships. Write down some thoughts on their continuing impact on debates in this area and compare your progress throughout this section.

### Introduction: Sex, Gender and Relationships

In the final topic of your A Level course, we consider a variety of issues in sexual ethics. In Year 1, we explored the topic of business ethics. However, in contrast to this area, which has been a major force in the last century, ethical discussions around sex have been conducted throughout history. All religions, cultures and societies have generally had principles about the morality of sexual relationships a person is allowed to engage in and what constitutes good sexual conduct. Thus, any exploration of sexual ethics has to accommodate both how sexual ethics have changed over the history of the Christian Church and how changing attitudes have led to a re-evaluation of sexual ethics for many Christians today.

The first part of this section will, therefore, discuss how traditional beliefs and practices have influenced religious figures and institutions and compare these influences with modern perspectives. Together, this should provide a useful background when thinking about issues such as extramarital and homosexual relationships, a background that will undoubtedly come up in this section, where we apply the normative ethical systems you have studied so far.

INSPECTION COPY

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



But how far should we go back when thinking about sexual ethics? For a common view has been to view sexual relationships and sex itself as something that is fundamentally good. We haven't stopped people reproducing, but there have often been sets of principles that people should engage in sexual relationships and view the purpose of sex itself. Those who held a permissive attitude towards sexual relationships and sex have often been denigrated, and those who have advocated for controlling sexual urges have often been conversely praised.

Why is this the case? The answer to this question is incredibly complicated and rooted in our culture. But it is key to note that many of the Christian perspectives we shall analyse are not without precedent. For instance, we can turn our attention towards the philosopher Plato's comparable view on sex prior to the advent of Christianity. He held a dualistic view of the body and spiritual activity: the soul was greater than the activity of the body, and since the material part of the body could act on base instincts, it was not an appropriate aim for a person. Instead, celibacy was celebrated, and this tradition persisted into Plato's thoughts and the Stoics later.

This might sound very familiar! There is a case to be made that many of these traditions had a strong influence on the development of Christianity and its attitude to sexual ethics. Celibacy has often been seen as a virtue by Christian thinkers, and this has informed the views on premarital and extramarital sexual relationships. It is to these topics that we now turn.

## Premarital and Extramarital Sex

The roots of Christian attitudes towards premarital and extramarital sex stretch right back to the earliest Christian communities. And, as we shall analyse, many of these beliefs have been shaped by the history of the Church and instead have only been further theologically developed over time. First, let's quickly go over what we mean by **premarital sex** and **extramarital sex**. Premarital sex refers to sexual relationships that occur prior to a person getting married while the other is not. Extramarital sex refers to sexual relationships that occur between individuals, of whom at least one is married to someone else. There has often been controversy about the moral status of premarital relationships, many have viewed them as the wrongness of extramarital sexual relationships or, to use another term, adultery. However, when applying different ethical systems to this issue, such agreement may still be reached.

First, though, it is key to analyse why there has often been opposition to premarital sexual relationships within the Christian Church. We can begin such an analysis by first examining how its passages on sexual ethics were interpreted by the earliest Christians.

## The Bible, Celibacy and Sexual Ethics

Now, the Bible does not present an exactly cohesive view on all matters of sexual ethics. What it does routinely stress is the importance of marriage. This tradition begins in the Bible where the purpose of men and women is stated to be marriage and reproduction. For an example, let's look at a few classic passages in Genesis 1 and 2.

*'Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as myself." So the Lord God made the woman from the rib of the man, and he brought her to him. And they were joined together, and they became one flesh.'* (Genesis 2:18-24 NRSV)

*Therefore, a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they are joined together. They become one flesh.* (Genesis 2:21-24 NRSV)

This idea that marriage is the ideal context for sexual relationships continues into the New Testament. While Jesus does not readily talk about the rightness or wrongness of sexual relationships, he has a strong emphasis on the importance and meaning of marriage for human beings.

*'He answered, "Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh?"' (Matthew 19:4-5 NRSV)*

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



This extends at times into a discussion around the rightness and wrongness of a particular is Matthew 5:27–28. Here Jesus seems to take the quite hard-line view of entering into a sexual relationship with a person outside of one's marriage but intention towards anyone who is not your marital partner.

*'You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery." But I say to you that anyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.'* (Matthew 5:27–28)

What exactly are we supposed to make of these comments? Well, on the one hand, the inference that Jesus was following in the footsteps of Old Testament writers, who extramarital sex were against the will of God. In the case of the former, although the Old Testament writing that explicitly outlaws sex before marriage, Jewish tradition has been from premarital sex, emphasising the importance of virginity (e.g. Deuteronomy 22:23–24). In the latter, there is plenty of explicit condemnations of adultery, including one of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:14), and Leviticus 20:10 even recommends the punishment of death for adultery.

Yet, if we read such passages with a bit more historical context, multiple other meanings may have been making a point about the importance of moral purity. As we noted, it is often than not focused on women's virginity, probably due to patriarchal influence. In Jewish law at the time, divorce was a much easier process for men than women. Men were allowed to divorce his wife at will, meaning that women faced great economic and social challenges even once married. Considering this background, Jesus may well have been making marriage more than a contract and instead being a real spiritual and moral union between two people.

But these nuances perhaps disappear once we turn to other New Testament writers. Paul explicitly many ethical principles surrounding sexual relationships that are largely absent in the Old Testament. One of the most important ideas Paul put forward was that celibacy was the ideal state. He encouraged purposeful abstinence from sex and sexual relationships, and for Paul was the best way to live throughout one's life. At the minimum, sex was a spiritual distraction. Yet, Paul also acknowledged that people would not wish to become celibate, and thus argued that marriage was a good alternative for those who wished to have a sexual relationship.

*'To the unmarried and to the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am. But if they practice self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn. The Lord permits you to do this. But he permits you to abstain from marriage, if you wish. It is better for you to remain as you are. I would like you to be like me. But each of you should do as the Lord wills. (1 Corinthians 7:8–9 NRSV)*

But why the emphasis on celibacy? Well, throughout 1 Corinthians and other epistles, Paul makes the argument that lust is a kind of bodily sin; it involves giving up authority over oneself and purity which a Christian ought to live up to. Thus, Paul explicitly opposes both marriage and celibacy, despite Jesus seemingly remaining more ambivalent about the former. There are various reasons for this, though, one of which is the fact that Jesus is never recorded as taking a wife, implying that celibacy was his ideal. Thus, if we are to live to Jesus' example, then celibacy ought to be our aim. If this is not possible, the next best thing. Any other kinds of sexual relationship risk a person being condemned.

*'For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from fornication; that each of you control your own body in holiness and honor, 5 not with lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God. (1 Thessalonians 4:3–5 NRSV)*

So, in many ways, early Christianity was heavily influenced in the footsteps of both its Jewish and Greek roots. Despite Jesus himself not making explicit rulings about many areas of sexual ethics, the Church took the great teachings of Christian thinkers, and in the next part we will explore how these were shaped by theology within the Christian Church.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



### Discussion Activity:

Should the Bible still influence discourse on areas of sexual ethics? Or is it too out of date? Discuss in pairs or small groups.

## Christian History, Church and Sexual Ethics

One key phrase we can pick out from the last section, repeated in both Genesis and Ephesians, is 'one flesh'. This phrase highlights how, in traditional Christian thought, marriage does not consist of a mere commitment between two people but encompasses a real spiritual and physical union. This bond is not broken. Yet, this idea of 'one flesh' is still open to interpretation in scripture. Does it include all sexual relationships of any kind? If the latter, then it can be argued that premarital sex is acceptable. Moreover, it implies that the importance of marriage in Christianity and so is a kind of sacrament. Furthermore, it implies that if you give your consent to engage in sexual relationships with another person while married, you are committing adultery. Extramarital sex is still a sin due to it being a violation of this bond.

Throughout much of Christian history, this has often been the line taken by theologians of the Christian Church. Marriage (as asserted by Genesis) is an essential part of God's plan for creation and human beings. Thus, Christian denominations have typically seen it as a gift from God, one which should be enshrined as a sacred institution. This means that the marriage ceremony represents a lot more than a pact, with the exchanging of vows and rings within a Church context indicating that an inward spiritual change has occurred. Among most denominations, including the Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican churches, marriage is a **sacrament**, a term routinely used to denote instances where God's grace is manifested in the world and where such key spiritual changes occur.

### The Early Church and Marriage

Altogether, we have two interesting strains of thought emerging from biblical discussion. On the one hand, sex is inherently sinful, distracting or wrong except outside of certain contexts. The sex act is something deeply spiritual and important. So how did these ideas develop in the early church? The early church fathers in the third and fourth centuries – for instance, Tertullian – saw marriage as deeply important, both in its spiritual and civic functions. However, many of them were also very keen about chastity. The aforementioned theologians were generally not keen on the idea of premarital sex. It was important to a Christian to be a virgin, whereas other figures, such as Tatian, were all for it.

However, the most vital figure in this period was Augustine of Hippo, who in the fifth century became one of the fathers of modern Catholic thought on sexual ethics. For although Augustine celebrated marriage as an essential part of life, for procreation, fidelity and companionship, he argued that chastity was the highest ideal. Moreover, he held that divorce and remarriage are completely unacceptable. Once you are married together in a spiritual union, this cannot be undone. This means that an even if you are divorced in the eyes of the state, their non-marital relationships are still adulterous. The Catholic Church still upholds this belief and does not allow divorce within the Church, only **annulment**. Those already married cannot remarry in the Church.

Yet, Augustine's beliefs here are closely intertwined with his views on human nature. He saw the human nature described in Genesis, essentially corrupted human nature, making the mind susceptible to sin. A product of this was also human beings possessing a general lust or sexual desire. For Augustine, this was a sinful desire. He used the term **concupiscence** to denote this. In other words, our sexual desire is a product of our corrupt natures and so inherently sinful. The only context in which it is acceptable is within marriage, and the best course of action is to resist them entirely and dedicate ourselves to God.

Thus, we can see how the two strains of thought we identified in scripture come to be developed in the early church. Augustine's thought, in many ways, this basic framework has not changed in modern Christianity. Premarital and extramarital sex are seen as sinful, with marriage being an unbreakable bond. This does not mean that thought on marriage has not developed since within the Catholic Church. For instance, the Church has fleshed out the idea of marriage as encompassing the greatest possible spiritual union, encouraging each person to work towards spiritual perfection and pass along wisdom to their children. But as we shall see in the next part, the foundations of Christian thought have been questioned from both within and outside of the Church.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



## Secularisation, Marriage and Sexual Ethics

Before we delve into this issue, let's expand a little bit on why Aquinas thought marriage was essential. Aquinas believed not just that marriage was divine will but that it was also essential for the preservation of human life, worshipping God, and reproduction. The issue you may find in legal interpretation is that it is not always easy to know exactly how marriage fits with the primary precepts. Reproduction and education are certainly possible without marriage, just as Aquinas is kind of forced to suggest that marriage is essential for the right functioning of society. One argument is that the nuclear family is the most stable environment for relationships. Another argument is that a nuclear family is through marriage.

But this also seems a bit continuous. Don't many couples successfully cohabit without marriage? And we have many same-sex couples who successfully raise children? Here, our modern way of life with Aquinas's arguments, and it's by comparing our more secular way of life with his. We seem to arrive at some contradictions surrounding marriage and sexual ethics. We might argue the rightness or wrongness of relationships based on the foundations of natural law or the writings of certain theologians to be authoritative when it comes to marriage. But we might even argue that Christian tradition has been deeply harmful to people's fulfilling lives and relationships. If this is the case, then we ought to re-examine our views on premarital and extramarital sex.

First, we might look broadly at how **secularisation** has changed the Western world. The influence of the Church has declined in both the public and private spheres. Most importantly, the idea that the Church is allowed to rule on the personal lives of people has come under challenge. With the development of new technologies such as effective contraception, the issue of premarital sex, such as undesired pregnancies, no longer became as central to the functioning of marriage and individuals were free to ask deeper questions about whether Christian sexual ethics was truly justified. More broadly, if one denied the authority of the Bible, then one might question premarital or extramarital sex if both parties consent.

Moreover, we might even look at the arguments of **secularists** concerning the Church. Secularists believe there should be a distinct division between religion and state. They argue that religion does not have a place within public and political life. Often this is based on the argument that religion is harmful to society and its individuals. Regarding Christianity, the argument is often that religious teachings on sex being inherently sinful are regressive and cause more pain than they prevent. When people are forming new sexual relationships, people are instead taught to feel guilt and shame about their impulses. Moreover, laws surrounding divorce in the Catholic Church are potentially problematic, such as domestic abuse emerge. If one partner is suffering in a relationship, should they be required to separate from a person without being condemned? For a more detailed look at secularism, see for example: Mill's harm principle.

### John Stuart Mill, Liberty, and the Harm Principle

You should be familiar with Mill from your ethics studies already. But as part of his philosophy, he was deeply concerned with human individual liberties. His argument was that if people are free to live their lives as they see fit, they will on the whole be more happy than not. Thus, if we adopt utilitarianism, liberty should be promoted through society. Corresponding to this emphasis on liberty, Mill introduced the **harm principle**. This was the basic idea that individual freedom should allow people to do as they want unless their actions cause harm to someone else. Thus, throughout his work, Mill was balancing of individual freedoms with the harm they might potentially result in.

Both these ideas were central to Mill's political **liberalism**. But they very obviously have implications when it comes to matters of sexual ethics. For Mill essentially argues that so long as individuals are able to freely engage in sexual relationships. This then leads to the conclusion that as premarital, extramarital and homosexual relationships are acceptable so long as they do not cause harm or unhappiness for those involved. Moreover, we should not restrict human freedom in the long run this will result in increased unhappiness!

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**





Mill's views here provide a useful contrast to the Christian traditions we've studied. Many Christian teachings, especially concerning practices such as marriage, are unattractive to the attitudes of the biblical writers and later theologians. For would a compassionate God expect beings to engage in a system of sexual ethics that leaves them unhappy and unfulfilled? We can also point to the fact that some figures, such as St Paul and Augustine, have deeply influenced the development of an effective challenge. If there are other principles or ethics that allow us to make better sense of our modern cultural perspective, shouldn't we adopt them? Or, if we do not, shouldn't we incorporate them into our own?

### Discussion Activity:

Should concepts such as the harm principle play an active role in deciding the law? Or should we ignore the importance of cultural and religious differences? Discuss in pairs.

## Modern Christian Thought and Sexual Ethics

We've noted throughout this section that Catholic teaching concerning marriage has remained relatively stable throughout the history of the Church. However, the same is not true of other denominations. Many have softened their position in light of changing cultural attitudes, secularisation, and the rise of human rights. It holds that ethical and social matters can be effectively discussed without religious reference. In this sense, we've seen this in action with Mill's own ethics and political theory. Yet the inward theological change in the minds of many, recognising that Christian traditions may be harmful or misguided.

This is particularly true concerning marriage. Many denominations, such as the Anglican Church, now permit remarriage, although this is at the discretion of the local minister. This has been a significant development. At the time of the Reformation, most Protestant thinkers still opposed remarriage. It was not until the nineteenth century that thought gradually began to change. However, the positions may be changing. Pope Francis, in his apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, suggests that the Church should be offering the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist to those living in civil unions, even if they are technically in sin. This includes those who have been remarried but are still considered as being in a state of grace by the Catholic Church.

So, has this led to a shift in views on premarital sex? Well, yes and no. The most liberal denominations have softened their position, arguing that a committed relationship can be sexual without being married, though marriage is still the best option. Moreover, there has been a recognition that cohabit before they marry and the reasons they might do so. On the other end of the spectrum, the Church is arguably still the most conservative, holding that premarital sex is a sin. If the purpose of sex is the possibility of reproduction and is not within marital bounds, then it is unacceptable. If the purpose of sexual relationships should be an expression of love, not for mere pleasure.

And what of extramarital sex? Well, you'd be much more unlikely to find support for this in the Christian world. If marriage is even just intended to be a firm commitment or covenant under God, then it holds enough importance for those involved not to be unfaithful. In many major denominations, marriage is a **sacrament**, or expression of divine grace, which is only received in those getting married. This comes with its own duties and vows, the breaking of which is seen as contravening the will of God. However, this position isn't necessarily too extreme. Most would hold that adultery is generally wrong, even if marriage is just a civil affair. We should be careful when we come to applying normative systems of ethics to these issues. But for the most part, the major source of debate in Christian sexual ethics: homosexuality.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



## Homosexuality

In recent years, the issue of same-sex relationships has been very much a thorn in the side of the Christian Church, with many condemning traditional Christian perspectives on homosexuality. But even within theological circles, the issue is more complex than it might appear, with Christian tradition sometimes at odds with both scripture and cultural voices. Moreover, the arguments against same-sex relationships are arguably less clear than those against premarital and extramarital sex. For if individuals of the same sex have loving relationships with each other, what is essentially sinful about their actions? Should the same sex or gender be restricted from marriage within the Church? Throughout both historical and modern voices on the issue, tying it in with our previous analysis of marriage.

### Christianity and Homosexuality

Like the issue of premarital and extramarital sex, there is to some degree a bit of ambiguity about the issue of homosexuality. In the Old Testament, there are often fairly firm condemnations, although these generally refer to sexual relationships between men. Leviticus 20:13 states:

*'If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; their blood is upon them.'* (Leviticus 20:13 NIV)

Here the punishment seems extraordinarily harsh. But same-sex relationships were also within Jewish tradition, even contributing to the downfall of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. This perspective also carries through to the letters of St Paul, which are often concerned with sexual behaviour, as we previously noted. Take a quick look at the passage below:

*'Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be idolaters, as were some of the Israelites; do not become adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, hateful persons; none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.'* (1 Corinthians 6:9–11 NIV)

These sentiments are not uncommon in Paul's writings. A similar example can be found in Romans 1:26–27, where Paul spells out the common view in Christian tradition that homosexuality is in some way sinful. He does not enter same-sex relationships of vice condemnation. But what's difficult here is to distinguish between premarital or extramarital sex, which are rooted in beliefs about marriage and relationships, and homosexuality, which does not appeal to a fixed form of worship or tradition. Instead, what is natural and unnatural behaviour in light of creation take hold, which are also the basis of the Church's teaching.

Moreover, one interesting aspect of the New Testament is that Jesus himself does not mention the wrongness of same-sex relationships, at least not in the writings that have been preserved. If the comments on relationships do refer solely to men and women, this may be an indication that the issue of same-sex relationships was not a pressing concern. It may even indicate that the Church's teaching on relationships, such that his espoused virtues of compassion and tolerance extended to all people, although for many scholars this is a bit of a leap in reasoning.

Altogether, though, the lack of precise scriptural discussions about same-sex relationships has led to a variety of Christian critics of homosexuality have typically had to enmesh their views in a position that can easily be challenged by modern cultural and theological critiques. In the next section, we will look at some of these critiques in a bit more depth and see how they have shifted and changed over time, and perspectives on homosexuality.

### Modern Christian Thought and Homosexuality

In the last section, we saw how the opposition to same-sex relationships is based not only on the idea that it is 'unnatural' or against God's plan for creation. Yet we also saw that this latter view is somewhat limited. Even if one takes the Bible to be generally a good source of guidance about the status of same-sex relationships or why they are different from opposite-sex relationships. And this is why same-sex relationships are a contentious issue for the modern Church. For the idea that same-sex relationships are unnatural is very contradictory. If God created human beings, then why did he create some to be heterosexual? And if what matters is that a sexual relationship embodies love, why does this not include same-sex relationships?

INSPECTION COPY

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



## The Catholic Church

For a good example of a conservative view on same-sex relationships, we can look to the view of this denomination is that while homosexuality is not a choice, same-sex relationships are importantly not a natural part of God's creation. While in Catholic law there is the contention that those who should not be discriminated against, and should be treated with compassion, those who are in same-sex relationships do face condemnation as they are contrary to God's will. In other words, the same kinds of arguments for celibacy are employed against those choosing to engage in same-sex relationships.

However, it is also a bit more complicated than this. The reasons the Catholic Church gives for why same-sex relationships spring not from the 'natural' but from natural law. They contend that such relationships are sinful as they cannot result in reproduction, a key aim of all sexual relationships. As suggested in Genesis, God purposely paired men and women to flourish and reproduce. Engaging in same-sex relationships is going against this purpose.

The trouble is of course that if we follow this line of reasoning to its logical conclusion, then plenty of other heterosexual relationships may also be sinful. Think of couples who so happen to be infertile or choose not to have children. Are they working against God's plan for creation? Giving reproduction such an important role in one's ethical perspective seems to lead to some odd results. Moreover, although the Catholic Church holds that homosexual individuals should not be treated badly, this principle has not always been followed through in practice. Arcigay, an Italian gay rights organisation, has suggested that the view of the Roman Catholic Church has contributed to violent attacks towards homosexuals and could be a factor in the deaths of around 150 homosexual men in Italy. Moreover, there has traditionally been a lack of pastoral care for those who are both homosexual and Catholic, resulting in many internal critiques of Catholic positions.

## The Anglican Church

Whereas the Catholic Church has resolutely maintained a conservative position on homosexuality, the Anglican Church has been a little more progressive in the last few decades. It first began to accept that homosexual individuals, coming from sex might *'have more hope of growing in love with their neighbour with the help of a loving and faithful homophile partnership, in intention giving inclusion and expression of their attachment'*. This still fell short of permitting same-sex marriage, but in the eyes of many it was a start, although this same position was asserted when same-sex marriages were introduced in the UK in 2004.

However, the issue raised its head once again when, in 2014, same-sex marriage was legalised outside of the Anglican Church. Since then, the Anglican clergy have been divided over whether to bring same-sex relationships into the Christian community and admit them sacraments. There is still great opposition towards allowing same-sex marriages in the Church and it seems unlikely to change soon, despite the growing numbers of LGBTQ+ individuals in the Anglican community. They still assert that it is acceptable to be openly gay but with the proviso that homosexuals remain celibate.

Yet, this view looks increasingly untenable in the modern era, especially as the Anglican Church moves away from the principles of natural law espoused by the Catholic Church. Furthermore, there has been growing opposition presented against the Anglican Church for prevaricating on the issue and often ignoring the voices of the clergy in favour of its more conservative elements. So, to what extent should the Church be more progressive on this issue? In the final part we can turn to the classic secular criticisms of Christian traditions and examine how the secularisation as a whole has changed perspectives on religion.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



## The Secular World and Same-sex Relationships

The rights and recognition of homosexual individuals, alongside the broader LGBT across the last quarter of a century, with many countries in the Western world in partnerships or same-sex marriage. For the UK, marriages between individuals of 2014, although these still have to happen either outside the Church or within a civil ceremony. There is no governmental pressure upon institutions such as the Catholic or Anglican churches to allow same-sex marriages within their buildings or establishments.

This highlights a potential gulf that is widening between the secular and Christian marriage. Although throughout much of history, there has been animosity towards a majority of people in the West are now accepting of same-sex marriages, most probably the younger generation. Why is the case? Well, like with the issue of premarital sex, there has been a key factor. As the Church's influence has declined both in the private and public spheres, that religion should impact on social issues. In fact, the idea that Christianity should influence the lives of individuals is often seen as quite regressive by many, especially if they are young.

We can consider the Sexual Offences Act of 1967 as an example. This was the first law to legalise homosexual relationships between consenting adults so long as they were in private. A key part of the Wolfenden Report, written 10 years earlier by a committee of the same name was *'it is no part of the business of government to interfere with the private lives of citizens so long as they are not harming others. It is the duty of government to ensure that a deliberate attempt be made by society through the agency of the law to equate the private life with the public life, there must remain a realm of private that is in brief, not the law's business.'* As homosexuality became widely accepted, many people had come to believe that the law should not be the judges of individual private behaviour.

Yet, this view stretches back to the liberal views espoused by figures such as Mill who looked at in the issues of premarital and extramarital sex. Even though many from the early twentieth century, with homosexual individuals often facing discrimination, the prevalent belief that if an act did not cause wider harm on others, then it should be allowed. To homosexual relationships, for many liberal Christians and other intolerant individuals, allowing same-sex relationships is socially destructive, many now recognise that it is not. By homosexual individuals acting upon their sexual preferences.

But this kind of political thinking is only one side of the story. For it doesn't explain why we should not only to tolerate homosexual relationships but also to *accept* them. The secularisation of society is not only in nature but also ethical in nature. As we shall see in the next section, when we look at the issue of homosexuality, there is little to suggest it should not be permitted in the public sphere. Many now who suggest that it is only fair or right to allow all individuals to express their sexuality (as long as it is without harm to others) or that allowing same-sex relationships increase the overall well-being of society (even an expression of good virtues, such as compassion, to be tolerant and accepting of others).

To some extent, this has even caused a shift within the Christian Church. There are now many churches and organisations which advocate for the LGBTQ+ community in the Church and its teachings, even in mainstream denominations such as the Anglican and Catholic churches. It will be seen whether the Christian Church as a whole will eventually move towards acceptance or whether it will remain taken by a lot of the secular world or whether it will remain at least in mild opposition to same-sex marriage.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



### Task:

In your own time, research LGBTQ+ groups within different denominations of the Christian Church. Write a sign that states your views on same-sex relationships are likely to change in the future. Write your notes on your thoughts.

## Applied Sexual Ethics

In this section, we will take a slightly different approach to the issues of sexual ethics. We will use different normative ethical systems to examine how each might provide moral guidance on extramarital and same-sex relationships. Throughout each, it is important to recall that we are in debate about how each normative ethical system should be applied, particularly in relation to specific actions from more general laws or principles. For instance, utilitarianism involves calculation. On any given issue, people may arrive at fairly different conclusions. In utilitarianism, calculation should be performed and the results followed. In either case, the kinds of arguments used throughout this section should only be seen as a rough guide for how you approach these issues in your end-of-year examination. It may be that you yourself take a very different approach.

### Natural Law

Natural law in Christian circles has traditionally argued that the primary precepts of natural law be directed towards reproduction, education of offspring and creating a stable society. Natural law has typically been seen to support the nuclear family, with one man and one woman (although potentially with help from the wider community and family!). Naturally, it has often concluded that premarital, extramarital and same-sex relationships destabilise society, prevent reproduction or do not effectively educate children.

But we can think perhaps a little more broadly about the primary precepts and how they might be interpreted. For as you should recall, deriving secondary precepts is not just about directly translating primary precepts into conduct but using our practical reason to apply the primary precepts to real-world situations. If we throw away assumptions about the stability of the nuclear family, which perhaps rests on the authority of the Bible, we may well derive different secondary precepts from the kind typically found in natural law. In particular, the guidance that natural law may give may well point towards relationships to be committed, rather than within a specific marital context.

Let us consider premarital sex first. One moral objection to this practice may well be that it is for pleasure, not reproduction, and it also may destabilise society if individuals reproduce. But what if it is the case? Many non-married couples now choose to have children. As we can tell, society is still ordered in the present day despite many having premarital sex. So, if we accept the influence of divine law, but the primary precepts may not point towards premarital sex, then extramarital contexts, just those in which reproduction is not an aim. With extramarital sex, the consequences are more likely to be for pleasure but it also potentially does have more serious consequences than premarital sex, as adultery is often done behind a partner's back. We should properly oppose extramarital sex on the basis of the ordering of society and justice. We should not commit adultery' as an absolute law, not one that is contingent on certain circumstances.

But finally, what of same-sex relationships? Well, the same kinds of principles apply. We can think a little more broadly about how they might be interpreted from a natural law perspective. One principle in discussions around homosexuality, as previously analysed, is that of reproduction. If same-sex relationships can't naturally bear children, with modern technologies they can, but they aren't strictly capable of having and rearing children – through surrogate parents. This might lead to the strange conclusion that same-sex relationships would be unacceptable under natural law. Recently, but this line of argument does highlight that the primary precepts are not just about reproduction as secondary precepts.

The same is true if we consider the primary precept of the ordering of society, as previously analysed. If allowing same-sex relationships and the destabilisation of human life, society or the human race, we would argue that, at most, only a small fraction of the human population is homosexual. If we accept that homosexuality, so it is unlikely that allowing same-sex relationships would cause a significant impact on reproduction and the flourishing of the human race. Thus, although it can be argued that this section could be rejected under natural law, there is also room for other interpretations to be considered.

INSPECTION COPY

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



## Situation Ethics

Situation ethics is perhaps the most unusual ethical system to apply to sexual ethics. In a Christian system of ethics, Fletcher was notoriously liberal in its interpretation, abortion and euthanasia. Moreover, compared to its consequentialist counterpart, it is difficult to apply. How can we measure the demonstration of agape love, especially to-judge metric such as happiness? Yet, once we turn to actual issues, and bear in mind legalistic ways of thinking, it can be argued that situation ethics naturally steers a person towards the right. It is always necessary to remember that situation ethics is not a rule to judge right and wrong, but a good or bad action is ever set in stone.

So, how should we approach premarital and extramarital sex? The big thing to note is that in a Christian ethical system, the covenant or rules of marriage disappears. All that matters is whether or not two people demonstrate love, and this is separate from the issue of whether or not two people are married. It is easy to make the case that situation ethics by and large supports acts of premarital sex as they do demonstrate love and not diminish it. Two people in a committed relationship will be justified in having sex, and two separated or divorced people may be right to have sex.

How might we imagine a different scenario, though? Well, think of a young person in a religious household which valued chastity. If they had casual premarital sex, could they demonstrate love if their family were deeply hurt by their actions? Similarly, if someone has sex without their partner's consent then it is hard to envision a situation in which such an act demonstrates love. Here, the flexibility of situation ethics can be highlighted inasmuch as although there are situations where premarital and extramarital sex could demonstrate love, one could also imagine situations where they would not.

Also, what of same-sex relationships? Well, it can be argued that under situation ethics, a same-sex relationship should be allowed so long as it is loving. This naturally includes individuals of different gender. Thus, in most contexts, situation ethics would allow for same-sex relationships. However, we might also draw similar principles to the religious family given earlier. If a young person has a same-sex relationship without their partner's consent, then this generally permissiveness is challenged. For depending on the state of a culture or society, it is not always the case that same-sex relationships aren't always demonstrating love.

We shall see a similar problem emerge when we consider utilitarianism, but it is important to note that in consequentialist ethical systems that the rightness or wrongness of acts become dependent on the attitudes of other people. If a society is deeply religious and conservative, is it right for someone to act in a way that hurts others, even if their attitudes are considered to be good? If situation ethics has an emphasis on subverting Christian tradition, it does not automatically mean it is morally progressive, and it is important to note these nuances when evaluating sexual ethics.

## Kantian Ethics

Kantian ethics is the most difficult ethical system you have studied to apply to issues of sexual ethics for personal behaviour is not always easy to conceptually universalise under the categorical imperative. However, the second formulation can often help with these matters, and it is worth considering both when approaching applied ethics from a Kantian perspective. Moreover, it is useful to remember that Kantian ethics is best when developing negative moral laws (e.g. do not x) rather than positive moral laws (e.g. do x) because of Kant's distinction between perfect and imperfect duties.

With that in mind, let's turn to the issues of premarital and extramarital sex. The former is the more difficult to evaluate, for one can arguably have a premarital sexual relationship with someone and still treat them as an end. Furthermore, if we conceptually universalise a law such as 'one ought to refrain from sex before marriage', although no contradiction arises, the same can be said for a law such as 'one ought to have sex before marriage'.

INSPECTION COPY

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



said of its opposite permitting sex before marriage. In other words, we can't really say that marriage doesn't exist without a conceptual problem, so premarital sex is arguably not a categorical imperative. The only ways a contradiction might arise is if premarital sex is seen as a concept of marriage altogether, but there is nothing in the meaning of marriage that requires this to happen. So Kantian ethics, although a little unclear, may not hold premarital sex as morally wrong.

However, the same is not true for extramarital sex. For marriage is a kind of covenant with certain rules about fidelity. Thus, it can be argued that once you get married then you are committed to another person. If we then conceptually universalised a law such as 'to engage in extramarital sexual relationships', it is hard not to see how a contradiction arises. Marriage is predicated on fidelity. In Christian tradition! In other words, if everyone engaged in extramarital sex, then the concept of marriage itself would become meaningless. This also suggests that extramarital relationships more often than not treat the non-offending partner as a means rather than an end, since their desires or thoughts are not considered.

But what of same-sex relationships? Well, it's a similar kind of discussion to that of premarital sex. Let's think for a moment about conceptually universalising maxims such as 'do not engage in same-sex relationships'. On the one hand, such a maxim can be conceptualised without contradiction. However, on the other, the statement can also be potentially conceptualised without contradiction! A world in which everyone engaged in same-sex relationships doesn't appear to be contradictory either. The world in which individuals *only* engaged in same-sex relationships is contradictory, but a world in which they *can* is not. Yet, permitting same-sex relationships does not mean everyone must engage in them. Moreover, like the issue of premarital sex, it can be argued that denying people a partner isn't treating them as ends. So, Kantian ethics here either doesn't say much or tacitly recognises that they are morally permissible.

## Utilitarianism

Compared to the other normative ethical systems we've studied, utilitarianism is a more permissive system to consider when thinking about sexual relationships. We've previously analysed how Mill's utilitarianism, in many ways, laid the moral and political groundwork for the legalisation of same-sex relationships. Yet, under Bentham's utilitarianism, there are a variety of situations in which premarital, extramarital and same-sex relationships become morally wrong actions.

Let's take a look at Bentham's act utilitarianism first. In one sense this might be the most permissive system of ethics we've studied so far, as all that is required is that an individual in a sexual relationship evaluate whether their actions result in greater happiness. Since sexual activity is often pleasure-inducing, we may well conclude that premarital and same-sex relationships are permitted, since individuals will be generating more pleasure than pain. There may be hypothetical exceptions, especially in the case of societies or cultures that frown upon same-sex relationships. In such societies or cultures, permitting same-sex acts or relationships may cause a lot of distress for many people, meaning that overall happiness is lower. Bentham's utility therefore might require either permitting or banning same-sex relationships depending on people's prior attitudes. One exception may also be extramarital sex, since adultery often causes great unhappiness, especially if done without consent.

However, if we examine the issue from the position of rule utilitarianism, our conclusions may be different. Premarital sex may be judged to produce greater happiness than unhappiness if it is permitted. The same may well be true of same-sex relationships, with exceptions for those who deem these grossly immoral. Yet, with adultery, rule utilitarianism runs into a problem. On the one hand, for those who have separated or are unhappy, extramarital relationships may produce happiness. Yet, on the other hand, they also produce deep unhappiness when no one is happy in the relationships are discovered within a marriage, especially when they lead to divorce.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



well err on the side of caution and say extramarital relationships are wrong, although calculating happiness and unhappiness on this issue.

But throughout, you might have noticed an interesting problem, the tyranny of the majority. If we live in a deeply religious, conservative society, then from a utilitarian perspective, it might be that allowing these issues to generate more unhappiness than happiness, simply because so many people are offended at their permission! This generates an interesting problem for the utilitarian. Should happiness be reasonably calculated? Should we permit same-sex relationships if the anticipation of them causing greater happiness in 50 years' time, even if many suffer in the meantime? There are many questions to answer, and it is worth thinking about the nature of calculation when we consider these issues of sexual ethics. As we saw in the consequentialist counterpart, situation ethics, the principle of utility can be drawn on to help us solve ethical dilemmas.



### Discussion Activity:

Which normative ethical system do you believe gives the best moral guidance on sexual ethics? Discuss in pairs or small groups.

### Quick Quiz

1. What is the difference between premarital sex and extramarital sex?
2. What is celibacy?
3. Why does Augustine believe sexual relationships should not be permitted outside of marriage?
4. What is the Catholic position on premarital sex?
5. What is the Anglican position on same-sex relationships?
6. When were same-sex relationships legalised in the UK?
7. What is the harm principle?
8. What is the Catholic position on same-sex relationships?



**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**





## ANSWERS TO TASKS

### 4 Activity:

*In your own time, research another example of a naturalistic ethical theory such as utilitarianism. Can you find an ethical view attempt to prove that their respective moral properties or laws can be justified? Write down a few notes and assess the naturalistic theory in light of the next sections.*

This activity should hopefully be fairly intuitive for students as they will hopefully have encountered naturalistic ethics and been introduced and justified throughout their studies in this section. A novel ethical theory, however, they can put this knowledge into practice. Virtue ethics is a good example, as it is clear how Aristotle develops his notion of virtue out of the nature of human beings in a similar manner to Aquinas. The naturalistic criticisms facing utilitarianism are similar as a result. However, many thinkers hold that virtue ethics has an advantage over utilitarianism's 'thin' ones. As a result, some students might be better poised to respond to the naturalistic fallacy.

### 5 Activity:

*Pick two moments in your life when you have felt guilty for actions you've committed. Can you identify this feeling as a product of your superego and the other parts of your unconscious mind? Write down your potential thought process according to Freud's theories of the mind.*

This is quite a fun activity to get students to engage with. Freud's thought can be complex, but ways with interesting results, and it is key to get students to understand how the mind works in psychoanalysis and not just conjured out of thin air.

However, what can emerge from this is an understanding of how Freud's theories are not as scientific as they seem. For there are so many ways of applying his psychoanalytic theories, it is not always intuitive. But if the theories themselves are so flexible and applicable, there is a risk that they are wrong. However, the behaviour shown by human beings or the reports that Freud has written are powerful.

### 6 Activity:

*In your own time, research LGBTQ+ groups within different denominations of the Christian Church. Can you find a sign that Christian views on same-sex relationships are likely to change in the near future? Write down your notes on your thoughts.*

Throughout this section, it is easy to get the sense that the Christian Church is a monolithic institution on relationships and/or marriage. However, there is an ongoing lively debate, especially within the Church, about the legitimacy of same-sex relationships, with many different groups holding different views on LGBTQ+ issues. In the most literal sense, the Christian Church is a broad church.

A good resource to look at is from the charity Stonewall, who have compiled a list of resources for people of faith. It can be found here: <http://www.stonewall.org.uk/resources>

Of particular interest might be the Anglican Fellowship and Diverse Church. It is also looking at how different denominations themselves and the different churches and congregations are dealing with same-sex relationships under Catholic or Anglican names. A list is available here:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Christian\\_denominations\\_affirming\\_LGBTQ](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Christian_denominations_affirming_LGBTQ)

INSPECTION COPY

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



# ANSWERS TO QUICK QUIZ

## Meta-ethics

1. Naturalism is the view that moral statements express propositions that are of natural facts about the world.
2. Natural law, virtue ethics, utilitarianism
3. Happiness
4. The philosophical problem with descriptive statements cannot be derived without a leap in rational moral reasoning – the existence of things doesn't
5. G E M
6. The view that good is a simple, non-natural property discoverable through
7. Logical positivism
8. Emotivism is the view that moral statements do not express truth-evaluab simply express subjective states of approval or disapproval.

## Conscience

1. Speculative reason concerns abstract ideas, concepts and affairs, whereas with applying these abstract affairs to the world.
2. A principle that holds that all human beings possess a natural inclination to
3. Vincible ignorance can be overcome through application of one's rational invincible ignorance is that which could not be overcome no matter how or understand.
4. The ego is the rationalising part of the mind, the superego the moralistic internalised values.
5. The id is a disorganised, unconscious aspect of the mind which contains our
6. For Freud, libido is the sexual drive or 'life force' which he identifies as the much of human behaviour.
7. Repression, identification
8. The authoritative conscience, for Fromm, is the aspect of our conscience in authority and their values, choices and ideals.

## Sexual Ethics

1. Premarital sex involves sex before marriage; extramarital sex involves sex commonly, adultery.
2. The state of abstaining from all sexual relationships, including marriage.
3. As they exemplify human beings submitting to their bodily desires rather to selves. These bodily desires are in turn emblematic of the corruption instil Fall and so premarital sex drives human beings further away from God.
4. The Catholic Church still holds that premarital sex is a sin and should be av
5. The Anglican Church permits same-sex relationships but still holds that same not be allowed.
6. 1967
7. A principle put forward by Mill which holds that the actions of people with limited or restricted where such a limitation prevents harm to others.
8. The Catholic Church holds that the sex attraction exists but that individual sex relationships for those contrary to nature and so a sin.

INSPECTION COPY

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**

