



Paper 2: Religion and Ethics Course Companion

For A Level Edexcel Religious
Studies: Year 2

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TEACHER'S INTRODUCTION

In writing this course companion I have endeavoured, above all else, to follow the Edexcel specification. Nevertheless, due to its vagueness, I have often had to rely on my own judgement when deciding what ideas or thinkers are worthy of inclusion or further comment, and what are not. It is impossible, in a publication of this kind, to include all relevant perspectives on the various ethical issues raised within. The mandatory religious perspective here is almost always Christian, and therefore views from Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism or Judaism are only covered tangentially. Teachers with expertise in these areas may wish to supplement the material presented here with their own insights. The philosophical elements of the companion, however, are reasonably thorough.

A02 marks are worth significantly more in this specification than the previous version, so the presentation usually has a critical edge. Each section features one or more 'analysis' sections, but they are not exhaustive; students should be aware that they are expected to join the dots between contrasting positions. The specification frequently states that students must know the 'strengths and weaknesses of significant areas of disagreement and debate' (or a subtle variation). I found it very difficult at times to simply break debates up into 'pros' and 'cons', not least because, in the more contested areas of the syllabus, what is a strength for me, may be a weakness for another. In some sections, I have decided it is best for students to decide for themselves.

Activities and discussion points are scattered throughout the resource; when appropriate, answers have been provided in the appendix.

I hope this resource proves itself to be of some benefit to both yourself and your students.

November 2016

Stretch and Challenge

Anything in a box like this is stretch and challenge, i.e. material not explicitly mentioned on the specification.



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KEY TERMINOLOGY IN ETHICS

Like any area of philosophy, ethics has its own set of specialised terminology. Throughout and time again during this course and it is a good idea to know what each means. There will be a lot here to take in right now, some of which you may not presently understand. As you study, you will soon become fluent in the language of ethics.

Ethics	The area of philosophy concerned with what behaviour is morally right or wrong.
Moral	Actions, behaviour or intentions that are considered good or right.
Immoral	Actions, behaviour or intentions that are considered bad or wrong.
Maxim	A moral rule.
Moral/ethical theory	A set of ideas about ethics and how people should behave.
Moral agent	Someone involved in making ethical or moral decisions.
Normative ethics	The branch of ethics which discusses what individuals <i>ought</i> to do. Questions include, 'What moral rules should people follow?' (the first major topic in this course).
Consequentialist	Term applied to ethical theories which judge whether an action is right or wrong on the basis of the consequence of the actions, not the action itself.
Deontological	Term applied to ethical theories which make judgements about the rightness or wrongness of an action <i>on the basis of the intention of the moral agents or whether they are conforming to a set of rules</i> (e.g. Kantian deontology).
Teleological	Term applied to ethical theories which are interested in the <i>end</i> (the final outcome), rather than the <i>means</i> (how they were carried out).
Act-centred	Term applied to ethical theories which make judgements about the rightness or wrongness of individual persons (e.g. utilitarianism and Kantian deontology).
Character-based	Term applied to ethical theories which make judgements about the rightness or wrongness of actions (e.g. Aristotle's virtue ethics).
Applied ethics	The application of ethical thinking to real-world issues, e.g. medical ethics, business ethics.
Meta-ethics	The branch of ethics which discusses what ethical language means. Questions include, 'What does it mean to say something is good?', 'What is the status of anything in objective reality?'
Descriptive ethics	A <i>description</i> of an individual's or a group of individuals' moral beliefs. In normative ethics, descriptive ethics is considered, in the context of a moral theory, rather than debate, e.g. 'Most people are selfish', 'Most people feel pain'. Descriptive ethics tell us how things <i>are</i> , rather than how they <i>ought</i> to be.
Cognitive	Language which makes claims about reality that are true or false. It states facts.
Non-cognitive	Language which does <i>not</i> make claims about reality that are true or false. It does <i>not</i> state facts.

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4.1 META-ETHICS

Introduction

In this section we will be looking at an area of philosophy known as meta-ethics. Whereas **normative** ethics is concerned with the question of what *is* good, meta-ethics is concerned with the question of what we mean when we say something is 'good'. Fundamentally, it is concerned with the question of whether moral statements are right or wrong, e.g. whether it is right to bring about happiness for others, but about whether moral statements were meaningful at all.

Key Terminology in Meta-ethics

For a subject so concerned with the meaning of language, it is fitting that meta-ethics will encounter a lot of new terminology in this section, which is – in this author's opinion – one of the most challenging parts of the course. Being able to use it competently is a challenge, but will put you in a good position to understand the rest of the course.

Realism holds that moral facts exist.	Cognitivism holds that ethical statements make claims about reality and so can be true or false. Since those claims can be true or false (like scientific facts, an individual's opinion is irrelevant when we make an ethical judgement).
Anti-realism holds that moral facts do not exist.	Non-cognitivism holds that ethical statements do <i>not</i> make claims about an independent reality and so <i>cannot</i> be true or false. Since they are subjective (like an opinion, we cannot say whether they are true or false).

- ◆ **Cognitivism** and **non-cognitivism** make claims about *language*.
- ◆ **Realism** and **anti-realism** make claims about what *exists*.
 - Generally, **realists are also cognitivists** and **anti-realists are also non-cognitivists**.

Even More Technical Terminology

Claims about what does or does not exist are referred to by philosophers as *ontological* claims (from the Greek *ontos*: being). You will also encounter this word if you are studying the *ontological* argument for God's existence is so called because it begins with an ontological claim: 'the concept of God exists (as 'something than which nothing greater can be conceived')'. This is a claim about what exists, not about what is good or bad.

Within these two camps, there are numerous, often highly nuanced, positions. This course will be **naturalism**, **intuitionism** (both species of cognitivism), **emotivism** (a species of non-cognitivism). On the next page is a flow chart which shows how the different positions relate to each other.

Absolutism and Relativism

In ethics, absolutism and relativism make claims about the *nature of morality*.

- ◆ **Absolutists** hold that the nature of morality is such that it admits of no exceptions. For example, are *always* wrong. This is true in all cultures, at all times, for all people. The Law theory, which was discussed in Section 2.1, is an example of an absolutist position.
- ◆ **Relativists** hold that the nature of morality is relative to each individual (individualism) or to each particular culture (cultural relativism). What is right for me, may be wrong for you. What is acceptable in Britain, is morally unacceptable in Saudi Arabia.

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Crucially, **relativists** maintain that *all perspectives are equally valid*: if my person highest good is severing the feet from live rabbits, and yours is that animal cruel establish that our own position is superior, or the other's inferior. For this reason identify themselves as relativists; in fact, it is more often used as a term of derision is to be self-defeating: if we can never say one position is better than any other, all? The existence of human rights enshrined in international law, along with advances in gender equality, are often pointed to as clear evidence that moral progress not only can be made. Meanwhile, defending the claim that a country without slavery is no better than a country with slavery is a challenge for even the most radical of thinkers.

Nevertheless, outside the academy, relativism continues to attract followers. Although the position is almost as old as philosophy itself, its modern origins are to be found in the work of the nineteenth-century German philosopher **Friedrich Nietzsche**. Misunderstood and largely unappreciated by his contemporaries, after his death Nietzsche became a major influence upon a dizzying array of intellectual and artistic movements: in the arts, Expressionism, Surrealism, Existentialism, and Postmodernism all bear his imprint, while in psychology the theories of Freud and Jung are equally indebted. To this day, he remains a cult hero for the alienated and disenfranchised.

The reason Nietzsche so captivated the artistic imagination in Europe is because he offered a radical re-evaluation of its intellectual history. As the Nietzsche scholar Keith Ansell-Pearson writes, 'for Nietzsche, morality represents a system of errors that we have incorporated into our basic ways of thinking, feeling and living, and a profound ignorance of ourselves and the world.'¹

In Nietzsche's view, philosophers are wont to think of themselves as working in the pursuit of absolute knowledge, when in fact what holds is **perspectivism**; how we see the world is determined by the values we have already absorbed. It is foolish, then, to consider one perspective superior to another, because all are laden with culturally and individually relative assumptions.

From now on, my philosophical colleagues, let us be more wary of the danger of an eye which has set up a 'pure, will-less, painless, timeless, subject of knowledge', an eye which cannot be thought at all, an eye turned in no direction at all. Interpretative powers are to be suppressed, absent, but through which we see something, so it is an absurdity and non-concept of eye that is demanded. We are to see, only a perspectival 'knowing'...

(On the Genealogy of Morality)

And elsewhere:

There is no such thing as moral phenomena, but only a moral interpretation.

Factual and Symbolic Language

The specification also states students should be aware of the distinction between factual and symbolic language. We might take this to mean a distinction between language which states facts about the earth revolves around the sun, and language which tries to *point beyond itself* to something beyond the Resurrection and I am the Life.' Hence the precise meaning is not entirely clear. This distinction takes on increased significance in Edexcel Religious Studies.

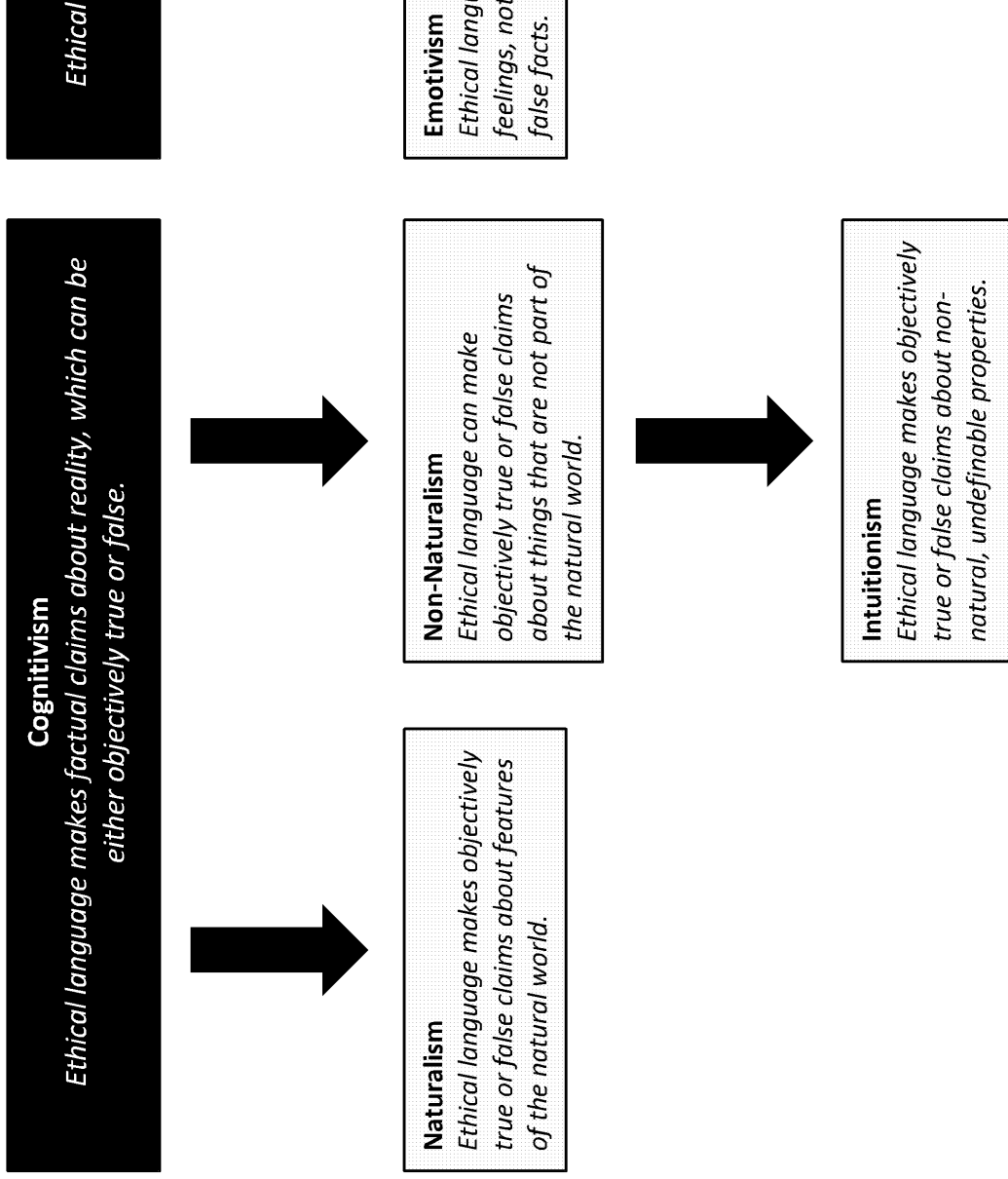
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¹ Nietzsche, F *On the Genealogy of Morality: Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought*, Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. xvi

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Activity:

1. Identify the differences in interpreting the moral statement 'happiness is good' as a cognitive and non-cognitive statement.

Ethical Naturalism

Ethical naturalism is a cognitive theory. It is the belief that decisions about what is right or wrong are made through discovery of the natural world and human nature. An action can be right if it is in accordance with the intended purpose of human nature (natural moral) or if it produces happiness (utilitarianism). Both happiness and the intended purpose of human nature are both things that exist in the world and can be assessed and empirically tested.

Ethical naturalism treats ethical statements the same as non-ethical statements. For example, the statement 'that car is blue' to be empirically tested (by looking at the car, I can see if it is blue). So too such ethical statements, such as 'happiness is good', can be empirically tested by seeing if an action has produced happiness. On this basis, ethical statements can be proved or falsifiable.

The Is-Ought Gap

Critics of this way of talking about morality are keen to point out these theories are a damning, mistake: they confuse what is the case with how it ought to be. This is a point that was first pointed out by Hume (whose views we will discuss in more depth later).



David Hume

In every system of morality, which I have hitherto seen, the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning... when all of a sudden I am surprised to find a new copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with a new relation connected with an ought, or an ought not. This is a new relation, however, of the last consequence. For as this new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it be explained; and at the same time that a reason should be given, altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be connected with the former, which are entirely different from it.

(David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*)

In this oft-quoted passage, Hume is for the first time pointing out the 'is-ought' gap. It was to have a profound influence in twentieth-century philosophy. The point is that when philosophers talk about ethical reasoning, they move from what is the case to what ought to be the case, which is a gap they got from the former to the latter.

For example, I may claim that it is the case that everybody loves *Game of Thrones*. I may go on to explain, in depth, what it is about *Game of Thrones* that has made it so popular. The universal love of *Game of Thrones* demonstrates its superiority over any other television drama. I may conclude that 'loving *Game of Thrones* has enriched my own and many of my acquaintances' lives. But I cannot conclude that everybody ought to love *Game of Thrones*. For Hume, it is at this point that the argument comes to an awkward halt. 'At no point', he might argue, 'have you justified moving from the claim that everybody loves *Game of Thrones*, to the claim that everybody ought to love *Game of Thrones*'.

Furthermore, Hume thinks it is unclear precisely how somebody could justify such a claim. If it is the case that everybody on the entire planet loved *Game of Thrones* (which is, of course, not the case), it is hard to see how this could be a moral principle. This is because to say that 'it is the case that everybody loves *Game of Thrones*' is to describe a factual state of affairs. 'Everybody seeks pleasure and avoids pain', for example, is a fact like that made by Jeremy Bentham in the opening line of his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* ('Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is their sole legitimate masters'). Bentham would argue that this is a factual state of affairs and, I imagine, many others would agree.

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Jeremy Bentham

However, for Hume, Bentham makes a damning error: the same work:

It is for them [pain and pleasure] alone to point out determine what we shall do.

(Bentham, *Principles of Morals*)

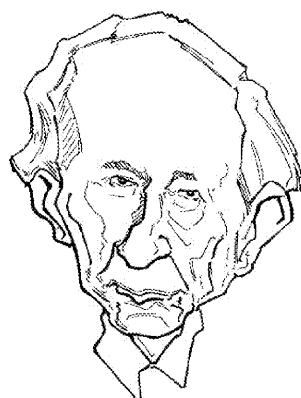
This sentence is a normative claim. It is saying what we ought to do. That is a very different thing to saying how things are. It might have been the case that the vast majority of Afro-Americans were held in slavery in mid-eighteenth-century Mississippi, but few today would argue it ought to have

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been the case. In fact, we might argue that it ought not to have been the case. Yet how can we decide who is right if the entire discussion is founded on a claim that it is possible to talk, assuredly, about how things are in the same way we talk about how things ought to be? This question occupies us for much of this topic.



G E Moore

Ethical Non-naturalism: G E Moore's Intuitionism

The Open Question Argument and the Naturalistic Fallacy

G E Moore (1873–1958) is often associated with his contemporaries, Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein. The work of these philosophers was radical at the time due to its focus on close linguistic analysis, often called 'speculation'. Moore, and his successors, all found that the puzzles philosophers had studied for millennia were rather the result of confused language. They were eventually to come to be called analytic philosophy, which is the dominant form of philosophy in this day in English-speaking countries.

One of Moore's most famous contributions is the 'Open Question Argument'. It is the question to be one that can be answered positively or negatively without 'self-contradiction or conceptual confusion'.²

Moore's example used the naturalistic element 'pleasure' (from utilitarianism), and the question was 'Is pleasure good?'. Utilitarians might say that 'helping people who are ill creates pleasure'; therefore, 'helping ill' is good.

Where the open question comes in is in asking, in response to the claim of utilitarianism, 'Is pleasure good?' The answer to this question could, without self-contradiction and logical contradiction, be 'No'. 'Pleasure' is not always good. From this Moore argued that 'good' is, therefore, not analytically identical to 'pleasure'. Therefore, 'good' is not the same as 'pleasure' and 'good' cannot be defined in terms of 'pleasure'.

A definition of 'good', therefore, has to be things that are analytically identical, e.g. 'bachelor' is analytically identical to the term 'bachelor' include 'man' and 'not married'. To ask 'Can a bachelor be married?' is an open question argument because it would not make sense to answer 'Yes'. Therefore, 'bachelor' means 'man' and 'not married'. Moore argues that no such example can be given that applies to the term 'good' because it will always result in an open question. Hence, 'good' cannot be defined in terms of a natural property. It does not make sense to logically equate good with a natural property.

As a cognitivist, Moore did not, however, argue that this meant good did not exist. Good was known and identified through our intuition – we know good when we see it – this is the intuitionist view.

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² Miller, A, 'Non-Cognitivism' in *Routledge Companion to Ethics* ed. by J Skorupski (Oxford: Routledge, 2011), pp. 111–121.

Moore uses the example of yellow to help explain this. Yellow is something that it when we see it. We cannot say what yellow actually is – we can only say things e.g. the sun. We are, however, unlikely to dispute whether something is yellow.

We know what yellow is and can recognise it where it is seen, but we can't the same way we know what good is. But that we cannot actually define it.³

Other Intuitionist Thinkers

Moore was not the only philosopher to create an intuitionist theory of meta-ethics. At about the same time built on the theory and attempted to rescue it from the criticisms we have encountered.

Harold Arthur Pritchard

Pritchard shared the view of Moore that 'good' cannot be defined but it can be known by intuition. Pritchard, however, identified **two types of thinking – reason and intuition**. Reason involves looking at the facts of the situation and intuition uses this information to then decide what action is right or wrong and how to act. Pritchard argued that people's intuitions vary because some people's moral thinking is more developed than others.

W D Ross

Ross took a slightly different approach to intuition from Pritchard and Moore but was also an intuitionist rather than a consequentialist. He considered intuition to identify what our duty is in a particular situation. Ross argued that our duty in moral situations is self-evident and always the same. He identified **prima facie** (Latin for 'at first appearance') duties. Ross identified seven core **prima facie** duties that these may sometimes conflict but said that in the situation it will be clear which one is the right one.

1. promise-keeping
2. reparation for harm done / faithfulness in relationships
3. gratitude
4. justice
5. beneficence (generosity)
6. self-improvement
7. non-maleficence (not doing harm/evil)

Analysis

- ◆ Moore's theory is able to overcome the **naturalistic fallacy** while still maintaining that moral facts are non-natural.
- ◆ **How exactly do we recognise goodness?** Moore claims that we are able to recognise moral facts by intuition, but he does not explain how we do this or what exactly the non-natural is.
 - Geoffrey Warnock points out that this raises a number of serious difficulties. If moral facts are non-natural, how do they interact with the natural properties? A utilitarianism in the eye with needles is wrong because it causes them pain, but this is not a moral fact. Intuitionism is intuitionist due to the open question argument. Surely, however, that intuitionism has some influence on our moral thinking.
- ◆ **How does intuitionism explain moral disagreement?** How does it aim to resolve moral disagreement? As a cognitivist, Moore believes there are moral facts and moral falsehoods, yet how do we find them? If I think abortion is always wrong and you think it is always right, how do we know who is grasping the moral fact and who the moral falsehood?
- ◆ **Even if there are moral facts, the intuitionist gives no reason why anyone should act morally.** 'torturing innocent children is wrong' I may well be stating just such a fact, but intuitionism does not give anybody any reason *not* to torture children; all I've done, in effect, is state a fact. It has not made it relevant to how persons should act.

³ Moore, G E, *Principia Ethica*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903).

A J Ayer's Emotivism

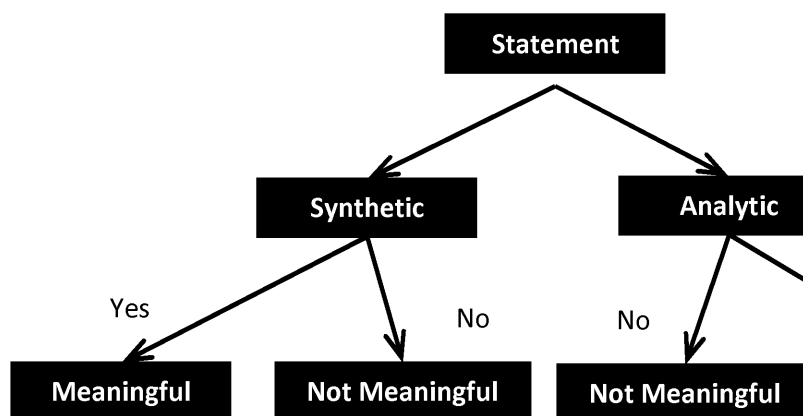
The Influence of Logical Positivism

The roots of emotivism are in the Vienna Circle, a group of early-twentieth-century philosophers who met regularly in the Austrian capital to discuss their ideas. The Circle were influenced by **logical positivism**, which considered science and logic to be the only legitimate sources of knowledge. Logical positivism holds that for something to be called knowledge it must be *meaningful*.

Key to this insight was the **verification principle**, which set out a criterion for deciding whether a statement was considered meaningful or meaningless.

Analytic statements – statements which are true by definition, e.g. 'all bachelors are unmarried' or 'a round square is round'.

Synthetic statements – statements which can be proved/verified according to empirical evidence. Empirical evidence is proof based on knowledge from observation or experience. A statement proved a priori (by reason alone), only a posteriori (experience and observation) statement 'it is raining' cannot be proved purely by thinking about it, but rather by looking out of a window. Synthetic statements also include mathematical statements which can be proved according to the laws of mathematics.



Ethical Language as Functional and Persuasive: The 'Boo-Hurrah' Theory

The English philosopher **A J Ayer** (1910–1989) developed emotivism with the verification principle firmly in mind. He found that if we put ethical language to test, we will find that it is clearly not tautological (the concepts of murder and wrongness are not synonymous, for instance). Hence, ethical language cannot be analytically true or false. It is also not possible to determine empirically whether a statement such as, 'Laughing at failed musicians is wrong' is true or false. Any attempt to do so would, of course, inevitably involve committing the naturalistic fallacy. This rules ethical language out from being synthetically true or false. According to the principle, if a statement is neither analytic nor synthetic in form then it is technically *meaningless*. Yet if this is true of ethical language, why do we persist in using words like 'good' and 'bad', 'right' and 'wrong'?

Ayer holds that ethical language, although not logically meaningful, does have a purpose: it expresses our disapproval or approval of a certain course of action, but this has led to the theory being unflatteringly referred to as the 'Hurrah! Boo!' theory. This reduces ethical statements such as, 'The mass murder of over two million people was an act of unspeakable evil' to 'Boo! The Cambodian genocide! Boo! Mass murder'.

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Further Developments: Weak Verification

In response to some of the criticisms above, Ayer later amended his theory. He developed a 'principle' which held that statements could be considered meaningful, even if they could not be verified by empirical evidence, 'if it is possible for experience to render it possible'. The weak verification principle states that moral and historical statements are meaningful (although not religious language). Ethical statements are meaningful if the statement referred to an objective experience, e.g. 'breaking that

Analysis

- ◆ Emotivism helps to explain why it is so difficult to resolve conflicting moral viewpoints, as there is no objective truth to arrive at.
- ◆ It recognises the wide variety of different moral viewpoints and gives them all equal value, even if it is that they are equally meaningless.
- ◆ It is consistent with our understanding of morality and human development that we make statements as an attempt to influence others and not as a statement of fact.
- ◆ It shows how emotive statements, which lack empirical evidence, can still be powerful in influencing others.
- ◆ It makes moral debate pointless and meaningless as all statements are equally meaningless.
- ◆ There is no way to judge between ethical statements and decide which one is better.
- ◆ People make ethical statements because they think they are true, not purely because they want to influence others.
- ◆ It denies the opportunity for any universal or widely agreed-upon moral principles.
- ◆ Emotivist theories fail to properly distinguish ethical language from other forms of language. It is not the emotional impact (for example, the impassioned speeches that are the hallmark of emotivism) that makes ethical language meaningful. Sometimes, when ethics is discussed dryly, even matter-of-factly. Historically, ethically momentous decisions have been made not in floods of tears or with wringing hands, but through discrete memos in which the ethical implications of a decision are weighed.
- ◆ The verification principle also rules out other forms of knowledge (historical knowledge, for example). If the verification principle is applied significantly, the emotivist theory is not itself verifiable and so technically meaningless. (The statement, 'All meaningful statements are either synthetic or analytic nor synthetic statement!')

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Prescriptivism

Hare, in his books *The Language of Morals* (1952) and *Freedom and Reason* (1963), developed the meta-ethical theory of prescriptivism.

Prescriptivism understands moral statements to be prescriptive – telling or prescribing what someone ought to do. It is similar to a doctor's prescriptions which tell patients what medicine or exercise they should take.

People, therefore, make moral statements as a way to convince others or influence them about what they should do. If I say 'murder is wrong', I am saying 'you should not murder', with the hope that my listeners will respond to what I have said by not committing murder.

Hare writes:

*'I have said that the primary function of the word 'good' is to commend. We have, therefore, to inquire what commending is. When we commend or condemn anything, it is always in order, at least indirectly, to guide the actions of people's, now or in the future.'*⁴

An important feature of prescriptivism is that it states that moral commands should apply to everyone. Therefore, if I say 'murder is wrong', this would mean that murder is wrong in all situations. The prescriptions should be consistent (mean murder is wrong in all situations) and not contradictory (it is wrong for other people to murder, but it is right when I do it).

⁴ Hare, R M, *The Language of Morals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 127.

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Analysis

- ◆ The main **strength** of intuitionism is that it moves on from emotivism to show that statements can still have a purpose and express something more than just a preference.
- ◆ Hare does not provide a way to differentiate between people's different preferences about which one is right.
- ◆ Even if people make moral statements which are universalisable, it does not mean these moral rules are universal because people come up with different prescriptions.
- ◆ Like emotivism, it denies the possibility of objective moral truth or moral knowledge. It is impossible to say something is right because someone can always prescribe the opposite.
- ◆ Prescriptive statements fail to have much effect on other people because there is nothing anyone can do. If someone says 'abortion is wrong', the listener is likely to ask 'Why?' but there is nothing to stop someone changing their preference. The next day the same person could say 'abortion is right'.

Exam Prep

'Everyone knows what good means.' Identify how different ethical theories demonstrate how non-cognitivist theories have critiqued the notion of what good means.

'To what extent is ethical language meaningful?' Compare emotivism, intuitionism and naturalism on whether ethical language is meaningful.

'Understanding ethical language can help in making moral decisions.' Discuss how views of prescriptivism, emotivism and intuitionism are in making moral decisions in practical moral dilemmas?

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Hare's Kantian Influence and Geoffrey Warnock's Critique

Hare's prescriptivism had two major intellectual sources: emotivism and Kantianism. The philosopher Geoffrey Warnock outlines Hare's view as follows:

*The thesis that moral judgements are prescriptive implies that one who judges that he ought to do X is logically committed to doing X. (Warnock, G. J. (1967) *Philosophy*, (London: Palgrave 1967))*

We can see, then, that Hare is taking a similar position to Kant on the way we should be universalisable. Warnock continues:

... that is, if I commit myself to this judgement in your particular case, I view that anybody – including, most importantly myself, – in the circumstances ought to act in that way.

Warnock makes two closely related criticisms of Hare's account of ethical language:

- i) 'moral judgements are not *essentially* prescriptive'
- ii) 'if [they are not essentially prescriptive], we need not claim for 'universalisability' what Hare, as I think mistakenly, claims for it.'

i) As he did to counter the claims of the emotivist, Warnock argues that moral language is not just prescribing but also advising, exhorting, condemning, deploring; resolving, confessing, undertaking; and so on, and so on.

They may be prescribing, certainly; but also they may be advising, exhorting, condemning, deploring; resolving, confessing, undertaking; and so on, and so on.

Hare restricts himself to a very limited context (those in which imperatives are issued), and incorrectly, declares this is the sole realm of moral discourse.

The central doctrine in Hare's account is that 'there obtains a quite special connection between moral statements and actions'. Namely, to accept or reject an ethical statement, for Hare, is just to act accordingly.

However, Warnock believes that, while it is true that imperative discourse has a direct bearing on conduct (you either assent and follow the order, or dissent and disobey), moral discourse is much more complex.

When it comes to moral discourse, 'someone's conduct will be somehow related to the actual relations, quite clearly, will be wildly diverse, and not to be summed up by a single word'.

ii) In Hare's view, to issue a prescriptive statement is to be willing to universalise it. A major problem is that Hare does not believe there is any objective standard of goodness. He is considered a non-cognitivist. Kant does, however; he thinks the only good is that which is determined by reason. There is no 'good' for Hare because that would involve a standard of 'good' or 'It is false that x is good'.

Without such a standard, Hare can only demand that a person is *consistent* in their actions. For example, to believe that sexism is ethically right, so long as you are consistently misogynist. If we agree that people treat one gender as superior to the other, then we can have no grounds for disagreement. So, Warnock concludes, Hare's attempt to rescue cogent moral discourse is like trying to play a competitive game in which each competitor was making up the rules as they went along.

Quick Quiz

1. Name a non-cognitive and a cognitive theory.
2. Is intuitionism non-cognitive or cognitive?
3. What is ethical naturalism? Give three examples.
4. What is the 'is-ought' controversy? Which philosopher is associated with it?
5. Which ethical theory considers ethical language to be meaningless? Why?
6. Do intuitionism, emotivism and prescriptivism agree or disagree with ethical cognitivism?
7. Give a difference between prescriptivism and emotivism.
8. Give a difference between intuitionism and emotivism.
9. Name a philosopher associated with intuition, emotivism and prescriptivism.

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4.2: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION

Introduction: Key Terms

This topic discusses the relationship between religion and morality. There are three possibilities:

1. Religion and morality are **dependent** on each other – one cannot exist without the other.
2. Religion and morality are **independent** – they can both exist separately.
3. Religion is *opposed* to morality – religion and morality exist separately but are in conflict.

The Euthyphro Dilemma, explained below, helps to show three possibilities: first dependent on each other because God commands that which is good.

It also explains the second possibility, that religion and morality could be (although not necessarily) independent because God could command anything and it would automatically be good.

The third possibility is examined in the final section; it is associated with the anti-religious movement that gained prominence at the turn of the century.

The Euthyphro Dilemma

When we see we are facing a dilemma, we usually mean to say that there are two choices but neither choice is particularly appealing. For instance: imagine that one evening at your favourite band in concert, Kantian jazz-fusion pioneers *The Critique of Pure Reason* are performing. Your university friend, who I have not seen for many a year, calls me up out of the blue to say they are on their way to the airport. Their flight has been cancelled and, as chance would have it, they are stopped at the airport only, close to my house. I am now faced with a choice: either I go to see my favourite band and miss out on seeing my old friend, or I see my friend and miss out on seeing my favourite band.

In his dialogue *Euthyphro*, Plato posed a problem which has had far greater philosophical discussion between **Socrates** and the Ancient Greek religious prophet Euthyphro. The problem is:

Whether the pious or holy is beloved by the Gods because it is holy, or holy because it is beloved by the Gods.

For our purposes, we may take 'pious or holy' to mean what is *morally good*. So the dilemma is asking:

1. Are things only good because they are commanded by God? (i.e. is morality **dependent** on God?)
2. Does God only command things which are good? (i.e. is morality **independent** of God?)

These statements might seem rather similar but they have important differences:

1

For 1) God gets to decide what is good. Something becomes good purely because God has decided it is good. The radical implication of this is that God could command humanity something that society might consider to be immoral. For example, if God had said killing is good, then killing would indeed be good.

2

For 2) there is an external standard of 'good' that exists independent of God. God loves acts that fit this standard. This avoids the problem above. For example, if God cannot decide whether killing is good or not; He must command whichever act fits the standard. This notion is, however, arguably contrary to the idea of God as omnipotent and therefore able to decide for Himself what is good.

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Divine Command Theory

One possible relationship between religion and morality is that they are dependent on each other. This means that they cannot be conceived as existing without one another. A large part of religion is its moral teachings, but more importantly, morality could not exist without religion and a God.

This dependence is made clear in divine command ethics. This is the ethical theory that moral agents should follow whatever God commands. We can know what God commands through Scripture, such as the Ten Commandments in the Bible, the Church, and Church authorities. God's commands are absolute and objectively true. Therefore, they must always be followed by all people at all times. This is based on the belief that God decides what is good and will judge humanity, sending them to heaven or hell according to whether they have followed His commands.

Those who believe that religion and morality are dependent believe that **without God, morality could not exist because there would be no authority behind moral commands.**

God is the only authority who can make people follow ethical commands. Only He has the power to judge people for their actions and send them to heaven or hell. Only He has the power to define what is good and make objective, absolute commands. Society could create ethical theories but they will just be one person's opinion.

Analysis

- ◆ Divine command ethics encourages people to be good because they fear hell and want to go to heaven. This is not true morality, because good acts should be done because it is recognised out of a selfish desire for reward.
- ◆ Kant argued that heaven and hell should never motivate a person's actions. He follows the moral law because they have recognised through reason that it is true.
- ◆ James Rachels argues that being moral out of obedience to God is inappropriate. It is to be an autonomous or self-direct agent'.⁵ It is about identifying for oneself what is right and wrong and behaving accordingly. God is wrong to ask humans to abandon this autonomy or independence. Divine command ethics, and he concludes that God is not worth worshipping.
- ◆ Moral theories can have authority without God being in the picture. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, for example, although not supported by everyone, is believed by many to be true and meaningful. Humans themselves can and do therefore judge other moral theories. They have authority because of how widely respected and agreed upon they are.
- ◆ Divine command ethics is subjective because believers think that for a thing to be moral, it must be commanded by God. This is their subjective opinion about how what is good and bad should be. For them, however, see the commands as objective.

Christians believe that the Ten Commandments must be followed.

And God spoke

'You shall have

'You shall not

*'You shall not
the LORD your*

'Remember the

'Honour your

'You shall not

'You shall not

'You shall not

*'You shall not
your neighbour*

*'You shall not
or anything that*

Divine Command Theory
The ethical theory that moral agents should follow whatever God commands.

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⁵ Quoted in Bowie, R, *Ethical Studies* (Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes Ltd, 2004), p. 128.

Weak Divine Command Theory

Due to the problems raised above, Divine Command Theory in its pure form has an unattractive solution to the Euthyphro Dilemma. In recent decades, a modification has emerged which tries to smooth over some of these difficulties.

One way of solving a dilemma is to show that the two options are not mutually exclusive; they don't have to do one or the other but can actually do both, then we no longer have a dilemma.

This is precisely what Weak (or Modified) Divine Command Theory tries to do. A *worse* version of Divine Command Theory, instead it tries to *weaken* the dilemma by showing that the two options in the Euthyphro Dilemma can both be true. How is this done:

1. Things are only good because they are commanded by God.
 - ◆ This would make morality *arbitrary*.

or

2. God only commands things which are good.
 - ◆ This would mean a *restriction on God's power*.

What if (1) and (2) are *both* true? That would mean moral commands are good by God *and* God only commands things which are good. How?

The philosopher Robert Adams argues that:

- ◆ Morally good things are **objectively** good (and morally bad things are objectively bad).
 - This means that God would never command something evil (such as torturing innocents) because such actions are objectively bad.
- ◆ Morally good things are objectively good *because* of God's **benevolent nature**.
 - This means that God's power is not restricted because commanding something good is what is in God's nature. Likewise: that I donate a little money to charity is good because that is what I am. There is no restriction on my power to be more tight-fisted, it is just *in my nature* to be generous. Not that God *can't* command evil things, it's just that God *won't* command evil things.

It's a fine philosophical sleight of hand, but it faces one crucial objection: what if God commands something that is objectively bad?

Activity:

1. Go back to the example at the start of the section. Can you think of a way to resolve the dilemma between my favourite band and my favourite food?

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Kant's Moral Argument for the Existence of God

Arguments of this kind work from the existence of ethical rules to establish the existence of God. To put it another way, they claim that we could not know right from wrong were God not to exist. Therefore, moral arguments for the existence of God want to establish three things:

- (i) that morality exists
- (ii) that God exists
- (iii) that the existence of God (ii) explains the existence of morality (i)

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The most famous example of such an argument was provided by Immanuel Kant that is the one which will be presented here. Kant is a very complex thinker, and arguments can be tricky to grasp. Despite being a religious man, he did not believe it was possible to *prove* the existence of God. Indeed, he spent much of his time trying to refute philosophers who attempted to do just that (you will encounter those arguments, and Kant's criticisms, if you are also studying the Philosophy of Religion).

Kant did think, however, that we could *postulate* the existence of God from the existence of rational, moral beings acting. To *postulate* something is to suggest it is *the best possible explanation* or solution to a problem. Postulating the existence of God does not mean it was the best solution to a problem he saw in his account of morality.

Autonomy and Heteronomy

Kant held that morality requires **autonomy**: if we are to act morally, we must be able to *choose for ourselves* what to do. We can't be said to have acted autonomously if someone has forced us to behave that way (this is the opposite of autonomy, **heteronomy**). To be *autonomous* is to be *responsible* for one's actions; they must arise out of one's own decision. With a gun to the head, we do what we are told – the only other option is death. In such a case, where an individual acts *heteronomously*, the responsibility for whatever happens lies with whoever is holding the pistol.

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Heteron
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hetero

What does this mean for the relationship between religion and morality? Well, it's the Euthyphro Dilemma: morality can't just be what God commands. 'Do what God commands' is not a better choice than the one faced when staring down the barrel of a gun. If that's the case, how can we distinguish good from bad?

Kant argues it is **reason**, the capacity we have to make rational decisions. When making a decision, we find that it demands we do our **duty**. When we ignore reason, we act immorally too. (Why Kant thinks this is explained in Section 5.1.)

The Summum Bonum

So if reason grounds morality, what need is there for God? One criticism which has been levelled at Kantian ethics is that it demands too much of people. Kant explicitly rules out acting morally for one's own benefit, in fact, he thinks morality should be completely disinterested. Even if doing the right thing is not what is best for you, Kant still thinks you should do it anyway, since reason demands it. It is a lot to ask but, says Kant, it is all for the greater good, in fact, it is for the *greatest* good: the **Summum Bonum**. Do not feel like it at the time, always aims towards the *Summum Bonum* and, since it should also eventually bring happiness too. Happiness is not, after all, a *bad* thing. It provides enough reason for us to act morally.

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God and Immortality

The problem, however, is that often doing the right thing doesn't bring happiness opposite. Theft, corruption, greed and treating people as means rather than ends being rich might make you very happy. Honesty, loyalty and putting your own interests leave you worse off, particularly when others do not share your scruples.

Yet the *Summum Bonum* must exist, otherwise it would not make sense for reason to postulate it. So, Kant thinks, the best possible way to resolve the problem is to *postulate* that the universe is ultimately fair. In addition, he also postulates an immortal soul, as well as a world where the *Summum Bonum* exists – heaven – after we have left the mortal world. Kant does not for a moment pretend he has proved that God and immortality really do exist. His existence explains why morality exists, and why it has the character that it does.

Analysis

- ◆ Why must the *Summum Bonum* be achievable in reality? Kant postulates God to give our behaviour some meaning, but he could just as easily accept the *Summum Bonum* as a goal we should aim for it anyway. Kant holds that 'ought implies can' but this is not to say that ought to behave morally implies we *can* achieve the *Summum Bonum*). The moral law ought to do something even if it cannot happen. This course companion has been written so that it *ought* to be good enough to ensure everyone who reads it gets an A* in Religion and Ethics. I knew that is what I *should* write, even if at times I nearly succumb to the temptation that my endeavour is ultimately futile.
- ◆ Is the entire moral argument something of a cop-out? Kant loved to destroy the idea of God, and wanted moral good to be based in reason, not personal happiness. He presented an argument which *suggests* (but doesn't prove) God's existence, and also suggests that happiness in the afterlife. Has he capitulated to the demands of his faith and superstition?

Theonomy

A small number of **conservative Christians** in the USA argue that all elements of society should be brought under the control of Old Testament law. Those who adopt this position, known as **theonomy** or Christian Reconstructionism, argue that morality is wholly **dependent** on the rules ordained by God. As one sympathetic theologian⁶ writes: 'Every ethical decision assumes some final authority, either be self-law ('autonomy') or God's law ('theonomy'). While unbelievers claim that man has the authority in determining moral right or wrong, believers acknowledge that God has the prerogative... Our obligation to keep God's commands cannot be judged by any other standard, whether its specific requirements (when properly interpreted) are congenial to our feelings and practices'

Conservative
for Christian
trends with
strict or literal

In practice, instituting a government and legal system rooted entirely in the teachings of the Bible would require the execution of homosexuals, blasphemers and adulterers; an end to freedom of speech and even the re-instatement of slavery.⁷

Those who argue for theonomy (or variants of it) are opposed to many of the social and moral values of the twentieth century (see Section 2.2: The 'New Morality').

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⁶ Bahnsen, G, 'What is "Theonomy"?' *New Horizons* April 1994 (<http://www.cmfnow.com/articles/bahnsen-what-is-theonomy>)

⁷ <https://carm.org/christian-reconstructionism-theonomy>

Quiverfull

*Children are a heritage from the Lord,
offspring a reward from him.
Like arrows in the hands of a warrior
are children born in one's youth.
Blessed is the man
whose quiver is full of them.*

(Psalm 127)

Taking their name from the biblical passage above, the Quiverfull movement is a which advocates large families and highly conservative domestic arrangements. contraception and birth control, including the 'rhythm method' advocated by the God is the rightful gatekeeper of the woman's womb, opening and closing it as a blessing, hence any attempts to prevent conception are an affront to the Almighty.

Many members of the movement also espouse a view known as **biblical patriarchy**, which advocates male leadership in the home and wider society. It is believed that 'the woman was created as a helper to her husband, as the bearer of children' and that 'the God-ordained and proper sphere of dominion for a wife is the household and that which is connected with the home...'⁸ **Biblical parenting** and home schooling are also advocated: 'Christian parents should provide their children with a thoroughly Christian education, one that teaches the Bible and a world. Christians should not send their children to public schools since education of civil government and since these schools are sub-Christian at best and anti-Christian at worst should be based solely on 'the word of God and reject methodologies derived from other unbiblical systems of thought.'⁹

Westboro Baptist Church

The Westboro Baptist Church, based in Kansas, USA, uses a range of shock tactics in order to spread what they believe to be the word of the Lord. The church is inspired by sixteenth-century French theologian and Protestant reformer John Calvin, who believed that man is sinful in nature (a doctrine known as total depravity) and that God has already decided who will be damned (known as unconditional election). The forty-strong Westboro Baptist Church believes that most of humanity are unrepentant sinners, entirely deserving of whatever punishment God has in store for them. Particular scorn is reserved for homosexuality – for example, in their slogan; the vast majority of Christians would argue that the idea that 'God hates homosexuals' is an all-loving God. Other Christian denominations and world religions are also frequently the target of invective. The group is perhaps most notorious for picketing the funerals of those who have died, justly punished by God. To date, they have conducted over 50,000 such 'protest' memorial services for the victims of mass shootings, US military service personnel and others.

Analysis

- ◆ Philosophically, for the view to be acceptable one must accept not only the literal truth of the Bible. Denying either of these two assumptions makes the view untenable.
- ◆ Furthermore, one must also be committed to the view that religion should be the basis of legal, political and social life. Many Christians, even those who have conservative views, are strongly opposed to any such idea. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the Quiverfull movement is at the furthest fringes of Christian thought.
- ◆ Nevertheless, an **anti-theist** may take the very existence of such views as evidence that religious belief can, in and of itself, be dangerous. We will come back to this point when we consider the religious individual might make to such charges, later in the section.

⁸ Vision Forum Ministries 'The Tenets of Biblical Patriarchy'

⁹ Ibid.

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The Challenges of Atheism and Anti-theism

Atheism is a philosophical position which holds that God (or gods) do not exist. It points out either philosophical flaws in arguments for God (discussed in Edexcel Philosophy) or that there are alternative, often scientific, explanations for the various mysteries religion claims to explain.

Anti-theism not only denies God exists, but also claims that belief in God should be rejected. Arguments usually build upon atheist arguments and employ historical or sociological evidence to show the immorality or harmfulness of religious belief.

Most major world religions have, historically or in the present day, been associated with violence. As discussed above, groups such as the Westboro Baptist Church use religion as a justification for disrespectful, if not outright hateful, actions. Observations of this kind are often used as an argument that morality is not so much dependent on religion as opposed to it. If we are to commit such repulsive actions, would it not be fair to say those beliefs are not the cause?

Religion and Terror

Although Islamist terror cells such as ISIS and al-Qaeda dominate the media landscape, they do not have a monopoly on political violence. Members at the fringes of the Christian fundamentalist movement in the United States have been known to bomb abortion clinics and perform the procedure. In Israel, a small group of Jewish fundamentalists known as the Jewish Underground is known to build illegal settlements on the land of neighbouring Palestine, believing that God has commanded them to do so. When either the Israeli army or local Palestinians attempt to dismantle these settlements, they often receive revenge through vandalism and arson. India, meanwhile, continues to see violence from Hindu nationalist and Sikh nationalist groups. Even Buddhism, a faith often perceived as synonymous with peace, is not untarnished: the ongoing violence directed against the Muslim minority in Myanmar has been drawn from the Buddhist majority, at times even with the support of nationalist groups.

Richard Dawkins (1941–Present)

Evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins is the world's best-known critic of religion. He is a committed naturalist and rationalist. In works such as *The God Delusion*, Dawkins argues that religion is a human invention (not a truth) and condemns the immoralities faith has sanctioned over the centuries. He also criticises the use of Darwin's evolutionary theory as an explanation for the existence of life. For Dawkins, religion is something science cannot explain, and religion not only gets in the way of scientific enterprise but is also difficult to understand. His style is polemical, even 'militant' in the eyes of his critics. He has been criticised by Harris, Christopher Hitchens and Daniel Dennett, as part of the 'New Atheist' movement of the early 21st century.

As a committed naturalist, Dawkins seeks a scientific explanation for religion, specifically as a by-product of evolution in some way advantageous for survival in early societies. However, in the present day, he sees it as nothing short of a plague on humanity. A relationship between religion and morality is, for him, impossible, although so, too, is relativism; Dawkins argues instead that ethical behaviour must be based on reason.

R A Sharpe – The Moral Case *Against* Religious Belief

Sharpe, who is an anti-theist, argues that the commands of Christianity and religion in general are morally wrong. He argues that 'one fact about religious commitment is that it leads its adherents to sacrifice their compassion for the suffering'. For example, Abraham's 'ordinary reaction' to God's command to sacrifice Isaac might have been one of horror but his faith meant he set this aside and chose suffering.

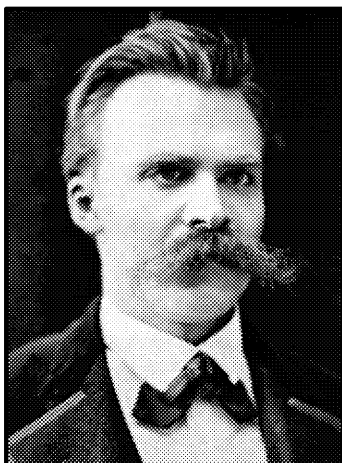
Sharpe argues that this can be seen in current Christian behaviour as well. For instance, the Church of England arguably gives the impression that it is more important to follow God's command to 'be fruitful and multiply' than to bring a child into the world that may suffer mistreatment and neglect because of religious beliefs.

He also argues that it distorts religious believer's motives for doing good acts – if they are motivated by compassion, they help others because of the reward that will be made available to them in the afterlife.

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Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900): Religion as Slave Morality



Master Morality:

A superior morality that encourages human flourishing.

Slave Morality:

An inferior morality, based on religion, that encourages virtues which are at odds with human flourishing.

Nietzsche, also an anti-theist, distinguishes two types of morality: the 'master morality' and the 'slave morality'.

The master morality is the morality that Nietzsche practised. It is a morality based on the idea of achieving 'the highest power and splendour of the human type'. Human flourishing will differ because each person is different. Individuals have to understand themselves and their own path to human flourishing.

Slave morality, on the other hand, Nietzsche argues has developed in Europe and is strongly associated with values such as pity, patience, humility, and forgiveness. These values he says are at odds with human flourishing. Individuals look for injustices to be dealt with in this life. He also argues that morality is universal so it applies to everyone in exactly the same way. Individuals find their own path to human flourishing.

Nietzsche therefore rejects current morality, which he sees as leading to a bad state of affairs. He rejects the idea of an authoritative morality because of God because, as he famously said, 'God is dead'. Nietzsche takes a relative view of morality and argues that morality is purely on what individuals deem to have value.

Simon Robertson summarises Nietzsche's contribution that the process of questioning morality is morally superior.

"By calling into question the value of morality may be inimical [obstructive] to realizing the obligation on anyone seeking to defend the claim (and not just assume) that moral behaviour."¹¹

Analysis

- ◆ The pro-theist is likely to argue that it is unfair to hold entire religions to account by a minority of believers, often with a corrupted interpretation of the faith. In response, the problem with religion is the ease with which it can be adopted and used to acknowledge any viewpoint other than their own.
- ◆ The theist may also draw attention to the atrocities perpetrated by explicitly religious groups, such as Stalin's Communist Party in the USSR, as evidence that, in the wrong hands, religion can be used to serve violent ends.
- ◆ Arguments about the harm religion causes are guilty of not seeing the wood for the trees. Groups are regarded as religious extremists, but their organisation's growth is a result of their success. For example, the Islamic State engulfs Syria and Iraq. Likewise, while the sectarianism which characterised the Troubles could be caricatured as a battle between Catholics and Protestants, in fact it was between Unionists (who wanted to remain part of the United Kingdom) and Republicans (who wanted to see Northern Ireland). Violent movements which have a religious affiliation are often, on the surface, about broader social, nationalistic, and political concerns.

Quick Quiz

1. Give a quote which summarises the question at the heart of the Euthyphro.
2. Give some examples of moral rules a Christian might follow if they believed in God.
3. What is theonomy?
4. Define the term *Summum Bonum*.
5. What example does Sharpe give to demonstrate why Christian morality lacks objectivity?
6. What is an anti-theist?

¹⁰ *On the Genealogy of Moral: A Polemic* translated by Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹¹ <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/encap/philosophy/alevel/nietzschescritiqueofmorality.pdf>

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5.1 DEONTOLOGY AND VIRTUE

Kantian Deontology

Social, Political and Cultural Influences

Such is his significance, it has sometimes been said that philosophy can be divided into the era before and the era after. Central to his project was a belief that the human capacity for reason could improve the world a better place. Such idealism was the hallmark of the **European Enlightenment**, which stretched from the mid seventeenth to the end of the eighteenth century. It saw a shift from faith to their own rationality, rather than religious doctrine, to solve the pressing problems of the world. Increased faith in the potential of the natural sciences and is also often considered a key influence on Western democracy: it was against the backdrop of the Enlightenment that the French Revolution both wrestled control from ancient monarchies and put in their place fledgling republics.

What sets Kant apart from other key figures such as Voltaire (now known primarily as a writer) and Rousseau (the French political philosopher) and Adam Smith (generally regarded as the father of economics), was his unwavering commitment to understanding what reason could tell us. He famously talked of instituting a 'Copernican revolution' in the way philosophy was done, with the consequences as the astronomer Copernicus' discovery that the earth revolved around the sun (rather than, as was thought, the other way round).

Kant was a devout Christian, but he largely tried to work from what might today be called agnosticism: we just can't *know* for sure whether God exists, thought Kant, we might have good reasons to believe in Him, but not enough to ever be certain. As a result, when he did write about God, Kant mostly wrote about what we could know about Him through speculative thought alone. (If you are studying this alongside this course, you are sure to encounter his critiques of the ontological argument.)

Nevertheless, when it came to ethics, he was adamant that we only need reflect on what we can know what we must do:

Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and steadily we reflect upon them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.

Duty-based Ethics

For Kant, reason governs morality. Knowing what is right or wrong to do in a given situation is a little bit like solving a sum: there is only one correct answer, and we simply need to find it.

Doing the right thing is our *duty* as rational beings. If we do the wrong thing the wrong way, immorally, we are acting irrationally too.

To understand why Kant believes this, we must first turn to his important distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives. Imperatives are just commands – instructions which tell us what to do.

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Hypothetical imperatives usually look like this: ‘You ought to do x if you want to get y’.

They command us to do something *if* we want something else. They are *conditional*. The word *hypothetical* is used to refer to a situation that *could* happen, usually if certain conditions are met. For example, ‘If NASA develops the right technology, hypothetically, human beings could travel to Mars’.

Categorical imperatives are usually of the form, ‘You ought to do x’.

They command us to *just do it*. They are *unconditional* commands. The word *categorical* means something *absolute*. Politicians or prominent public figures often issue ‘categorical imperatives’. For example, a politician might say ‘I will do this or that’ to distance themselves from a scandal in the newspapers; they mean to say that they will do it no matter what. They do with it.

It is the difference between bargaining with a trader at a car-boot sale and being told ‘I’ll give you £3 if you throw in another CD’ can be transformed into a hypothetical imperative, ‘Give me another CD if you want to get £3’, whereas ‘Stab! Stab! Twist! Kill!’ can be transformed into a categorical imperative, ‘You ought to stab, you ought to twist, you ought to kill’.

Activity:

1. Identify whether each of the statements below could be considered a hypothetical imperative.
 - i) Put your hands above your head and step away from the vehicle!
 - ii) Buy one 12” pizza at Plato’s Pizzeria and get the second absolutely free!
 - iii) If you want that leather-bound set of Kant’s collected works for Chris’s philosophy homework.
 - iv) Everyone should own an Apple product.
 - v) You oughtn’t to wear white trousers if you’re going for a curry this evening.
 - vi) Listen, you really need to shut up.
 - vii) If you love me then you will give me a child.
 - viii) Worship me!

The Categorical Imperative

Anthology Text: *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, translated by Allen W Wood (Yale University Press edition, 2002), Text, second section, pp. 29–47.

Why is the distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives so crucial to Kant? Because he thinks that one can only do something good if it is done *unconditionally*, or, to put it another way, with no strings attached. As a result, it is our *duty* to do good. Analogously, it is a soldier’s duty to protect the nation – even if they wake up one morning and do not feel much like fighting or marching, still they *must* do it.

In the first chapter of his most significant ethical work, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant writes:

Nothing in the world – or out of it! – can possibly be conceived that could be called ‘good’ without qualification except a GOOD WILL... It isn’t what it brings about, its usefulness in achieving some intended end. Rather, good will is good because of how it wills – i.e. it is good in itself.

He goes on to say that all other things which might be considered good, such as ‘intelligence, power, riches, honour, even health’ and, crucially, happiness, if misused or misapplied will be said to ‘sparkle like a jewel all by itself’; its value doesn’t ‘go up or down depending on what it [is]’. It is ‘the condition of all [other goods], even of the desire for happiness’; it is the **reason**. It just doesn’t make sense to say anything else is good, because rationality is good in itself. Whereas, any other thing we might consider good, could, in some circumstances, from a different standpoint, Kant derives his entire system of **deontological** ethics.

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First Formulation

Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.
(*Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*)

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(i.e. law
morality
making

The Universalisability Test

Kant's first formulation of the categorical imperative gives rise to a particular procedure for making moral decisions which is sometimes known as the

The core idea is that when we make any moral decision we must ask ourselves whether the same thing in similar circumstances. In Kant's language, we are making a maxim that could become a universal law (a maxim is another word for a general rule or principle). For example, '30 mph in the town centre', 'Don't run in the corridor'.

For some actions, this is clearly impossible. If I like the look of your new mobile phone, I might quite like to steal it, Kant would immediately ask that I stop and consider the following question: 'Can I honestly recommend the maxim that in any circumstance where somebody feels like it, to steal ahead and do it?'

Now, I might well turn round and say, 'Get lost Kant! I'll take what I like, when I like it'. But this simply would not work. If everyone were permitted to steal when they felt like it, private property would soon disappear. In fact, people would probably not bother with going to be stolen, so pretty soon there would be nothing to steal. In other words, 'I can steal whenever I feel like it' is self-defeating.

On the other hand, a maxim such as, 'It is not permissible to torture small children' is not self-defeating. Nobody ever tortures small children, no problems are likely to arise. Certainly the maxim is not self-defeating about that rule. The opposite, however ('It is permissible to torture small children') would defeat itself.

There is also another reason that Kant would have a big problem with torture, as

Perfect and Imperfect Duties

In *Groundwork*, Kant divides duties into perfect and imperfect categories. Perfect duties, such as 'Do not kill', 'Do not steal' – their universalisation involves an obvious logical contradiction.

Imperfect duties relate to those maxims which do not involve any logical contradiction, but are undesirable for a rational being. For instance, there is no logical contradiction in the maxim 'When in need, feel free to urinate on tombstones'; society would not collapse if everyone did this. The cemetery whenever they needed the bathroom. It is hard to imagine any other world where everyone is happy to defile the graves of each other's ancestors, but we can argue we have an imperfect duty to 'not act disrespectfully towards the dead'.

Activity:

2. Identify whether the following activities could be universalised without contradiction.
 - a) stealing bread to feed starving children
 - b) queuing for the cash machine
 - c) maintaining a heroin addiction
 - d) having a roast lunch every Sunday
 - e) vandalising urinals
 - f) supporting Manchester United
 - g) working as a doctor
 - h) lying about your age and appearance on an online dating site

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Second Formulation

So act as to treat humanity, both in your own person, and in the person of every other, always at the same time as an end, never simply as a means. (Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals)

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One of the problems we encountered with act utilitarianism was its dubious star relativist theory, all options remain on the table, even if the very thought may m classic example, torturing the innocent to save the multitude may be permissible happiness for the greatest number.

Kant takes the opposite view. Certain actions are *never* permissible. It is this as called 'Humanity Formula', which has had the most enduring influence on Weste

The crucial idea here is that people can never be used as a means to an end. To twisted sadist from setting off a chemical weapon in Piccadilly Circus can never b somebody is being *used* as a tool for some other purpose.

There is an intuitive appeal to this idea: how often have we seen in a melodrama me!' uttered with absolute disgust? There is something deeply unsettling about or to you, not because they like you, or value you, or even love you, but for some malevolent, purpose.

Kant recognised this, and thought he could explain *why* people feel this way. Pe because they are rational beings, and rational beings deserve dignity, they deser *always treating them as an end in themselves.*

Activity:

3. Identify whether humanity (the agent) is being used as a means or an end
 - i) A boy scout helps a frail old lady across the road to earn his 'Assisting
 - ii) A student steals his friend's assignment so that he can copy his work.
 - iii) On the way home from the pub, Matt gives a homeless man £1.33.
 - iv) Belinda compliments her line manager's terrible outfits and laughs at because she wants to be promoted.
 - v) A woman steals bread from the supermarket to feed her starving fam
 - vi) Orhan sleeps with Lucia to make his ex-girlfriend jealous.
 - vii) Steve buys everyone in the office a Milkybar from the corner shop.

Third Formulation

Act according to the maxims of a member of a merely possible kingdom of ends legislating in it universally. (Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals)

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For his final formulation of the categorical imperative, Kant envisions a utopian I share the same moral vision, desiring the same goods and sharing the same end: formulations, as the laws the hypothetical members of the kingdom would devis of nature' and 'humanity' formulas. Hence, any moral rules constructed must be contradiction and treat people as ends, never means. The third formulation add theory: he is trying to tell us how society would be governed if all people were to When acting individually, we should then try to imagine whether our action wou of ends', in the hope that by doing so, we might bring it closer to reality.

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W D Ross' Prima Facie Duties

W D Ross (1877–1971) was a Scottish, twentieth-century philosopher. He, like Kant, developed an ethical theory.

He argued that in ethical situations, all moral agents have a certain type of duty. This is a Latin phrase which means literally 'at first appearances/view' or prior to closer inspection. It is a duty which we can instantly recognise and which becomes apparent through our intuition. However, we needed to know exactly how to act upon them or apply them in an ethical situation. Our own judgements about how to act upon our duties.

Ross identified seven prima facie duties:

1. promise keeping (or fidelity)
2. reparation
3. gratitude
4. justice
5. beneficence
6. self-improvement
7. non-maleficence (avoiding actions that do harm)

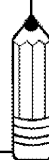
Ross said that although before we are in an ethical situation, we cannot know what our duties will be, however our duties will become apparent and we will be able to recognise what they are. If two duties come into conflict, neither should be ignored but the moral agent should determine which one is more important.

Analysis

- ◆ There is insufficient acknowledgement of the importance of rights because of subjective interpretation, rather than recognising there are objective rights.
- ◆ Today, many people believe in individualism and reject the notion of duties.
- ◆ It is more flexible than Kant's theory and allows more room for subjective interpretation. It is important in different situations or across different time periods. This allows for consideration of consequences. For example, your duty to tell the truth to your friend whereabouts of your friend becomes less important than your duty to protect your friend. Therefore, it provides a middle ground between consequentialism and absolutism.
- ◆ It allows for partial treatment of friends and family through recognising we have special duties to them. It makes it more practical than impartial ethical theories which require impartiality and treat friends the same as strangers.

Activity:

4. Come up with situations in which two of Ross' prima facie duties might come into conflict. How easy would it be to decide which one is more important or even to know what our duty is?



Exam Tip

Discuss the difference between Ross' and Kant's theories.

Thomas Nagel: Agent-relativity and Deontology

The contemporary American moral philosopher has developed an influential account of deontology upon Kant's work. He distinguishes between agent-relative and agent-neutral reasons.

Agent-relative Reasons: These are *reasons for someone* to do (or not do) something. They are not for others. For example, *you* should take care of *your* children.

Agent-neutral Reasons: These are *general reasons for anyone* to do (or not do) something. They are not just to me, but to everyone. For example, *people* should not harm *their* children.

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Nagel argues that utilitarian theories offer **agent-neutral reasons** for actions. They apply to both everyone and no-one in particular. Indeed, the essence of utilitarian thought is not my pleasure that counts, but the *greatest pleasure for the greatest number*. Deontological theories provide **agent-relative reasons** to do or not do certain actions differently towards our friends or family than towards perfect strangers.

Why is this important? Both utilitarian and deontological theories have often been criticised by much of people. The twentieth-century British philosopher Bernard Williams asks us to imagine where a man can save only one of two people from drowning in a shipwreck. One is a complete stranger. He knows that whoever he does not save will die. Of course, if he is healthy, the man is going to choose to save his wife. Yet for both utilitarianism and deontology a moral justification for this action is going to be complex. From a purely impartial perspective, to choose the person we love over the person we don't, we must instead consider the 'pleasure their survival will bring' or 'whether I can legislate a universalisable maxim that would allow one thought too many'; for the man to save his wife is surely a moral no-brainer, not in need of demand rather arcane justifications.

Nagel sidesteps this difficulty because he holds deontology actually requires that we have special duties to people that do not apply to others. This captures the intensely personal character of moral decision making and also avoids some of the difficulties with Kant's deontology. Crucially, these duties are grounded in our subjective emotions but in the claims of *others* on us. Parents have special duties to their children, not because they feel they must, but because children have a claim on their parents – to look after them. These claims are still deontological because they are not based on what we are able to dispense with the Kantian notion that we must always be legislating a universal law. Nagel accepts that that universe does not exist, and that our responsibility is first and foremost to our duties that apply only to us.

Contemporary Applications of Rule and Duty-based Ethics

The Treatment of Animals

Since animals are not rational beings there is no requirement not to treat them as mere means to an end.

Kant even remarks that there is nothing *morally* wrong with torturing animals, although it would lead to a harshness of character.



If a man shoots a dog, he is no longer capable of having a duty to the dog. His act is inhuman, and it is inhumanity which makes his act wrong to mankind. If he has feelings, he must have feelings for animals, for he has a hard also in his heart.

(Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*)

In short, the utilitarian disregards animals as a feature of the world.

Nevertheless, modern deontological perspectives do attempt to promote animal rights. The contemporary philosopher Tom Regan is particularly associated with this. He argues that animals, as living beings, have an inalienable right to life. As such, using them for food is to violate their right to life; it is to use them as a means to an end and not as an end in themselves. Crucially, Regan's conception of inherent worth is *not* based on the capacity to reason, but on the capacity to have a life, in other words, a being that has a life of its own.

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War and Peace

Kant ultimately sought universal peace, a programme he set out in a 1795 essay 'Philosophical Sketch'. War involves killing which is *always* wrong (it contravenes formulations of the categorical imperative). However, he was aware that politics sometimes do take place and when they do, they need to be carried out according to consequentialist principles. Certainly Kant supported the right for a nation to go to war, which is in line with many of just war theory's tenets, although purely consequentialist considerations of the likelihood of success would likely not figure in a deontological account of the just war.

Analysis

Strengths

- ◆ It is impossible to know the future or what the consequences of actions will be, so Kant focuses on the moral principle itself, not its secondary impacts. It therefore seems more just to judge someone on what they do, not on the consequences of their actions.
- ◆ It treats everyone equally and justly in much the same way the justice system treats everyone equally and justly.
- ◆ It creates core, absolute moral principles which cannot be dismissed because they are based on reason.
- ◆ Moral decision-making is simple and straightforward because what is right and wrong is clear.
- ◆ The categorical imperative creates moral rules which are consistent with the principles of justice, as that theft or murder is wrong. This helps to make it relevant and practical.
- ◆ Following one's duty is more important than doing what one thinks is right, which is often influenced by our own biases and selfish preferences.
- ◆ It recognises the intrinsic value of humans. It protects them from being used as a means to an end, as in utilitarianism, where the minority could rightly be made to suffer for the greater good.

Weaknesses

- ◆ There seems little justification or authority for the moral obligations in deontology, as it is based on the idea of a divine lawgiver (God).
- ◆ It is not practical or even possible to act according to duty alone – human decisions are arguably more complex than this.
- ◆ Following absolute moral commands or one's duty could result in awful consequences in situations where certain disastrous consequences should be avoided. There are no exceptions to the categorical imperative, so it does not respond to complicated or extreme moral situations. Similarly, good consequences can be achieved by actions that are not actually good because what matters is the intention, e.g. an action that results in good consequences but is motivated by selfishness.
- ◆ It does not allow compassion or sympathy to motivate moral actions.
- ◆ Kant was a Christian and saw his ethic as consistent with Christianity, but God is not a central part of his ethic. He says 'how 'Kant largely reduced religion to ethics – to be holy is to be moral'. This is not necessarily relevant to Christians.
- ◆ Kant's principle of universalisation allows for the universalisation of amoral principles, as a principle can be universalised, does not mean it is right or even sensible.
- ◆ Kant commits the naturalistic fallacy because he turns an 'is' into an 'ought'.
- ◆ There needs to be an actual reason to act according to one's duty – not simply a moral principle.

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Aristotelian Virtue Ethics

Historical and Cultural Influences on Aristotle's Virtue Ethics

Virtue ethics is found first in Plato, but it was his student Aristotle who developed it into a fully-fledged moral philosophy. The Ancient Greek culture, captured in the works of Homer, emphasised many of the virtues listed by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Both Aristotle and Plato belonged to the Athenian upper class, and their descriptions of the virtuous individual are likely tied very closely to their concept of the good. Aristotle rejected Plato's Theory of Forms, which held there was an abstract idea of the good to which all specific virtues corresponded. Instead, he grounded the goodness of the virtues in human nature.

Anthology
Nicomachean Ethics
David Ross
1924 edition,
virtue,

'Living Well': The Concept of *Eudaimonia*

Each theory we have looked at so far has a specific idea of what 'goodness' consists of. For utilitarians, it was the maximisation of utility. For Aristotle, it was *eudaimonia*.

There is no precise translation for *eudaimonia* in English, but it may be taken as 'well-being' or 'flourishing'.

For Aristotle, every object has a certain function, a particular thing that it alone can do. For example, the function of a knife is to cut; the function of a net is to catch things. Since everything has its particular function, it follows that human beings must have some special function in Aristotle's thinking?

Well, what separates human beings from everything else on the planet? Aristotle's answer is that the ultimate good is to exercise our rational capacities in the pursuit of *eudaimonia*.

The purpose of human life, and the end towards which cultivating virtues aims, is *eudaimonia*. *Eudaimonia* is a Greek word meaning 'the highest good' and is often translated as 'well-being' or 'flourishing'. Aristotle uses it to refer to the 'good life' or 'human flourishing'.

Slote describes how 'Eudaimonia is the idea that no trait of character can count against the overall well-being of the virtuous individual', but stresses that it is not about recommending that we be selfishly or egoistically motivated'.¹² It is an individual's good – living in harmony and cooperation with others.

Existentialism The twentieth-century French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre claimed that 'existence precedes essence'. This was intended as a direct rebuke to thinkers such as Aristotle who believed that each thing has a particular purpose that is somehow essential to it. For Sartre, things are not imbued with functions – particularly for human beings. In fact, 'man is thrown into the world, empty crisp packet into the bin. Life is quite meaningless and it is up to the individual to find its purpose to it.'

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¹² Slote, M, 'Virtue Ethics' in Routledge Companion to Ethics edited by J Skorupski (Oxford: Routledge, 2011), 115.

The Golden Mean: Virtues and Vices

To work out what can be considered a virtue, Aristotle said moral agents need to find the mean or **balance between two vices**, avoiding excess or a deficiency of any virtue.

Aristotle writes: 'Virtue is a mean because the vices respectively fall short of or exceed what is right in both passions and actions, while virtue both finds and chooses that which is intermediate.'¹³

To work this out, individuals need to use **practical wisdom (phronesis)**. This is an individual process of working out what virtue is suited to each situation and to each individual. Thus there can be no rules or maxims about how to act. Individuals use their autonomy and intellect to work it out and then put it into practice.

Aristotle says that human beings are able to work out for themselves what is good what is good in a particular situation, but what will produce the good life in general.

Now it is thought to be the mark of a man of practical wisdom to be able to choose what is good and expedient for himself, not in some particular respect, e.g. about health or to strength, but about what sorts of thing conduce to the good life in general.

	Vice	←	Virtue	
Example:	Foolhardiness		Courage	

The Development of the Virtuous Character

Aristotle held that the morally correct way to live was to develop a virtuous character. This but, in theory, anybody can develop one. Aristotle describes 11 **virtues**, each with a corresponding vice of excess and a vice of deficiency.

The Virtues in Full

Vice of Excess	Mean	
Rashness	Courage	
Licentiousness/Self-indulgence [recklessness; libertinism; a waster]	Temperance [self-restraint]	Insensibility [insensibility]
Prodigality [reckless spending]	Generosity	Miserliness
Vulgarity	Magnificence	Pedantry
Vanity	Magnanimity [being a 'good sort']	Spinelessness
Arrogance	Pride	Unambitiousness [lack of self-respect]
Irascibility [short-tempered]	Patience / Good temper	Lack of spirit
Boastfulness	Truthfulness	Bashfulness
Buffoonery [a clown]	Wittiness	Humourlessness
Obsequiousness [a door mat]	Friendliness	Moodiness
Shyness	Modesty	Shamelessness
Envy	Righteous indignation	Maliciousness [Schadenfreude]

Based on p. 104 of J A K Thomson's translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*; bracketed items are my explanation.

¹³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by W D Ross, (The Internet Classics Archive) available at <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.htm>

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by W D Ross, (The Internet Classics Archive) available at <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.htm>

Aristotle used the word Greek word 'arete' to describe these traits, and although English as 'virtue', a more accurate translation may be 'excellence', 'good quality' describes it meaning 'the quality of excellence toward which we strive in our daily life'. It denotes a striving towards fulfilling a certain intended purpose, e.g. the virtue of a doctor denotes a striving towards fulfilling a certain intended purpose, e.g. the virtue of a doctor is the purpose of making the patient better.

Modern Developments of Virtue Ethics

Historical and Cultural Influences

The twentieth century saw a revival in virtue ethics with numerous scholars developing virtue ethics, with varying similarities to Aristotle's theory. Some focus on how an individual can become a virtuous person by following certain guidelines, others on how our actions make us virtuous. Virtue motivation is key to producing good character. They are responding to the prominence of consequentialist ethics in ethical thinking and the need they see for a new ethical traditions.

Philippa Foot

The British philosopher Philippa Foot (1920–2010) rejected the non-cognitivism of some of her Oxford colleagues (see Section 4.1: Emotivism) after the atrocities of the concentration camps came to light at the end of the Second World War. She contended that the moral cognitivists tended to attack ('good', 'bad', etc.) were too narrow, and that their moral theory when it came to the weightier moral virtues which Aristotle had written about was not settled on the view that human beings are naturally constituted to be good, but on **phronesis**, which she understood as a kind of rational deliberation about what is good in a particular situation. The exact argument for her positions are complex, enmeshed, as is of course the quarrels of the day, but Foot's work helped to rehabilitate virtue ethics, position it alongside deontology and utilitarianism.

Alasdair MacIntyre – The Polis and Post-truth Politics

'Man', Aristotle famously proclaimed, 'is by nature a political animal' (*Politics*, Bk 1). It is for this reason that he was not only concerned with the question of how we might best live individually, but also how we might best live *collectively*. This topic preoccupied Aristotle in another of his major works: *Politics*.

Polis is an Ancient Greek word for a city-state, literally translated as 'city'. It has been taken more broadly to mean a community or a political community. The term from 'polis' is the root of the word 'politics' derived from the Greek word 'polis'.

... the best life, both for individuals and states, is the life of virtue...

(*Politics*, Bk 7)

At the start of the *Nicomachean Ethics* he also writes:

For even if the end is the same for a single man and for a state, that of the something greater and more complete whether to attain or to preserve; though the end merely for one man, it is finer and more godlike to attain it for a nation or a city. For the end of the individual is a part of the end of the state, as the end of a part is of the whole. And the end of the state is the good of the state, which is the good of the nation, since it is political science, in one sense, to study the good of the state.

Aristotle is here revealing himself to be fundamentally at odds with modern conceptions of the good life. He believes that the good of the individual is a part of the good of the community (the 'polis') should have in our lives. In liberal democracies we are neutral about how we live our lives. So long as our actions do not harm anybody, we can follow whatever course of action we see fit; this is known as the *harm principle*, first expressed by John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*. For Aristotle, however, the polis, which means all the people of a nation-state, should collectively aim to live virtuously.

¹⁵ *Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy*, edited by T Mautner (London: Penguin Books, 2000).

¹⁶ Plato, *Protagoras* and *Meno*, translated by W K C Guthrie (London: Penguin Books, 1956) quoted in

While Aristotle's political ideas may sound strange to modern ears, there are the mentality may actually be preferable to the liberal, individualist society we have contemporary Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, whose 1981 work *After Virtue* sense of moral value in the contemporary world. He argues that when we talk of 'wrong' today, we are using words whose original meaning and context have long may have made sense in a Christian society, or an Ancient Greek society, but in a they have no force, because we no longer have any shared moral principles. Eth euthanasia, abortion, inequality, rights, justice and fairness, rage on, but they will because each side refuses to accept the others' basic assumptions.

In the absence of any meaningful notion of the common good, MacIntyre contends our rulers act strictly according to their own, often ruthless, self-interest:

Politically the societies of advanced Western modernity are oligarchies disguised as liberal democracies. The large majority of those who inhabit them are excluded from membership in the elites that determine the range of alternatives between which voters are permitted to choose. And the most fundamental issues are excluded from that range of alternatives.

(*The MacIntyre Reader*, p. 237) Da

It is for this reason that MacIntyre advocates a return to communities, not dissimilar which characterised the Athenian city-state of Aristotle's day, where the members work towards not just individual, but collective goodness. In such an environment, be resolved because everybody has an understanding of what the good life is, and, meaningfully contribute to the debate.

Virtuous Role Models

As well as using the **Golden Mean** to know how to live the virtuous life, another source of information and inspiration is the example virtuous people can provide.

Activities:

8. Decide five people who are examples of virtue.
9. Discuss if others are virtuous people.

Examples can be useful and practical ways to know how to be virtuous. It is often easier to understand something when you see it in real life. That said, examples are also not to be worshipped because nobody is perfect and everyone has flaws. There are, then, a few problems with the

- ◆ Role models are not necessarily templates we can all copy. While this gives virtue takes many different forms, it does, however, make it hard to know if their example. If it is just inspiration, this may not provide much in the way
- ◆ People disagree about who is virtuous, so it might be hard to know who the an example.
- ◆ People are often virtuous in contexts that are different to our own, so it might virtue into ways that can be acted upon in our own lives.

Contemporary Applications of Virtue Theories

Treatment of Animals

Would treating an animal well foster certain virtues?

For Aristotle, *eudaimonia* is restricted to human beings. It is our particular function for human beings is for us to live in accordance with reason. Living well will require virtues only really apply to how we deal with other human beings (for instance, to hear your jokes). Animals are simply not in the picture.

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Does that mean we can treat them as we wish? Well, a modern take on virtue ethics might have it that the kind of character who starves their pets or kicks stray dogs in the street is unlikely to be an example of a flourishing human being. In fact, outright cruelty to animals would likely suggest a character laden with vices.

A defender of animal rights on utilitarian or deontological grounds would still find something amiss in this account, however. The treatment of animals only matters because of what they show about a person's character. They are still not an important part of the ethical landscape.

However, it is certainly possible for a virtue ethicist to contrive an account of 'good living' which involves a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle; for instance, perhaps refusing to eat meat shows temperance or magnanimity of character. Others have tried to ground the proper treatment of animals in terms of our relationship to them. Pet owners form strong bonds with their animals. To them, being cruel to a pet is little different to being cruel to a close family member.

Virtue ethics is unique among the theories we have studied in that it does not hope to offer hard and fast rules of morality. However, we might wonder, in areas, this lack of clear guidance is not a strength but a weakness.

War and Peace

Aristotle lived in an age where wars of conquest were not only common, but glorious (think Alexander the Great!). So firstly, we might wonder whether war could ever be conducive to *eudaimonia*. On the one hand, it allows virtues of courage, rightful pride, righteousness to develop, yet on the other, it is more often than not the occasion for innumerable evils.

Aristotle himself thought that 'no one chooses to be at war, or provokes war, for we 'make war that we may live in peace' (NE, Book X, Ch. 7). This is, in effect, a last resort. As ever in virtue ethics though, there are no hard and fast principles, virtuous decision is the one done at the right time, the right place and so on. To contrast this with the maxim-based just war theory, although the virtuous individual would consider proportionality, a fair peace settlement, and so on.

Analysis

- ◆ Unlike teleological and deontological ethical theories, virtue ethics avoids the need for laws to work out what is morally right. These approaches have often been seen as too rigid.
- ◆ It encourages people to be virtuous at all times and transform themselves to be virtuous in general. This avoids the problem with other ethical theories which can be followed only when one has been told to, or for heavenly reward, rather than out of a motive to be good.
- ◆ It provides practical ways to develop virtue through the Golden Mean and exercises.
- ◆ It is a holistic theory that does not separate out moral dilemmas that require one's whole life as morally relevant. Individuals can develop and practise virtues in all aspects of life, including emotions, are integrated into the theory.
- ◆ It looks at what makes life worthwhile rather than purely what is right or wrong at a particular moment.
- ◆ It allows us to show preference and partiality to our friends and family, which is not allowed (although Keenan, see above, would disagree).
- ◆ It recognises human intellectual ability and autonomy to make decisions about what is good, and how it should be shown in situations. It encourages moral agents to become virtuous by developing an understanding of what is good, rather than acting on what they are told.

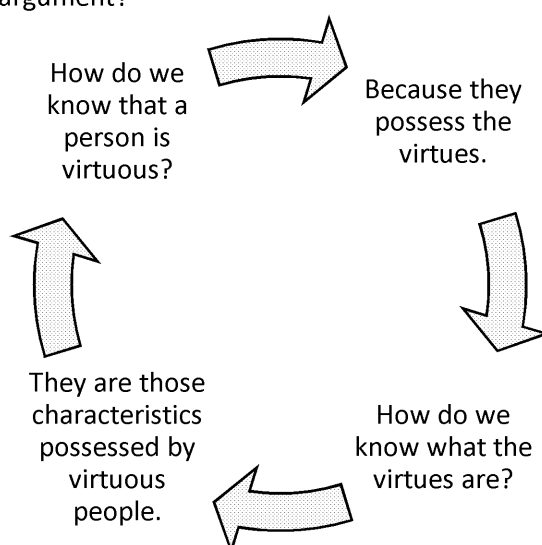


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- ◆ Virtue ethics can struggle to provide clear guidance on poignant moral issues like marriage and stem cell research. It is hard to see how applying virtues or principles can provide insight on such complex issues.
- ◆ It is a secular theory and so not in fitting with Christian views, especially the inability to achieve the kind of perfect state Aristotle suggests. The virtues Aristotle suggests are consistent with Christianity because of the influence of Greek thought on Christianity.
- ◆ Virtues can be good on the outside but unvirtuous in motive – although Slotkin emphasises the importance of good motive.
- ◆ There is no room for rights and obligations, particularly ideas of human rights which are important today.
- ◆ The **golden mean** has been abandoned in more recent theory because of its vagueness, as well as virtues which are considered to have an excess, such as truthfulness or honesty. The Golden Mean also has problems in helping us to identify exactly what certain virtues are.
- ◆ Owen Flanagan has commented on the difficulties of having examples of virtues. He argues that there is not just one type of moral or virtuous person. He argues that 'the person is as unlimited both as the individual is complex and as human experience is varied'. He gives an example of the many different kinds of saint in the Christian tradition to demonstrate this. Instead of trying to copy moral examples, individuals should develop virtues for themselves.
- ◆ Is Aristotle making a circular argument?



In other words:

1. Virtue is whatever virtue does.
2. Virtue does whatever virtue is.

This is clearly circular: how can we know that a person is virtuous if we don't already know who the virtuous are? How can we know what virtuous acts are if we don't already know who the virtuous are? 'Which came first, the chicken or the egg?' scenario.

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¹⁷ Flanagan, O, 'Varieties of Moral Personalities' quoted in Keenan, J F, 'Virtue Ethics' in *Christian Ethics* (London: Continuum, 1998).

The Charge of Elitism and the Nietzschean Challenge

One criticism that can be levelled at Aristotle and the virtue ethics tradition generally is that they are inevitably culturally relative. On this view, all Aristotle's theory amounts to is a prolonged description of those personal characteristics that his culture (essentially the Ancient Greek nobility) found admirable or distasteful. Likewise, the modern virtue ethics of Anscombe and MacIntyre lists those personal characteristics that mid-twentieth-century British philosophy professors find admirable or distasteful. (It's worth noting that these philosophers were rebelling *against* relativism, which they felt was leading the world into something of a moral abyss.)

Some thinkers would take this further: all moral philosophy is culturally relative and, moreover, elitist. In Mill's utilitarianism, we find the ethical proclamations of an emotionally damaged Victorian colonialist; in Kant, the kind of universal morality that may suit Enlightenment in Prussia, but which is out of place in the world of today. It is also notable that, since the time of Plato, philosophers have put themselves on something of an ethical pedestal. It is always they the philosophers who know what is good for them, but good for you too.

This line of thought finds its most powerful expression in the German writer and philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who argued that one of the great mistakes of Western philosophy was to be discussed in a vacuum. For Nietzsche, morality has a history. There is a story behind every action that is considered good, and another kind is considered bad. He laid out most of the story of Western moral philosophy in a book titled *A Genealogy of Morality*.

We don't need to know the details of Nietzsche's story, but central to his account is the contrast between the Ancient Greeks, who praised courage, strength and conquest, and the Christians, who praised meekness, self-denial and frugality. If morality can be so different in different places, why should we trust the claims to ethical truth made by one thinker? Nietzsche's bold conclusion is that any claim to objective morality is bound to fail. He himself was living in an age when the entire façade of ethics was beginning to crumble, and he believed that replacement would be a world without values.

In defence of virtue ethics (and normative ethics more generally), ideas should be judged on their merit. To argue otherwise is to commit the **genetic fallacy**; a type of fallacy where an idea is rejected out of hand because of who said it, or where it originated. Just because a philosopher praised those characteristics he personally found amenable does not mean they are objectively good. The reasons *why* honesty or generosity came to be valued in a particular culture may be different, but they are valued nonetheless. Nietzsche gives us cause to radically question our values, but his nihilism need not be thrown out with the bath water.

Quick Quiz

1. What is meant by deontology?
2. Give an example of a hypothetical imperative.
3. What is a maxim?
4. Give an example of a categorical imperative.
5. State the second formulation of the categorical imperative.
6. Name three of the virtues Aristotle identifies.
7. What word does Aristotle use which is often translated as 'virtue'?
8. What does *eudaimonia* mean?
9. The Golden Mean attempts to find a balance between two ____?
10. What is 'practical wisdom' useful for?

The Case of the Inquiring Murderer

Imagine that one night you are woken from bed by the sound of loud banging at front door. When you go to answer, stood before you is a vast figure who wields a machete and whose face is covered by a blood-stained hockey mask. He demands to know the exact whereabouts of a woman who you happen to know full well is spending the weekend at a hotel down the road. You even know her room number.

Now the sensible thing to do in this situation, if you could get your wits about you, would be to lie; to tell the murderer that you have never heard of this woman, or give him a false address. The one thing that would seem to be a terrible idea in this scenario would be to tell the truth: 'Of course, she is staying at the Crystal Lake Hotel in room 73A.' Yet for Kant, this would be the correct course of action because the maxim, 'Lie when it suits you to do so', cannot be universalised (if everyone lied whenever they felt like it, people would quickly stop believing anything anyone said).

A scenario similar to this was presented to Kant in his own time by one of the most famous philosophers of the 18th century, Immanuel Kant. It has come to be known as 'The Case of the Inquiring Murderer'. Kant's problem is widely considered unsatisfactory. He suggests that in this scenario one should lie because we cannot predict the consequences of not doing so. It is possible, Kant argued, that the intended victim's location could inadvertently send the murderer to their secret hiding place. In such circumstances such as these, to stick to the absolute rule because we will be helped by it is not enough.

James Rachels, in *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, points out two problems with Kant's solution.

- (i) Firstly, is it really the case that our predictive powers are so limited? Deterring other human beings is arguably essential to a functional society. Supermarkets stock more burger buns and disposable cutlery in the summertime because they are confident that more people will be having BBQs in July than they will in January. Likewise, there will be more police on patrol on Saturday night than on a Tuesday afternoon, because the police are able to predict that there will be more trouble from wayward drinkers at the weekend when the clubs are open late. If we were to follow Kant's advice, clubs would be shut and the clubbers working.
- (ii) Secondly, Rachels points out that 'Kant seems to assume that although we have to avoid any bad consequences of lying, we would not be similarly responsible for any bad consequences of telling the truth' (p. 125). The issue here is that Kant is having his cake and eating it too. On the one hand, he wants us to be morally responsible for the consequences of breaking absolute rules (like lying); on the other, he does not want us to be morally responsible for the consequences of following them (e.g. by telling the truth, we have arguably aided the murderer). Either consequences are morally relevant, or they are not. Kant cannot have it both ways.

The obvious solution to Kant's conundrum would be to make the maxims we act on more specific. Instead of following the maxim, 'You ought never to lie', why not say, 'You ought never to lie about a person's life'? There is surely nothing self-defeating about that maxim, and it would be presented by The Case of the Inquiring Murderer in a stroke.

The only trouble with this response is that it is unclear where we draw the line. If we make maxims so specific that any kind of action becomes permissible. Say my friend – Tom – borrows some money for a new PlayStation but has no intention of ever paying it back. I say, 'Borrow the money if you want it but don't pay it back', cannot pass the universalisation test because if everybody paid loans back, nobody would give out loans in the first place. However, if we always repay loans unless your name is Tom Reid and you need a new PlayStation, then in circumstances that it is unlikely to result in any contradiction were it universalised, we have, thereby, made Tom's action morally right.

Kant likely foresaw the flaws of this kind of reasoning. Crucial to his deontological consistency is that if morality is to be binding, it must apply to all people equally. We cannot make one but not the other. As Rachels puts it, 'if you accept any considerations as reasons in one case, you must accept them as reasons in other cases'. Tom's reason for allowing himself to borrow the money may be something like, 'Oh man, I really need that new PlayStation or even a new tyre!' However, if the shoe was on the other foot and it was Tom who was giving the loan, would he be willing to accept somebody else's desire for a video games console and fear of being laughed at if they never to pay him back? It's highly unlikely. One of the strengths of Kant's moral theory is that it is 'special' or has interests which are of greater significance than anyone else's.

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6.1 MEDICAL ETHICS

Introduction: Key Concepts in Medical Ethics

Medical ethics is the branch of philosophy which studies the moral conundrums that face medical professions. As a form of applied ethics, it is primarily concerned with using the analysis to resolve, or at least clarify, real world issues. Nevertheless, theoretical consideration and philosophical debate.

We will be looking closely at two key issues in medical ethics: debates around the sanctity of life and around the end of life. Although these are distinct subjects, in both the discussion involves those who argue for an ethic grounded in the **sanctity of life** and those who argue for an ethic grounded in the **quality of life**.

Sanctity of Life: The idea that each and every life has *intrinsic* and *absolute* value. Many arguments for the sanctity of life often do so for religious reasons, in the belief that, since life is God-given, it is wrong to end it. Advocates for the sanctity of life are more likely to be against assisted dying and euthanasia.

Quality of Life: The idea that the value of a life depends on how satisfying it is to the person living it. Those who have (or can expect to have) a very low quality of life may not have a life worth living. Quality of life arguments are often used to justify certain forms of assisted dying and euthanasia.

Other significant concepts are autonomy, rights, responsibilities and human nature

Autonomy	The ability for a being to <i>make its own decisions</i> . In end of life debates, this often involves having options and choices when it comes to how one ends one's life.
Rights	The entitlement a person has to choose when their life should end. Whether or not such a right is controversial.

Responsibilities	Responsibilities can be considered to go hand-in-hand with rights. If I have a right to die, then somebody else (e.g. the government) has the responsibility to ensure my right is respected. Likewise, if I have a responsibility to live, then somebody else (e.g. the government) has the responsibility to ensure I can live from speaking freely.
Human Nature	A vague, often unhelpful concept, human nature is the <i>way humans are</i> . In end of life debates, this might be framed as 'humans <i>naturally</i> want to live' (so, e.g. euthanasia should remain illegal); equally, it could be framed as 'humans <i>naturally</i> want to suffer' (so, e.g. assisted dying should be legalised). Different views of human nature can mean quite different things.

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Beginning of Life Debates

The Status of the Embryo

When do we become human? At one end of the spectrum, there are those who claim a human comes into being the moment a sperm fertilises an egg; at the other, are those who argue that even the newborn baby in its mother's arms is not yet worthy of the label. Where one draws the line between these two extremes is crucial to determining whether certain kinds of research, fertility treatments and medical procedures are morally permissible. The major areas of medicine in contention are listed in the table below:

Zygote: The single cell where a sperm cell fertilises the egg.

Embryo: The collection of cells from fertilisation up until around the eighth week of pregnancy.

Foetus: Term applied to the developing human from the eighth week of pregnancy on the basis of form and function.

Embryo Research	Any research which uses embryos to further scientific or medical knowledge, to understand hereditary disease or to improve fertility treatments.
In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF)	Fertility treatment which is used by couples unable to naturally conceive. Sperm, taken from either a donor or the couple, is used to fertilise an egg, either a donor or the couple, inside the laboratory (hence 'in vitro'). The resulting embryo is then implanted into the woman's womb.
Pre-implantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD)	Technique, often used in conjunction with IVF, which checks for genetic conditions (such as Huntington's disease and Down's syndrome) before implanting into the womb.
Stem Cells	Stem cells are a unique form of 'undifferentiated' biological cells found in embryos. This means they have the capability to develop into specialised cells which perform vital functions in the human body (e.g. blood cells). Researchers hope that stem cells could be used to treat incurable diseases.
Cord Blood	The blood contained in the umbilical cord and placenta after birth. It contains stem cells. Rather than disposing of these materials after birth, they can be stored in a blood bank. The hope is that these stem cells could be used to treat the child or its immediate family develop in later life.

Abortion

An abortion is the termination of a pregnancy. Generally, when people speak of an *induced* abortion, where the embryo or foetus is intentionally removed from the womb; *spontaneous* abortion, where the embryo or foetus is prematurely expelled from the womb; or *miscarriage*, where the embryo or foetus is prematurely expelled from the womb, are all classed as an abortion. For the sake of simplicity, 'abortion' can be taken to mean 'induced abortion'.

Legal Situation in the UK

Abortion was legalised in the UK in response to the women's movement which emerged in the 1960s (see Chapter 1.2 for more detail).

- ◆ 1967: Abortion is legalised in England, Scotland and Wales (it does not extend to Northern Ireland). With the consent of two doctors, the procedure may be carried out up to the twenty-eighth week of pregnancy (or the twenty-seventh month).
- ◆ 1991: The law changes and abortions can now only be performed up to the twenty-fourth week (around the sixth month). Exceptions apply to women who would be at risk of physical or mental harm if they were to give birth, or if evidence has emerged that the foetus has 'severe abnormalities'.
- ◆ 2008: An amendment to the act is proposed, further reducing the cut-off point to the twenty-week mark. Both are defeated in Parliament.

In terms of upper time limits, the UK's abortion laws are some of the most liberal in the world. In the US, for example, doctors must obtain the consent of the woman and her husband (or a panel of doctors) to the procedure, and for there to be a risk to the woman's health if born, would have 'severe abnormalities'. In practice, it is rare for an abortion to be performed after the twenty-week mark.

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Religious Perspectives on Beginning of Life Debates

Religious groups usually oppose abortion on the grounds that it violates the **sacredness** of life. This is based on biblical passages which suggest that life has been granted by God and is therefore sacred.

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them. (Genesis 1:27)

Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into him the breath of life. (Genesis 2:7)

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you. (Jeremiah 1:5)

Sanctity of life arguments against abortion often take the following form:

1. It is wrong to kill innocent persons.
2. An embryo (or foetus) is an innocent person.
3. It is wrong to kill an embryo (or foetus).

If this argument is correct, abortion, along with each of the practices listed in the table, would be morally impermissible (with the exception of **cord blood**, which is discussed later). An alternative way of framing the argument is to say that embryos and the foetus have a **right to life**. By carrying out an abortion, we are denying them that right, so abortion is wrong.

(1) is uncontroversial, so the focal point of the debate is (2): does an embryo (or a foetus) count as a person? In other words, when does **personhood** begin?

Among Christians, answers to this question range from 'after the child is out of the woman's womb' all the way to 'from the moment of conception'. Traditionally, the Roman Catholic Church embraced the doctrine of **ensoulment**, which Aquinas held happens 40 days into the pregnancy (although others disputed this). Today, the Church believes this happens from the moment of conception. It is, as a result, also opposed to the various medical technologies and procedures which require the destruction of embryos. This position is under fire because it allows for the conception of children out of marriage and so undermines the 'procreative' aspects of human sexuality.

At the other end of the spectrum, liberal Christians tend to favour an approach rooted in **situation ethics** (discussed in Section 2.2). The central idea is **agape** (selfless Christian love). Since situationalism rejects the kind of absolutism which characterises the Catholic position, it has argued that abortion should not be considered wrong in all circumstances. Indeed, on some occasions. Although there are no hard and fast rules, we can imagine that some might think abortion best serves the interests of agape love if the pregnancy was the result of rape, or if the child to be born with severe abnormalities, or even if the woman is too young to be capable of caring for a child.

The latter approach is also much more flexible on the issue of medical technology. IVF, for example, should not provoke much opposition; PGD and stem cell research may also be admissible. It is not a *carte blanche* for embryo experimentation; however, the criterion is still what promotes love. As such, research leading to the development of **designer babies** will be opposed, likely on the grounds that: a) love should not be conditional upon a child being clever or beautiful, and: b) adoption of such technologies could lead to dystopian levels of inequality.

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Analysis

- ◆ The notion of **ensoulment** is highly problematic:
 - It presumes **dualism** (the view that the body and soul are separate things) which has little support among modern scientists and philosophers. [This is discussed in the Philosophy of Religion course.]
 - Even were the soul to exist, it is impossible to tell – empirically – when it begins.
 - Alternative ideas for when **personhood** begins may have much more going for them than self-consciousness.
- ◆ Liberal Christian approaches grounded in **situation ethics** also face difficulties:
 - They may be challenged on the same grounds as the theory as a whole – how can it be measured?
 - Could keeping a child create more love in the long run, even if, at the time of decision, it seems better not to?
 - Secular critics (discussed below) would suggest situation ethics does not always take into account certain circumstances (e.g. for financial reasons) may still be considered.

The Ethical Debate Surrounding Cord Blood

Since storing cord blood does not destroy embryos, it is not open to the sanctity of life argument against practices such as IVF, PGD and embryo research. Two other issues have been raised, however:

- i) Ensuring that cord blood is stored correctly could compromise the mother's safety during the stages of labour. If those in the delivery room are more focused on preserving the mother's health at this critical juncture, the chance of adverse effects such as infection is increased.
- ii) In the UK at present, parents have the option of donating cord blood to a public cord blood bank, or, for a fee, to one of a number of private providers. Whereas cord blood is available to any patient who needs it, private providers store the blood in a private bank (i.e. the child) in later life. The chances the child may need this blood in their lifetime are very low (perhaps only 1 in 20,000), after which time the blood sample may deteriorate. The service can be charged up to £1,500 for the service.

Hence, one medical ethicist, in a letter to *The Guardian* writes: 'Mothers in labour are urged to store cord blood through cord blood banking, for benefits which are largely speculative, to make practical decisions an obvious ethical problem to me.' (Dickenson, D, 6th Feb 2007, 'The ethics of cord blood banking')

Secular Perspectives on Beginning of Life Debates

The main way secular ethicists have tackled the **sanctity of life** argument against IVF and embryos is to reject (2) and argue that the embryo (or the foetus) is *not* a life.

Peter Singer – A Utilitarian Defence of Abortion

You briefly met Peter Singer in Section 2.1, where we saw how he defines right and wrong in terms of *satisfaction of preferences*. A preference is an *interest* in certain things happening. For example, I have an interest in finishing this paragraph, and my preference will shortly be satisfied.

Singer takes this idea and weds it to the **utility principle**. When it comes to ethical decisions, we should use 'the principle of equal consideration of interests', which holds 'that we should take into account the interests of all those affected by our actions'.¹⁸ Crucially, it is not just human interests: so, too, do other members of the animal kingdom. All sentient beings have interests, and our decisions should take that interest into account. (This insight is crucial to the treatment of animals.) Of course, some beings have more interests than others. For example, a being may have an interest in avoiding pain, but also, for example, an interest in being happy, to practise their talents, etc. When faced with an ethical dilemma, Singer argues, the right decision is going to be the one that satisfies the greatest number of interests.

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¹⁸ Singer, P, 1993, *Practical Ethics*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press), p. 21

How does this apply to abortion? Well, embryos are not sentient beings (they do not have an interest in feeling pain, in fact, they have no interests at all. Yet when they have developed a central nervous system, what **value** does its life have?

Singer writes, 'My suggestion, then is that we accord the life of a foetus no greater value than we accord the life of a nonhuman animal at a similar level of rationality, self-consciousness, awareness, etc. If, then, a foetus is a person, no foetus has the same claim to life as a person.'¹⁹

The foetus is not a person because, for Singer, the marks of **personhood** include those that we associate with an adult human. Facets of a person, such as self-consciousness, the ability to rise to complex interests, all of which the foetus lacks. Therefore, the **sanctity of life** argument (and there is nothing to stop the second premise of the sanctity of life argument (that there is an innocent person'), which is, in Singer's view, simply untrue. Therefore, the sanctity of life is not a reason to suppose that abortion or the destruction of embryos is morally impermissible.

Analysis

- ◆ The most controversial implication of Singer's argument is that, since newborn babies lack the features of personhood, like the foetus, they should not be considered people.
- ◆ Singer in fact accepts this, writing, 'If we can put aside [the] emotionally motivated aspects of the killing of a baby we can see that the grounds for not killing people are not infants.'²⁰ However, he stresses that this does not mean abortion is morally acceptable, just that it is not *intrinsically* wrong.
- ◆ It is also clear from Singer's argument that the various medical technologies used in abortion are morally permissible on his account.

Judith Jarvis Thomson – A Defence of Abortion

This famous paper, which can easily be found online, employs an imaginative thought experiment to suggest that sanctity of life arguments fail because they do not respect the woman's right to *what goes on in her own body*:

*You wake up in the morning and find yourself back to back in bed with a famous unconscious violinist. He has been found to have a fatal kidney ailment, and the Music Lovers has canvassed all the available medical records and found you. They have therefore kidnapped you, and last night the operation was plugged into yours, so that your kidneys can be used to extract poisons from the blood of the other person. The director of the hospital now tells you, "Look, we're sorry the Music Lovers has got a little messed up--we would never have permitted it if we had known. But still, it's no great disaster. Those people--they're awfully musical. By then he will have recovered from his ailment, and can safely be unplugged from you. To unplug you would be to kill him. But never mind. It's all very nice of you. By then he will have recovered from his ailment, and can safely be unplugged from you. It is incumbent on you to accede to this situation? No doubt it would be very kind of you. But do you have to accede to it? (Thomson, J T, 'A Defence of the Right of Abortion', **Philosophy & Public Affairs**, Vol. 1, no. 1 (Fall 1971))*

The suggestion is that if it is wrong to demand someone put up with the violinist, it is also wrong to demand women carry a pregnancy to full term. Therefore, Thomson argues, it is entirely within her rights to request an abortion.

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¹⁹ Ibid, p. 151

²⁰ Ibid, p. 171

End of Life Debates

Euthanasia

Euthanasia, which literally translates from the Ancient Greek as 'good death', refers to the practice of *intentionally ending a life* because it is believed to be the morally correct course of action. We may distinguish between three forms of euthanasia:

- ◆ **Voluntary euthanasia**, where a person chooses to *end their own life* and requests that another person do it *for* them.
- ◆ **Non-voluntary euthanasia**, where another person chooses to *end another person's life* because they are *unable to decide for themselves*.
 - A doctor turning off the life-support machine of a patient who has been in a permanent vegetative state is an example of non-voluntary euthanasia. So too, however, was the Nazi regime's decision to kill disabled infants during the Second World War.
- ◆ **Involuntary euthanasia**, where a person *does not wish to die* but a decision is made to end their life.

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Involuntary euthanasia may sound like a convoluted definition of murder, but where we might intuitively think murder has not taken place, but involuntary euthanasia has. In the aftermath of an explosion, young army Doctor Larrey awakes from the blast, only to find himself surrounded by wounded soldiers, each urgently demanding medical attention. Remembering that in times of emergency, a doctor must prioritise care according to the severity of the injuries, the process known as *triage*. He knows, from the briefest of inspections, at least that they will not live long to live, no matter what treatment he gives them. Nevertheless, they cry out in pain, 'please, I don't want to die, I can't stand the pain!' With a deep sense of sadness, he administers the lethal injection, both dead in quick succession. Would we consider him a murderer? Or, would we consider him as compassionately as could be hoped for in such testing times?

Active and Passive Euthanasia: A separate, but related, distinction is also sometimes made between **active** euthanasia, where something is done that *directly* causes a person to die (such as a lethal injection) and **passive** euthanasia, where something is done (or not done) that leads to death (such as withholding treatment that may prolong a life so unbearable it is better to die).

Assisted Dying

Organisations such as the Campaign for Dying in Dignity argue a further distinction between assisted dying and the various forms of euthanasia. Their website states:

Assisted dying only applies to terminally ill, mentally competent adults who, after meeting strict legal safeguards, to self-administer life-ending medication.

Campaigners for assisted dying argue that it should be distinguished from voluntary euthanasia, where a doctor to administer the life-ending medication, and assisted suicide, which allows a person to self-administer life-ending medication provided by another person. The legal situation varies between these distinctions:

	Legal in...
Assisted Dying	US States of Washington and Oregon
Assisted Suicide	Switzerland (e.g. Dignitas) and parts of Germany
Voluntary Euthanasia	Netherlands and Belgium

All of the above are currently *illegal* in the UK.

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²¹ <http://www.dignityindying.org.uk/assisted-dying/>

Palliative Care

Palliative care is the branch of medicine which offers assistance to those with terminal illnesses. It is carried out in purpose-built facilities – hospices – but it can also be offered in an individual's home. Palliative medicine involves drugs and therapies designed to relieve pain and suffering by terminal illnesses, along with psychological or spiritual support for the dying and their families. An approach is *holistic*, which means it is concerned with the entirety of an individual, not just their physical symptoms. It can begin days, weeks or even months prior to the end of life.

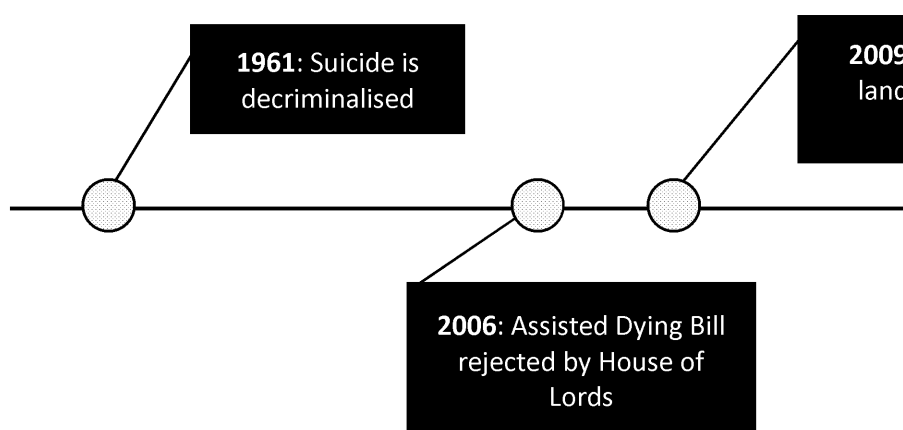
Palliative care often finds support among religious groups, who consider it more acceptable than euthanasia or assisted dying; the 'hospice movement', for instance, was founded by Cicely Saunders, whose views on end of life care were as much influenced by her Christian faith as by her medical training.

The Legal Situation in the UK

The legal situation surrounding euthanasia in the UK is complicated.

- ◆ **The Suicide Act of 1961** decriminalised the act of suicide. Previously, individuals who attempted suicide were liable to be prosecuted. However, it was still illegal to assist a suicide.
- ◆ In **2006**, the Assisted Dying Bill, which would have allowed terminally-ill individuals to request assistance to end their lives, was rejected by the House of Lords.
- ◆ In **2009**, Debby Purdy, a multiple sclerosis sufferer, brought a case to the High Court for clarification of the law. Ms Purdy wanted to travel to the Dignitas clinic in Switzerland to end her own life. However, she wanted to know if her husband, who would accompany her to the clinic, would be prosecuted for assisting her suicide. At the time, the law stated that anyone who helped another person to commit suicide could face up to 14 years in jail.
 - After a lengthy legal battle, the House of Lords finally issued a ruling: the factors such as the nature of the victim's illnesses would have to be taken into account when prosecution could take place.
 - The ruling was hailed by pro-euthanasia campaigners as a victory, because people would *not* be prosecuted for assisting with their partner's suicide.
 - ↳ This is supported by the fact that, although over 100 British citizens have travelled to Dignitas since 2002, none of their relatives have been prosecuted.
- ◆ Groups such as the Campaign for Dignity in Dying continue to pressure the government for legal reform.

The changing face of euthanasia legislation in the UK...



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Religious Perspectives

The Catholic Church bases its views on euthanasia heavily on the **Natural Law tradition founded by Thomas Aquinas**. 'To preserve life' is a **primary precept** – one of a number of God-given rules which govern human beings that Aquinas argues should never be broken. Euthanasia always involves *ending* a life, hence it breaks this rule. From this basis we might conclude that Natural Law theory holds euthanasia is *always* wrong.

Another primary precept which Aquinas may have brought to bear on the euthanasia debate is the notion that we should strive to create an orderly, harmonious society. Opponents of euthanasia often appeal to the **slippery slope argument**, which suggests that legalising the practice could have terrible consequences for the population as a whole. Likewise, the Natural Law theorist may maintain that euthanasia can have no place in a civilised society, since it has the potential to cause unrest. This rules out **voluntary euthanasia**, **involuntary euthanasia** and **assisted dying**.

Slippery slope argument
change to the law may result in catastrophic consequences. In the euthanasia debate, if legalising medically-assisted dying inadvertently put pressure on their lives. Knowing this may strengthen a sense of duty that they are just 'a burden' and a result, even if they survive, it is somehow their own fault compounded if they are left with relatives with one eye on the testament. Just as it is to kill the unfortunate (albeit with good intentions) in euthanasia we would be in all manner of nasty

However, what of **non-voluntary euthanasia**? It is worth pausing a moment and considering **proportionality** (discussed in Section 2.3). Wilcockson writes:

Proportion is a well-established principle in the Natural Law tradition which is seen individually so that what might be considered proportionate to achieve the needs of the patient and even the resources of the doctor... For instance, a patient considered so ill that no amount of surgery would improve their condition, a doctor might then prescribe 'nursing care only' (the patient should be kept comfortable in their needs knowing that the patient will die shortly).²²

The suggestion here is that there may be some room within the Catholic tradition but only in very specific circumstances.

The **doctrine of double effect**, which has a long history in the Church, can also be used to argue that 'there is a difference between foreseeing an event and directly intending or *willi*ng it'. Certain actions with bad consequences are admissible so long as the direct intention is good and the bad consequences. Is it possible that some forms of euthanasia would satisfy this criterion? Just might: sometimes, when faced with a patient who is in severe pain and has been known to administer a fatal dose of painkillers. The doctor's intention is not to cause a bad consequence, it is rather simply to put an end to their suffering (a good consequence), it is categorised as a form of **passive euthanasia**, as the death could be said to have

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²² Wilcockson, M, 1999, *Issues of Life and Death*. (London: Hodder), Ch. 4

²³ Ibid.

Acts and Omissions: The Catholic position on the difference between *acts* and *omissions* causes difficulties for those believers who would suggest pain sometimes justified. The distinction between the two can be illustrated as follows:

- (i) **Act:** 'I shoot you in the face.'
- (ii) **Omission:** 'Someone is pointing a gun in your face and I fail to stop them.'

It is clear in (i) that I am responsible for your death, but case (ii) is more complex. I could stop you being killed, but I decided not to bother, do I deserve some blame for this? Sometimes omissions are morally on a par with acts.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994) holds that 'an act or omission which causes death in order to eliminate suffering constitutes a murder gravely contrary to the dignity of person and to the respect due to the living God.' This seems to suggest that **passive voluntary euthanasia** are just as bad as active, or voluntary, euthanasia.

A more liberal Christian perspective can be found in the work of Joseph Fletcher, who in his *ethics* dealt explicitly with euthanasia and the right to die. As a result, there is no doubt that his views on the issue are starkly clear. In a magazine article titled 'The Right to Die' he wrote:

The sanctity (what makes it precious) is not in life itself, intrinsically; it is in the situation. Compared to some things, the taking of life is a small evil and the loss of life is a small evil. Death is not always an enemy; it can sometimes be a friend.

Life is sometimes good, and death is sometimes good. Life is no more a goal than death is. It is good, when and if it is good, because of circumstances, because of the way it is lived. It deserves neither protection nor preservation... Let the law favor living, and let it favor death when it is the better choice.

Fletcher is here denying the **sanctity of life** and affirming that what really counts is the quality of life. Why would he think this? Remember, for Fletcher, the only end worthy of moral consideration is the reduction of suffering. Deciding the most loving action requires a situational approach. When it comes to euthanasia, there is nothing more than an end to their suffering, Fletcher is prepared to say, 'Life is sometimes good'; there are no absolutes, and **relativism** (one of the **four working principles**) is central to his approach.

Medically-assisted suicide and voluntary euthanasia, then, so long as they are the result of a rational decision, would be fully supported by a situation ethicist. What about **non-voluntary euthanasia**? This enters much more controversial territory:

People... have no reason to feel guilty about putting a Down's syndrome baby away" in the sense of hidden in a sanitarium or in a more responsible let it die. But it carries no guilt. True guilt arises only from an offense against a person. ... There is far more reason for real guilt in keeping alive a Down's syndrome child on a false idea of obligation or duty, while at the same time feeling no obligation to provide the best possible environment for a living, learning child.²⁵

It is a startling claim, but it is evidence of just how seriously Fletcher took the situation. His comments were in fact made in response to an article written by a father whose son was a baby boy with Down's syndrome. The couple, who already had one child at home, took their son to a sanatorium (a type of hospital, rare nowadays, which cares for those with long-term conditions) where the child died a few days later of heart failure. The father felt, however, that, while it was preferable for the baby to have been euthanised shortly after birth.

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²⁴ Bard, B & Fletcher, J, 'The Right to Die' in *The Atlantic Monthly*, 221 (April 1968)

²⁵ Ibid.

Fletcher agrees with the father, and believes that this would actually be the moral turn on his definition of **personhood**:

To be a human is to be self-aware, consciously related to others, capable of sufficient to support some initiative. When these things are absent, or can be neither a potential nor an actual person. To be a person is a lot more than biological organism functions biologically does not mean that it is a human between a man and a brute.²⁶

An individual with severely diminished mental faculties, according to this definition, is unable to decide for themselves whether or not they wish to die. The decision is made by people who are most affected by their living or dying – in this case, the parents.

It is worth noting that the medical understanding and treatment of children with severe disabilities developed in the decades since this article was written, and so too have cultural attitudes. A father, or indeed Fletcher, would express the same views today is impossible to

Analysis

- ◆ Natural Law theory maintains that the **sanctity of life** is the central issue in medical ethics, and that there is an obligation to 'preserve life' because it is God-given).
- ◆ As a result, considerations about **autonomy, the right to die** and individuals' rights are secondary. Advocates of legalised euthanasia regard these as just as (if not more) important as the sanctity of life.
- ◆ **Proportionalism** is, however, a practically-minded, intuitively appealing idea that allows for decision-making regardless of one's religious beliefs.
- ◆ Situation ethics holds that **quality of life** is a more important consideration than the sanctity of life. Advocates of medically-assisted suicide would be in full agreement.
- ◆ As a consequentialist ethic with **agape** at its heart, Fletcher's theory is far more concerned with the quality of life.
- ◆ Fletcher's advocacy of euthanasia for the mentally disabled is controversial and a slippery slope argument: would allowing euthanasia unintentionally open the door for

Secular Perspectives

'The desire among the citizens of modern democracies for control over how they live, and how they die', says Singer, and this 'marks a sharp turning away from the **sanctity of life** ethic.'²⁷ In this turning towards an ethic based on considerations about **quality of life**.

We saw how the Natural Law tradition might be used to justify some forms of **non-voluntary euthanasia**; however, **voluntary euthanasia** (and **assisted dying**) is explicitly ruled out by the **sanctity of life** and **autonomy** at the heart of medical decision-making, where does that leave

The medical ethicist Jonathon Glover argues, 'voluntary euthanasia is justified in cases where the person would commit suicide if he could, and where we believe that the conditions for allowing to allow or assist a suicide are satisfied.'²⁸ We can break this claim down into three parts:

1. Firstly, we must understand *why* someone would wish to end their life.
 - ◆ The impulse to suicide is founded, in all cases, on the belief that death would be a relief, indicating not just a **poor quality of life**, but a *negative* one: life is considered a burden.
2. Secondly, we must consider when, if ever, it is morally permissible to *allow* someone to end their life.
 - ◆ Suicidal desires born of deep depression can pass, even if, to the sufferer, they seem permanent. Allowing someone to end their life when there is a possibility that their mind can be changed is not permissible, because there is still hope that they will recover. So the individual's will must be resistant to all attempts (e.g. through the support of friends or family) to change it.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Singer, P, 1994, *Rethinking Life and Death: The Collapse of Our Traditional Ethics* (New York: St Martin's Press).

²⁸ Glover, J, 1977, *Causing Death and Saving Lives* (London: Penguin), p. 185

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- ◆ If a person's desire to end their life is so strong that nothing can alter it, they commit suicide. Glover writes, 'some suicide decisions are quite rational, a very clear assessment of their future lives, so that interference is unjustified. It would be wrong to *stop* someone killing themselves because to do so would violate their **autonomy**, then sometimes suicide must be morally permissible.'
- 3. Thirdly, we must consider the circumstances when it would be right to *assist* suicide.
 - ◆ The most ardent campaigners for the legalisation of **voluntary euthanasia** are entirely made up, but they are simply not physically able to end the lives of the people in these circumstances, that improving their quality of life is not a rational decision, then the individual's **autonomy** must be respected, in other words their **right to die**.
 - ◆ For somebody to have a **right**, then there needs to be a corresponding duty on others to respect it. If nobody respects the right, then **autonomy** is being violated.
 - ◆ Respecting a **right to die** may require the assistance of others if the person is unable to do so. If we (as a society) do not help them, by, for example, not allowing them to end their life, then, the argument runs, we are denying them their **autonomy**.

'The difference between **voluntary euthanasia** and **assisted suicide** is that the first is for the person themselves, while the second is for someone else', says Glover, but 'it is hard to see why it matters *in principle* who actually performs the act. So if **assisted suicide** (allowing individuals to end their *own* lives with the *assistance* of others) is morally permissible (and, by extension, **assisted dying**), then so, too, is voluntary euthanasia (allowing individuals to request that a physician end their lives *for them*). We can say that, providing certain conditions are met, an ethic based on the concepts of **quality of life** and respect for **autonomy** gives us a moral basis for voluntary euthanasia.

Another issue which supporters of voluntary euthanasia must face is the **slippery slope** argument. The claim here is that legalising voluntary euthanasia may inadvertently lead to a rise in *involuntary* euthanasia (where a person's life is ended *against* their wishes; murder, for all intents and purposes). The **slippery slope** claim is to look at the situation in countries where voluntary euthanasia *has* been legalised, such as the Netherlands or Belgium.

Singer examined claims made by opponents of liberalising euthanasia laws that 'legalising involuntary euthanasia in the Netherlands. These cases, Singer writes, 'were only a small percentage – of all the deaths related to medical decision-making', but have nevertheless been used to argue against liberalisation. He found that 'while there appears to be a limited amount of non-voluntary euthanasia in the Netherlands in extreme circumstances, no cases of 'involuntary euthanasia' came to light. He concluded that, based on the available evidence, the **slippery slope** effect has not occurred against euthanasia.

Analysis

- ◆ The concepts of **autonomy** and rationality are problematic. Particularly in medical ethics, they come under heavy attack. Usually, the claim is along the lines of 'autonomy is a relative or reflects only the experience of a dominant social group. If it is true, then the concept, then much work in medical ethics would be undermined.'
- ◆ Assessing whether someone has made a 'rational' decision to die is very difficult. It is hard to judge the extent to which other factors (the pressure of family members, etc.) have impacted on the decision.
- ◆ Even if there has not been a **slippery slope** effect in the Netherlands, it could still be legalised in other countries. Singer himself accepts this: 'The Dutch experience suggests that it might be easily replicable in other countries. Americans, in particular, would do well to consider that the Netherlands is a welfare state that provides a high standard of health care for all its citizens. No patients need to ask for euthanasia because they are unable to do so.'

²⁹ Ibid., p. 180

³⁰ Singer, P., 1994, *Rethinking Life and Death: The Collapse of Our Traditional Ethics* (New York: St Martin's Press).

³¹ Ibid., p. 158

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Quick Quiz

1. What is an embryo?
2. What is a foetus?
3. What does IVF stand for?
4. What does the sanctity of life refer to?
5. What is voluntary euthanasia?
6. What is assisted dying?
7. What is non-voluntary euthanasia?
8. What is involuntary euthanasia?

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ANSWERS TO ACTIVITIES AND QUIZZES

Where answers are not provided, please use your own judgement.

4.1 Meta-ethics

Activities

Question	Answer
1. Identify the differences in interpreting the moral statement 'happiness is good' as a cognitive and non-cognitive statement.	<p>A cognitive interpretation would understand truth about the nature of a moral reality. It means 'good' principles that exist in the world and can be objectively stated. A statement is considered to be true will depend on what is 'good'. A utilitarian would, for example, consider it to be objectively true. According to a non-cognitive interpretation it would be objectively false.</p> <p>A non-cognitive interpretation would be that truth is about any moral reality. According to emotivism, truth is a matter of emotion. According to prescriptivism it is possible to bring about happiness. It is not objectively true for the holder.</p>
2. Try to define 'yellow' to someone else without using any naturalistic terms. How hard is it?	Students should find this activity impossible. They should realise how easy it is to accidentally use naturalistic terms (and descriptions of good).
3. Come up with some more examples of closed questions.	According to Moore, closed questions are only analytically true, e.g. 'Does a circle have angles?' The answer is 'No' without any contradiction.
4. Write some more examples of prescriptive and descriptive statements.	<p>A descriptive statement is any statement that is analytically true. A prescriptive statement is one that tells you to do, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ descriptive statement: Happiness is good ◆ prescriptive statement: You ought to act

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Quick Quiz

Question	Answer
1. Name a non-cognitive and a cognitive theory.	Non-cognitive = emotivism and prescriptivism Cognitive = utilitarianism, virtue ethics, naturalism
2. Is intuitionism non-cognitive or cognitive?	Cognitive
3. What is ethical naturalism? Give three examples.	It is the belief that decisions about what is right and wrong are made through discovery of the natural world and its laws. Examples: virtue ethics, natural moral law, Kantian ethics
4. What is the 'is-ought' controversy? Which philosopher is associated with it?	It is associated with Hume. He argued that you cannot derive a prescriptive statement (an 'ought') from a descriptive statement (an 'is'). Ethical naturalism because it argued that moral statements are based on observations of the natural world, it was in line with naturalism.
5. Which ethical theory considers ethical language to be meaningless? Why?	Emotivism – because ethical language is not meaningful, it is just expressions of emotion
6. Do intuitionism, emotivism and prescriptivism agree or disagree with ethical naturalism?	Disagree with ethical naturalism
7. Give a difference between prescriptivism and emotivism.	Emotivism holds religious language to be meaningless, it is just an expression of emotion. Prescriptivism shares the view that it is meaningless but holds that it does serve a particular function.
8. Give a difference between intuitionism and emotivism.	Intuitionism is naturalist, whereas emotivism is not.
9. Name a philosopher associated with intuitionism, emotivism and prescriptivism in turn.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intuitionism – G E Moore, Pritchard, Foot Emotivism – Ayer Prescriptivism – Hare

4.2 The Relationship between Religion and Morality

Quick Quiz

Question	Answer
1. Give a quote which summarises the question at the heart of the Euthyphro Dilemma.	Whether the pious or holy is beloved by the gods because it is pious or holy, or pious or holy because it is beloved by the gods.
2. Give some examples of moral rules a Christian might follow if they believed in divine command ethics.	E.g. any command from the Decalogue
3. What is theonomy?	Belief that God determines, absolutely, what is right and wrong, associated with Conservative Christianity
4. Define the term <i>Summum Bonum</i> .	The supreme good – the result of which all human actions should be directed
5. What example does Sharpe give to demonstrate why Christian morality lacks compassion?	The Catholic Church, which believes in the sanctity of life, but follows God's commands against abortion, even though it causes a child into the world that may suffer because it is unwanted by its parents.
6. What is an anti-theist?	Somebody who opposes religion

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5.1 Deontology and Virtue Ethics

Activities

Question	Answer
1. Identify whether each of the statements below could be considered a hypothetical or a categorical imperative.	i) Categorical ii) Hypothetical iii) Hypothetical iv) Categorical v) Hypothetical vi) Categorical vii) Hypothetical viii) Categorical
2. Identify whether the following activities could be universalised without contradiction. <i>NB Many of my answers are open to debate!</i>	i) Not universalisable ii) Universalisable iii) Not universalisable iv) Universalisable v) Not universalisable vi) Not universalisable vii) Not universalisable viii) Not universalisable
3. Identify whether humanity (the agent) is being used as a means or an end in the following scenarios.	i) Means ii) Means iii) Either means or end could be argued. iv) Means v) End vi) Means vii) End
4. Come up with situations in which two of Ross' <i>prima facie</i> duties might come into conflict. How easy would it be to decide which one is more important, or even to know what our duty is?	There are numerous potential conflicts, e.g. keep your promise to a friend who has committed a crime with a duty to support your friend about the friend's crime, or situations where self-interest conflicts with duty to others.
5. List 11 virtues you think are most important. Is your list the same as Aristotle's? Could this create problems?	Students can come up with their own lists, which may differ from Aristotle's. This could raise problems about the criteria for considering a virtue and therefore having any certain virtues.
6. Come up with some more examples from the table on p. 29. How easy do you find it to know the excess and deficiency of each virtue?	Students are likely to find this reasonably hard to do. Is there such a thing as an excess or deficiency. Is there such a thing as a word for this but what does 'too kind' mean?
7. Write a definition for each of Aristotle's virtues.	1. Courage – to something that is frightening, 2. Temperance – acting in moderation, self-restraint 3. Generosity – giving, not being selfish 4. High-mindedness – having high moral principles 5. Right ambition – not too much or too little 6. Patience – being able to accept or tolerate pain, not being angered or annoyed 7. Truthfulness – being honest and not deliberately lying 8. Wit – having a sense of humour 9. Friendliness – building kind and tolerant relationships 10. Modesty – not bragging or boasting about one's achievements 11. Righteous indignation / justice – being judicious, seeking fair punishment and desert

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Question	Answer
8. Decide five people you think would be good examples of virtuous people to learn from.	Examples of virtuous people might include Mother Teresa, Desmond Tutu.
9. Discuss if others agree with your choice of virtuous people. Are there any disagreements?	If students' lists are similar, there could be a debate about whether they are virtuous, e.g. Barack Obama, Bill Gates?

Quick Quiz

Question	Answer
1. What is meant by deontology?	The study of duty; an ethical theory which says that duty are the basis for determining the right action.
2. Give an example of a hypothetical imperative.	E.g. If you go to bed early tonight, you can sleep better tomorrow.
3. What is a maxim?	A principle or rule to be followed, e.g. 'Don't lie'.
4. Give an example of a categorical imperative.	E.g. Stop what you are doing, right now!
5. State the second formulation of the categorical imperative.	Act so that persons are always treated as ends, not merely as means.
6. Name three of the virtues Aristotle identifies.	Any three of: courage temperance magnificence magnanimity proper ambition / pride patience / good temper truthfulness wittiness friendliness modesty righteous indignation Accept synonyms.
7. What word does Aristotle use which is often translated as 'virtue'?	<i>Arete</i>
8. What does <i>eudaimonia</i> mean?	Flourishing, good living, etc.
9. The Golden Mean attempts to find a balance between two ____?	Vices
10. What is 'practical wisdom' useful for?	Chiefly deliberation; in terms of ethics, it is useful for deciding what to exercise in which situation; 'right time, right place, right person'.

6.1 Medical Ethics

Quick Quiz

Question	Answer
1. What is an embryo?	Organism developing in the uterus up to 14 days.
2. What is a foetus?	Organism developing in the uterus after 14 days.
3. What does IVF stand for?	In Vitro Fertilisation
4. What does the sanctity of life refer to?	Belief that life is sacred, God-given, and should not be destroyed.
5. What is voluntary euthanasia?	Where a person chooses to <i>end their life</i> and a doctor or other person assist them.
6. What is assisted dying?	When terminally-ill adults request a doctor to administer them a lethal dose of drugs.
7. What is non-voluntary euthanasia?	When another person chooses to <i>end their life</i> because they are <i>unable to decide for themselves</i> .
8. What is involuntary euthanasia?	When a person <i>does not wish to die</i> but a doctor or other person administers a lethal dose of drugs regardless of their wishes.

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