



Revision Summaries for AS / A Level Year 1 Eduqas

Component 3: Religion and Ethics

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Teacher's Introduction

The revision summaries in this series are designed to support your students as they study the AS / A Level Year 1 Eduqas Religious Studies specification, and have been designed to cover the major themes and concepts of each topic point accordingly. This revision summary supports the Component 3: Religion and Ethics part of the specifications.

Remember!

Always check the exam board website for new information, including changes to the specification and sample assessment material.

All students, whether they are academically strong, average or weak, can benefit from a concise and clearly explained set of notes to revise from, both as they work through the Eduqas course and also when preparing for their end-of-course exams. It is recommended, therefore, that students be given each relevant summary after learning a topic so that they can clearly understand the summaries and refer back to them when needed. However, the summaries can also function well as a pack given to students in the run-up to their exams.

Each topic follows a set structure detailed below:

- ✓ **Glossary:** A clear list of important terminology students need to know when studying the topic.
- ✓ **Overview:** A look at the major themes of the topic, with a brief introduction to the major points of discussion and disagreement.
- ✓ **Key Points:** The main body of the summaries for each topic, providing a clear and concise set of notes that help students support their own knowledge and understanding of the topic.
- ✓ **Key Figures:** An important overview of any major philosophical or theological figures students are required to know.
- ✓ **Key Texts:** A set of notes around any important theological or biblical texts students may require background information about and understanding of.
- ✓ **Student Checklist:** A helpful guide to what students need to know by the end of the revision summary and a way to check their understanding and progress through a particular topic.
 - ! **Note:** The checklist is presented in question format and these questions would be ideal to set for homework or revision so that students can build the skills they need in order to progress to longer exam-style questions.
- ✓ **Exam-style Question:** A practice essay question with helpful assessment objectives, complete with levelled mark schemes and indicative content at the end of the resource. These are useful for students approaching their end-of-year exams or wishing to improve their essay technique on a particular topic.
- ✓ **Year 2 Consideration:** Informative boxes have been added where appropriate throughout this resource including details about issues related to the concept which are relevant to the study of this course in the second year of the A Level Course.

NB Depending on the figures studied and the required reading, not all topics will have a Key Figures or Key Texts section.

This structure clearly ensures students have not only a grasp of the key themes of each topic, but also a way to understand their place within the specification as a whole. Students who may have missed lessons or not made detailed notes may benefit greatly from these revision summaries, especially in helping their recollection of key topics closer to their end-of-course exams.

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Theme One: Ethical Thou

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Arbitrariness	One of the challenges posed by Euthyphro's dilemma to divine command theory.
Aristotle	Greek philosopher who is considered to be the father of Western philosophy.
Divine Command Theory	The belief that ethical sentiments are sourced from the deity, usually the traditional Judaeo-Christian God in the discussion.
Doctrine of the Mean	The idea that a moral choice can be made on the slide between moral excess and moral deficiency.
Ethical Altruism	The opposite of ethical egoism; the idea that the moral agent is self-sacrificing towards the benefit of others.
Ethical Egoism	An ethical theory which posits that the most moral choice is the one that benefits the self.
Eudemonia	Happiness; excellence – the state of flourishing as a result of living virtuously.
Euthyphro's Dilemma	A challenge to divine command theory found in the work of Plato.
Function Argument	Aristotelian theory that all things are dedicated towards their own good.
Meta-ethics	Meaning 'beyond ethics', this is ethics which is focused on the meaning of ethical terms rather than whether or not the ideas are morally correct or morally wrong.
Modified Divine Command Theory	A more modern version of divine command theory developed by Robert Adams.
Moral Responsibility	The holding of someone as praiseworthy or blameworthy for their actions.
Normative	Describes ethical ideas which relate to an ethical system, such as what is good.
Prisoner Dilemma	An analogy used often to critique ethical egoism; an ethical dilemma where the commonsense choice is not the best choice.
Teleological	An ethical system concerned with the end or purpose of actions.
Virtue	The morally good characteristics, behaviour or qualities of a person.
Virtue Ethics	An ethical system based on the thoughts of Aristotle, which focuses on showing virtues to other human beings.

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Divine Command Theory

Overview

Meta-ethics literally means 'beyond ethics'; it is the discussion of what is good and bad, but rather seeks to establish the terms, and whether or not they have any meaning. Divine command theory is a form of meta-ethics.

Divine command theory is the theory that the origins of ethical statements and ideas (right and wrong) all come from God. This belief of the origins of ethical theories is often held by religious people. To believe in divine command theory, one also must believe in God.

An example of an ethical theory which generally would fit with divine command theory is the theory of natural law, as proposed by Aquinas.

Key Points

General Points

- Divine command theory is the meta-ethical belief that the origin of ethical ideas is God – and that moral values can be derived from divine revelation, including Scripture and/or other religious texts.
- Actions which are commanded by God are morally right, actions which are forbidden by God are morally wrong.
- Religious people such as Christians believe that God created the world and morality. Therefore, it would follow that such a creator would also create rules for living.
- To put it in layman's terms, it is the belief that ethical behaviour which is good and right, and bad ethics come from a good God. God commands what is good and what is good.
- This can take various forms of communication – either through revelation such as Scripture, or indirect forms of communication such as the realities of the natural world and the laws of nature.
- For example, the laws we can observe governing nature may be considered to be the laws of God – and if these happen to marry with religious Scripture then all the more so.
- One common example is the Ten Commandments given to Moses in the Old Testament, Exodus 20. These include divine commands such as not to kill or lie, and to not take the name of God in vain.
- These laws are considered to be wholly good as God is considered to be wholly good and benevolence justifies the ethical nature of the laws. Furthermore, the omniscience of God is considered to further justify the laws – God is all knowledgeable and, therefore, knows what is good and what isn't good, and what the best is for people.
- Not all divine command theorists are Christians, as other religions such as Judaism and Islam have their own viewpoints; however, all divine command theorists must believe in some form of divine authority to have any kind of hold.
- In divine command theory, someone can be considered to be moral if they act in accordance with which are divinely commanded – that is to say, to be good is to follow God's commands.
- If God is omnipotent (all-powerful) then it would follow that he would need to be able to govern, and rule cannot be established without guidance for those who are ruled.
- Divine command theory is objective (uninfluenced by personal emotion), not subjective, and is held in moral absolutes.

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Modified Divine Command Theory

- Robert Adams is an American professor and philosopher of metaphysics and is known as the modified divine command theory.
- This form of divine command theory revolves around the idea of omnibenevolence to respond to Euthyphro's dilemma (discussed in the 'Analysis: Challenges' section).
- He clearly links the human ideas about what is right and wrong with the omnibenevolent God.
- In his book, Adams described his version of the theory as follows:
 - ‘Any action is ethically wrong if and only if it is contrary to the commands of a loving God.’
- This assertion of a loving God solves the issue of the idea of the changing of moral laws. A loving God will only act in a loving way towards humankind and, therefore, Adams solves the issue.
- In this version of divine command theory, moral laws are posited as an inherent part of God rather than being separate. Therefore, it would not make sense for right and wrong to change and God does not change.

Divine Command Theory: Analysis: Strengths

- When one first encounters divine command theory one might view it in a positive manner – it appears to be clear.
- It is objective rather than subjective – it says what it says, i.e. you cannot read the Ten Commandments and interpret these to mean that you CAN cheat on your spouse, because it objectively says you cannot.
- Human beings are fallible. Therefore, an ethical system based on humans will be fallible. If one believes God to be infallible, then it would follow that a system of laws created by such a deity would also be infallible.
- In a vacuum it logically works – if one believes in a God who is good and from whom rulings come, then obviously it makes sense that ethical rulings given by God are considered to be good. If one removes the theory from all other factors and functions.
- One of the strengths of divine command theory is that it is relatively clear – we have clear codes and rules by which believers are called to live morally – Jewish people live by! This makes making ethical decisions involving any of the topics addressed relatively simple.
- Adams' modified divine command theory goes some way to solving the challenge of Euthyphro's dilemma (discussed in Analysis: Challenges).

Divine Command Theory: Analysis: Challenges

- Within the vacuum itself there are issues with the theory – namely, contradictions and a lack of direct rulings. If one is using religious commandments in order to garner guidance in a situation on which no direct ruling is given, then you come to the situation with your own opinion and interpretation of the text, which can differ between people.
- Therefore, you could end up with two people following the same theory and interpreting it differently. This is inconsistent and causes issues when developing a moral system.
- Furthermore, those who propose to follow divine command theory will inevitably be posed with a dilemma – Euthyphro's dilemma, to be precise, and the various issues that are caused for divine command theory as a result.
- This is a dilemma which was first posited by Greek philosopher Plato in his dialogue named Euthyphro.
- Through this dialogue the initial question is posed:
 - ‘Are acts moral in and of themselves, and, therefore, commanded by God because they are good, or are acts good because God has commanded them?’

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- This question poses a huge challenge to divine command theorists.
- If divine command theorists posit that an action is good because it is commanded by God, what things which are commanded by God to be considered to be good? Are they simply good because God says they are? This is the challenge posed by this question.
- The arbitrariness problem occurs when one takes the viewpoint that goodness is whatever God has commanded it. When taking this viewpoint, it would appear that morality would be based on the whims of God, and somewhat arbitrary.
- The final challenge to divine command theory explored here is known as the pluralism of the divine, based on the fact that the world is full of different religions, beliefs systems and cultures, with no exclusive knowledge of the divine.
- There are issues with Adams' modified theory; while it posits that God is good, it does not address the question of whether morals are dependent on or independent of God. It also does not address the issue of which many would now consider to be immoral, such as the commandment to kill, which appear inconsistent with Adams' theory of a benevolent God.

Key Figures

Robert Adams

- American philosopher and professor of metaphysics and religion.
- He is best known for developing the modified divine command theory.

Student Checklist

What Do I Know?	No Idea ☹	Some Idea ☺	Good Idea ☺
What is divine command theory?			
Where does this theory believe ethics come from?			
What is an example of Divine Command?			
How might God's omniscience and benevolence influence divine command theory?			
What are the strengths of divine command theory?			
What is the pluralism of the divine?			
What is Euthyphro's dilemma?			
What is the arbitrariness problem?			
What is meant by modified command theory?			

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Virtue Ethics

Overview

The most important scholar to consider when discussing the influence of virtue ethics is Aristotle. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, he outlines his ethical theory, which is now commonly known as virtue ethics. The end goal and purpose of human life is eudemonia.

The idea of virtue stems from the Greek word 'arete', meaning virtue. This has a range of general connotations which come to mind when considering the general modern use of the word, but instead ascribes ideas of moral excellence.

Key Points

General Points

- Virtue ethics is a normative and teleological form of ethics which is centred on character. It specifically focuses on the character of the individual.
- Virtue, in this sense, does not mean the same thing as it would in modern discourse. Translated into English as 'excellence' when considering the Greek culture it comes from 'arete', the Greek word for virtue.
- Virtue ethics is commonly associated with the Greek philosopher Aristotle, and is set forward in his work *Nicomachean Ethics*.
- It is a form of teleological ethics as he argues that the actions one being takes are directed towards an end or a purpose. All beings work towards an end (a telos).
- Human beings are no different. The end which he posits we work towards is called **eudemonia**.
- This is best translated as flourishing or happiness. However, it is important to note that it is not considered to be pleasure, as it might be understood within utilitarianism. Pleasure is experienced by animals, but eudemonia is exclusive to human beings.
- Therefore, when a decision is made, Aristotle's ethical code is concerned with the actions that result in the end of achieving eudemonia.
- Virtue ethics is character ethics – this means that this method of ethical thinking focuses on an individual person rather than the actions they perform.
- This can be seen in some religious teachings; for example, within Christianity. In ethical action there is also emphasis on certain character virtues such as in the Bible. In the Scripture, Jesus emphasises certain character traits and virtues (such as being merciful) and how they lead to being blessed. This demonstrates how religion, like virtue ethics, can emphasise character as a motivating factor (and goal) when discussing ethical practice.

Aristotle's Function Argument

- Aristotle argues that all things are dedicated towards a particular function. For example, plants absorb sunlight and create energy for growth via photosynthesis.
- To this end they have characteristics that enable them to achieve this end, and the good is how well they perform their natural functions.
- However, not all things have different kinds of characteristic functions, depending on their nature.
- Whereas plants have vegetative souls (characterised by nutrition and growth) which encompass a wider variety of characteristics and functions.
- Human beings differ in being able to reason, and, therefore, possess what Aristotle calls a rational soul. The good for human beings is performing their functions well, and the unique characteristic of their rationality, then the good for human beings is performing the activities of their rationality well.

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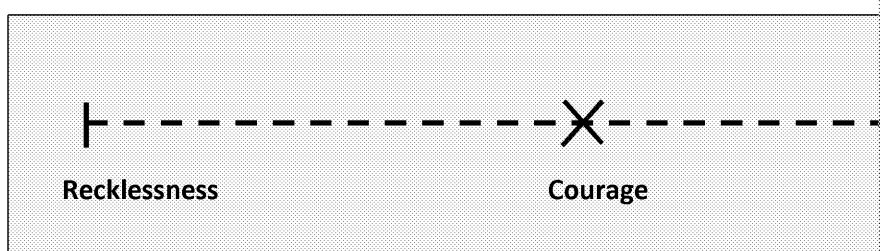


Reason and Virtue

- Within Aristotelian virtue ethics, there is a hierarchy of souls. Humans are at the top due to their possession of the ability to reason.
- This is closely tied to the idea of the human soul.
- This reason is central for Aristotle as it is indicative of the rational soul of humans.
- In his theory there are two facets to the human soul – the rational and the non-rational for the non-rational soul.
- Therefore, the eudemonia, or flourishing, of a human soul occurs when humans act in accordance with their reason.
- It is reached by the engagement of humans with the rational activity of the soul, which creates excellence.
- For Aristotle, to reason is to exercise virtue.
- For Aristotle, there are differences between moral virtues and intellectual virtues, which reside in the soul.
- We must know what is right to do, and then choose to do this correct action.
- Awareness and choice are important here – a virtuous action is only virtuous if it is chosen.

The Doctrine of the Mean

- In everyday situations, we will encounter moral choices. In order to navigate these choices, a certain amount of reason is required to use our reason.
- It is similar to the concept of the mathematical mean – if you are familiar with that knowledge here.
- Virtue lies between two extremes of action – the excess of virtue and the deficiency of virtue.
- The doctrine of the mean dictates how virtue lies in a mean between two extremes of excess and one of deficiency.
- To act virtuously is to find the medium between the excess of virtue and deficiency. Virtue is then developed by using reason to work out the mean, and then practicing it.
- There are many different possible examples. For example, we can use the doctrine of the mean for the virtue of courage:



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Virtue Ethics and Religion

- The idea of virtues is familiar and appears in religious ethical systems – for example, Jesus preaches on a series of virtues in a passage known as the Beatitudes. This is including various virtues, found in the Gospel of Matthew 5:3–12, and these are:

*'Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.*

*Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.*

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for right
for they will be filled.*

*Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.*

*Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.*

*Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.*

*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of things against you. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

- This verse lists the virtues which are considered to be virtues to which a Christian should aspire.
- They are considered to be characters which God desires and has, which should be imitated.
- These virtues were put forward in this Bible passage, but can also be seen throughout the life of Jesus.
- Throughout the passage, reward is promised by God for those who pursue and practice these virtues.

Virtue Ethics: Analysis: Strengths

- Virtue ethics is agent-centred – emphasising the importance of understanding the moral character rather than emphasising their moral choices in a specific situation.
- It respects and underlines the importance of human desires, emotions and passions. Unlike other ethical theories, it does not wholly rely on reason to decide what is and what is not.
- The theory fits well with human experience of complex factors and multiple choices.
- It places emphasis on the base idea of virtue and character, rather than goals. Unlike some other ethical theories, it does not focus on the end goal.
- It fits with ideas of Aristotle, regarding how to view a person as moral – as having the right character, which we can tell by observing some virtues in people.

Virtue Ethics: Analysis: Challenges

- As virtues are not universal, and conditioned by the culture of a particular person, it is difficult to provide universal moral guidance in new scenarios.
- It could be argued that because of the allowance that different virtues can be practiced in different societies, virtue ethics is not making a case for moral rights and wrongs, but is just describing a set of practices within societies. Cultural relativism poses a huge issue for the universal application of virtue ethics.

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- One of the criticisms of virtue ethics is that it is only partially useful – it is useful for everyday actions, but when it comes to meatier moral dilemmas, it falls short. The virtues of the individuals does little to ease the struggle of those living in extreme circumstances.
- Further limitation of virtue ethics is when it comes into contact with issues such as politics. The virtues of the individuals do not necessarily result in the outcome in a political system. It could only go so far as the individual, leaving no room for change. It is not the best thing for the country. It could only go so far as the individual, leaving no room for change. It is not so important in politics.
- Other challenges to these ideas are the developments of modern technology. It has created a way as to create new ethical dilemmas. It is difficult to apply Aristotelian virtue ethics to a multifaceted modern issue as euthanasia.

Key Figures



Aristotle

- Classical Greek philosopher, responsible for developing virtue ethics.
- Believed that ethical conduct should be based around the idea of the Golden Mean, credited with developing virtue ethics.

Key Texts

Nicomachean Ethics

- This is the text in which Greek philosopher Aristotle put forward his ideas about ethics.

Student Checklist

What Do I Know?	No Idea ☹	Some Idea ☺	Good Idea ☺
What is virtue ethics?			
Who first put it forward?			
What is eudemonia?			
What is the Greek understanding of virtue?			
What is the importance of reason in virtue ethics?			
Which ideas does Aristotle's virtue ethics reject?			
What is Aristotle's Golden Mean argument?			
What is the doctrine of the mean?			
What are some of the strengths of virtue ethics?			
What are some of the challenges to virtue ethics?			
What is an example of a religious virtue?			

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Ethical Egoism

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Overview

Ethical egoism is a normative ethical theory. The theory focuses, as the name would suggest, on the self – the ego. The key ethical principle is the idea that people should practise ethics in their own interests.

It can be confused with psychological egoism – and while the two ideas are linked, ethical egoism is an ethical theory rather than an observation of how humans react.

Key Points

General Points

- The crux of ethical egoism is the belief that the acting moral agent (i.e. the human) has the capacity to make moral decisions and should always make decisions which will generate the best outcome for the acting agent (i.e. themselves).
- One key point of ethical egoism is that it directly contrasts with ethical altruism – the idea that the moral agent should act in the interest of other people, rather than the moral branch of selflessness, so to speak.
- The argument against altruism contained within ethical egoism is that altruism renders the individual person worthless. Ethical egoism developed in response to this criticism.
- Furthermore, it is key to make a distinction between ethical egoism and psychological egoism. Psychological egoism is the idea of how people actually behave, while ethical egoism is the debate over or study of how people should behave.
- It is a consequentialist form of ethics, as it focuses on the outcome of a situation.
- It is the antithesis of ethical altruism, which is the ethical theory of putting the interests of others before oneself when considering an ethical action.

The Theory of Ethical Egoism

- Ethical egoism is relatively straightforward as a method of ethical navigation.
- It argues that we should instinctively know our needs, and act on them.
- There are three different forms of this form of ethics. These are as follows:
 - The individual form: *I should act in my own interest*
 - The personal form: *he or she should act in his or her interest*
 - The universal form: *everyone should act in their own interest*
- Ethical egoism juxtaposes suffering and dying with enjoying life as religions of suffering and dying, e.g. Christianity puts forward an idea that 'no one has given up one's life for one's friends' (John 15:13).
- Conversely, ethical egoism argues that moral principles are rooted in self-interest.
- The German nihilistic philosopher Max Stirner was an important figure when it comes to ethical egoism, in which he was an outspoken proponent. He was a rational egoist – meaning he completely rejected the idea that an individual should act out of a motivation other than self-interest.

Ethical Egoism: Analysis: Strengths

- One of the main strengths usually posited of ethical egoism is that it is the ethical theory that most closely mirrors the natural mental state of human beings – that is known as psychological egoism. Ethical egoism is an ethical practice closest to what is intuitive to human beings.
- Therefore, it could be argued that this is the best path to follow should someone choose to follow a moral model which is mentally healthy for the natural state of human beings (at least in the short term).

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- One argument in favour could be that ethical egoism, in giving highest importance to the individual, enables people to figure out their identities and truly tune into themselves.
- One important argument in favour of ethical egoism counters the idea that it is selfish by positing that ethical egoism emphasises the reason of the moral agent. Reasonable people would, for example, consider a harmonious world to be a better world than starting a war over greedy desire for oil.
- One stipulation often made is that ethical egoism should mean that the decision is in the long term interest of the individual long term, rather than in the short term.

Ethical Egoism: Analysis: Challenges

- Many people would critique ethical egoism by deeming it as selfish – and they make this critique on the assumption that selfishness is a bad thing. Ethical egoism can be viewed in a positive light and, therefore, there is a challenge to this criticism.
- However, one of the main critiques of ethical egoism is that it is relatively self-interest driven.
- Take, for example, the ethical issue of the use or abuse of the world's natural resources.
- An ethical egoist may take the stance that they are free to use the world's natural resources in the way they would like to.
- There is a further issue with ethical egoism as practised by larger groups which is known as the tragedy of the commons dilemma.
- This is a dilemma which demonstrates how if multiple people share a common resource – and all agree to a limited and fair use of the asset, it works well. However, if more than their fair share, this will lower the likelihood of the remaining fish reproducing for everyone in the future. And if everyone does this, there will be no fish to provide a food source. Selfishness, when acted upon communally by everyone, can be a disaster.
- Community has traditionally been held as a valued entity within society and has provided an evolutionary benefit. However, ethical egoism gives community little value and, in some ways, could even be considered to threaten communities.
- Ethical egoism also leaves the door open for atrocities to be committed. Similarly to utilitarianism (as will be explored later), ethical egoism can be used to justify actions which would be considered by the vast majority of people to be wholly unethical.
- Being driven primarily by self-interest could lead to amassing wealth, for example, at the expense of the impact this might have on others or on oneself in the long term. For example, the expense of other people would be justified under ethical egoism.
- Surely, this is a form of bigotry – which is largely condemned throughout society. It would lead to an individual prioritising themselves above all others, with the amount of importance in the decision-making process being laid on the individual. Such actions are difficult to justify as being moral.

Key Figures

Max Stirner

- German philosopher who lived from 1806 to 1856
- Believed that ethical egoism was the only correct way to approach ethical decisions
- Believed it would be irrational to act any way other than selfishly

Key Texts



The Ego and Its Own

- This was published in 1845.
- This is the text in which Max Stirner put forward his ideas regarding ethical egoism.

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Student Checklist

What Do I Know?	No Idea ☹	Some Idea ☺	Good Idea ☺	
What is ethical egoism?				
To what end should moral agents act according to ethical egoism?				
Who first  was ethical egoism?				
How does it differ from utilitarianism?				
How is ethical egoism self-defeating?				
What is the prisoner dilemma?				
What issue does the prisoner dilemma pose for ethical egoists?				
How might someone critique ethical egoism?				
How does psychological egoism support ethical egoism?				
How might someone  in favour of ethical egoism?				

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Practice Exam-style Question

1. (a) Explain the approach of ethical egoism to making moral decisions.

HINTS

In your answer you should:

- exhibit awareness and comprehension of relevant beliefs, including
 - the key ideas of ethical egoism
 - the key ideas posited by Stirner
 - key concepts of the value of moral agents

- (b) 'Ethical egoism is too narrow a work; a better system of ethics is theory.'

Evaluate this statement.

HINTS

In your answer you should:

- evaluate and assess facets of religious approaches and differing impacts and impact, such as:
 - the strengths of ethical egoism
 - the weaknesses of ethical egoism
 - key ideas of divine command theory
 - a comparison between these ideas

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Theme Two: Deontological Ethics

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Abortion	The medical process of ending a woman's pregnancy.
Application	The implementation of ethical thinking in real-world situations, such as abortion.
Aristotle	Greek theologian whose thoughts heavily influenced Thomas Aquinas's <i>Summa Theologica</i> and the development of natural law.
Deontology	A branch of normative ethics that judges whether an action is right or wrong based on whether it follows specific moral laws or rules.
Double Effect	The idea within natural law that sometimes it is impossible to avoid negative repercussions.
Duty	A moral obligation that human beings ought to follow and act upon.
Euthanasia	The intentional ending of a person's life in order to relieve suffering.
Fortitude	The cardinal virtue of having courage.
Justice	The cardinal virtue that is concerned with fair treatment.
Key Precept	The rule within natural law that requires people to go to the end of their powers.
Natural Law	The theory of ethical conduct developed by St Thomas Aquinas.
Normative Ethics	The branch of ethics that deals with how human beings ought to behave.
Precept	Rules or guidance derived from the Bible and reason.
Primary Precepts	The set of five principles that Aquinas believed ethical actions should be based on.
Proportionalism	The modern development of natural law by Catholic theologians, which posits the idea that as long as the reason for breaking a rule is proportional, it is acceptable.
Prudence	The first cardinal virtue of using reason in correct practical situations.
<i>Summa Theologica</i>	This is the text in which Aquinas put forward his views on ethics.
Temperance	The cardinal virtue of being able to resist temptation.
Theological Virtues	Specific virtues which Aquinas believed came from God.
Thomas Aquinas	Thirteenth-century monk and theologian responsible for the development of natural law.
Tiers of Law	The hierarchy of rules within Aquinas's thought.

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St Thomas Aquinas's Natural Laws and Precepts as the Basis of

Overview

Duty-based ethics, also known as **deontological** ethics, is a system that there are certain moral duties held by every individual that if adhered to shape society. Natural law theory is a form of deontological ethics.

First posited by St Thomas Aquinas, natural law is a theory based on the teachings of Aristotle. In formulating natural law, Aquinas relied on his ideas of the twin pillars of reason and revelation. However, his work was also heavily influenced by Aristotle. He accepted that the moral principles of the natural law were derived from the natural order of things, as even in the natural world. Aquinas's writing (thirteenth century) encountered problems which were not directly addressed in Scripture. Therefore, he found a way to apply Scripture to modern situations and give rulings on this basis. Enter Aquinas.

Key Points

General Points

- Deontological ethics can be religious if it is believed that the rules originate from revelation from God.
- However, it should be noted that deontological ethics can also be secular if not derived from another source of authority, such as human rationality or the natural order of things.
- Christian ethics is often built around specific commandments or rules known as the Ten Commandments.
- However, not all religious ideas or codes can be traced directly back to the Bible.
- Natural law is an absolutist form of ethical conduct. This means that the ethical principles cannot be changed or deviated from no matter the situation, as the morals are absolute. If natural law says it is wrong to kill (which it does) then it is wrong to kill in all circumstances.
- Furthermore, natural law is a theory which has both deontological and teleological aspects, both with the duty to follow the law of God and with acting in such a way as to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number of people. This is the primary and secondary precepts.

Natural Law

- Natural moral law theory is most closely associated with the medieval Catholic Church. It is a form of religious deontological ethics.
- Natural moral law, as it is understood today, is built upon the twin pillars of revelation and reason. The Bible, heavily influenced by the life, work and ideas of St Thomas Aquinas. His work is even referenced by the Vatican and the Catechism of the Catholic Church in its teaching on natural law.
- He reasoned that all humans have a natural purpose towards which God wants them to strive. This purpose, or **telos**, will bring humanity to unity and fellowship with God and the reaching of the highest human potential.
- There were two sources Aquinas believed that humans could use to understand their natural purpose: **Bible and the world and reason**.
- Aquinas believed that humanity was given reason and freedom by God so that they could understand and fulfil our natural purpose. All humans had the ability to reason, which means they could understand natural moral law if they chose to.
- Aquinas believed that everyone has a specific purpose unique to them that comes from the talents and gifts given to them by God.
- He is, therefore, emphatic in the belief in a creator as well as the need for humanity to follow the natural law.
- Ideas about morality, or moral rules, therefore, come from inside human beings. However, these ideas in turn come from God, according to Aquinas, because God made humanity.

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Key Precept

- At the heart of natural law theory is a single, uncontroversial moral principle that *we should aim to do good and to avoid doing evil*.

Primary Precepts

- Aquinas believed that through reason, the Bible and the world, it became clear that there were five 'primary precepts' that formed the basis of natural moral law. Although Aquinas himself, it is clear that he thought the following five rules were the most significant:
 - to preserve life
 - to reproduce
 - to educate children
 - to worship God
 - to create an orderly, harmonious society
- These rules are **absolute** and to disobey them is always to do wrong.

Secondary Precepts

- From the primary precepts, Aquinas argued that moral rules could be deduced for daily decision-making so that humans can fulfil their natural purpose.
- Vardy describes these secondary precepts as 'unpacking' the primary precepts to show what they involve and mean for daily decision-making.¹
- The secondary precepts also show us the **legalistic** character of Aquinas's ethics, as they are a case of deciding which rule to apply to a given situation.
- For example, from the primary precept of 'preserve life', the Catholic Church, based on natural moral law, has argued for the immorality of abortion based on the fact that it fits the command in the Ten Commandments 'Do not murder'.
- Similarly, the Catholic Church argues that homosexual sexual acts are immoral because they do not lead to reproduction, another primary precept.

The Four Tiers of Law

- In the writings of Aquinas, there are four different tiers of laws which govern human behaviour in a hierarchy, with certain laws which are above others. They are as follows:
 1. **Eternal law** – the principles and rules made by God which control the entire universe and are only known by God.
 2. **Divine law** – the principles and rules made by God which he has chosen to reveal in the Bible. Examples of this include the Ten Commandments / Sermon on the Mount.
 3. **Natural law** – laws made by God which are not revealed in Scripture, but which humans can discover through their use of reason.
 4. **Human law** – the laws made by humans which govern humans – for example, the laws of a country. The US Constitution is an example of human law.

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¹ Vardy, P and Grosche, P, *The Puzzle of Ethics* (London: Harper Collins), p. 38.

The Doctrine of Double Effect

- While Aquinas held that the primary precepts were **absolute** – they are rules that apply at all times and in all places – he also recognised that sometimes life throws up situations where you do good without also doing bad.
- A classic example is the case of killing an attacker in self-defence. Aquinas has reasoned that it is morally acceptable for an individual to kill in self-defence if their *intention* was to preserve their own life rather than take away another's.
- This came to be known as the **doctrine of double effect**, which holds that a bad act can be an act morally wrong so long as that bad consequence is not intended.

Year 2 Considerations: Proportionalism

The concept of proportionalism is described in detail in the next section. This appears in year 2 of the course to familiarise yourself with it as you are going on to further study!

- As time went on in the 20th century, there has been a noted effort from those who ascribe to natural law theory to adjust natural law theory somewhat.
- Bernard Williams, one such scholar, argued that we should generally follow natural law unless there is a significant reason that would mean it was fair to temporarily set aside the law.
- Therefore, acts are not inherently or **always** evil, assuming there is significant reason to set them aside.
- This is known as proportionalism.
- Proportionalists would hold that in a given situation it becomes clear what is the right course of action.

Key Figures

Aristotle

- Influential famous Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 BCE) posited the idea of eudemonia in his own works.
- Both of these ideas proved hugely influential for St Thomas Aquinas in the work *Summa Theologica*, in which he posited his form of natural law.

St Thomas Aquinas

- The reason Aquinas is considered such an important figure in the history of ethics is his synthesis of the thought of the pre-Christian Aristotle with biblical teaching.
- Aquinas used the teachings of Aristotle in order to formally write what is now remembered as an extremely important theologian.
- His influential works include *Summa Theologica*, in which he posited his 'Five Proofs' including the cosmological and teleological arguments, two arguments which have convinced many philosophers and theologians to this day.
- After the collapse of the ancient Greek and Roman civilisations (the 'classical' period), his works had, for a long time, been almost entirely lost to European civilisation.
- Fortunately, some of his writing had been preserved by Arabic scholars in the East. By the 12th century, these works had gradually begun to spread, in translated form, into Western Europe.
- Due to his keen interest in these translations, Aquinas became a leading figure in a movement known as scholasticism. This was a particular way of doing theology that developed in the 12th century, motivated by the perceived need to systematise all Christian theology and prove that Christian belief were rational. The use of reason was a defining feature of scholasticism, and Aquinas argued about exactly what Church doctrine should be.

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Key Texts

Aristotle *Physics* 113

- In this work, Aristotle posited his idea of telos as being one of the four causes of the world. Telos as being the end or purpose he believed one could observe in the world. Reason behind why things exist within life, i.e. a table exists in order to have the purpose of individuals using it to eat dinner.

Summa Theologica, 1-11, St Thomas Aquinas

- This is the text in which Aquinas famously posited his five proofs of God's existence. It is also the text that contains his ideas on natural moral law.
- It is in this text that he puts forward his key principle of primary precepts and secondary precepts.

Catechism of the Catholic Church

- The Catechism of the Catholic Church is a document in which all of the teachings of the Church are traditionally contained.
- Below are some quotes which highlight the ideas and teachings regarding natural moral law in the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

The natural law is a participation in God's wisdom and goodness by man for whom he is created. It expresses the dignity of the human person and forms the basis of his freedom.

The natural law is immutable, permanent throughout history. The rules that it prescribes are valid. It is a necessary foundation for the erection of moral rules and civil laws.

Romans 1:20

- In this passage St Paul, the author of the Book of Romans, is describing how God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

Romans 2:14–16

- In this passage, St Paul is describing how Gentiles (non-Jews) know the law from their hearts, not from the existing Jewish law, but through their own hearts or conscience. Paul is appealing to the fact that everyone knows the natural moral law because God instilled it in everyone. This latter part is what Aquinas says about ethics.

Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. (Romans 2:14–16)

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Student Checklist

What Do I Know?	No Idea ☹	Some Idea ☺	Good Idea ☺	
What is meant by deontological ethics?				
What is natural law?				
Who posited natural law?				
What is the key precept?				
What are the primary precepts?				
What are the secondary precepts?				
What is the doctrine of double effect?				

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St Thomas Aquinas's Natural Law Theory

The Role of Virtues and Goods in Supporting Moral Behaviour

Overview

To Aquinas, virtues are important things necessary in supporting good moral behaviour.

It is important to remember that virtue is different in Aquinas's understanding from the modern understanding of excellence, it means a moral value – there are key ideas about what virtues are and how they influence moral behaviour. These virtues are based in biblical teaching and are performed (or should be performed) in the interest of the end goal of becoming more like God and acting in accordance with His will.

Further to the discussion of virtues, Aquinas also discusses types of 'goods' and 'actions' and how they relate to different types of virtues.

Key Points

General Points

- Aquinas believed that the ultimate goal of human beings is to be like God.
- The virtues described within Aquinas are different from the virtues of Aristotle.
- Virtues and goods work in different ways within Aquinas's thought, but the ultimate goal is the same – that both goods and virtues should fulfil the human ultimate end of being like God. Human beings to get as close to this as possible.

Three Theological Virtues

- There are three virtues which Aquinas considers to be 'revealed' virtues and which are mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13:4–7;13, which states:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs. Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. Love never fails. But the greatest of these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

- These are known as the theological virtues of faith, hope and love.
- For Aquinas these are virtues that should influence and drive all other virtues and actions discussed below.
- Full fulfilment of these virtues is not possible for a human being in this life, but everyone should strive for them according to Aquinas. Some people may be given these virtues as a particular blessing.
- The four cardinal virtues, however, can and should be practised by anyone.

The Four Cardinal Virtues

- The word 'cardinal' comes from the Latin word 'cardo' – meaning hinge. This is because these are the cardinal virtues. They are the virtues on which morality hinges.
- These four cardinal virtues are:
 - **Prudence** – This is the first cardinal virtue; it is concerned with the intellectual virtue of 'recta ratio agibilium' – right reason shown in practice. It is the virtue of using their God-given reason to correctly ascertain what is the right course of action.
 - **Justice** – This is the second cardinal virtue; it is concerned with the idea of giving people what they justly deserve – their fair share. This makes sense logically to individuals as all human beings appear to have an innate sense of justice ingrained.

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- **Fortitude** – This is the third cardinal virtue, and can be translated in lay terms as courage. It refers to a specific kind of courage – it is concerned with the courage to face trials placed in the path of an individual.
- **Temperance** – This is the fourth cardinal virtue and is concerned specifically with the ability both to resist unrighteous desires and to ensure that one's fulfilment is proportionate. In a sense, it is being able to establish balanced morality.
- These are thought to be virtues which function as the lynchpin to a moral, civilised society. St Thomas envisioned these virtues as being a means to create civilised society. To his mind, for these to happen should everyone adhere to these values.

Types of Acts and Goods

- Aquinas ascribes in his writings different types of acts and different kinds of goods. He distinguishes between **internal** goods and **external** goods.
- Internal goods are the intent behind an action – the goodness intended within the individual making a moral choice.
- External goods are the actions themselves – the choices made by an individual.
- Real goods are goods derived from the correct choices made by a moral agent to fulfil their purpose (telos).
- Apparent goods are things which are perceived to be good but are not, as they are not reasoned by a moral agent and the result of these choices will not aid the telos.
- There are also different kinds of acts – interior acts and exterior acts.
- An interior act is the driving force behind an action – the intent which makes an action possible.
- An exterior act is the term for an actual action. When these two are both correct, the action is good.

Key Figures

St Thomas Aquinas

- As established, St Thomas Aquinas was a thirteenth-century monk whose teaching was based on the Bible in order to be able to use it to navigate unprecedented moral decisions. His work was highly influential.
- It is he who put forward that there are two different kinds of virtues, as positions both the cardinal values and the theological values, and the different kinds of goods.

Key Texts

Summa Theologica, 1-11, St Thomas Aquinas

- This is the text in which Aquinas famously presented his five proofs of God's existence. It is also the text that contains his ideas on natural moral law.
- It is in this text that he also puts forward his ideas about the virtues – both the cardinal virtues and the different types of goods and goods.

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Student Checklist

What Do I Know?	No Idea ☹	Some Idea ☺	Good Idea ☺	
What are the three theological virtues?				
What is the term for the collective virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance?				
What is prudence?				
What is justice?				
What is fortitude?				
What is temperance?				
What is an internal good?				
What is an external good?				
What is a r...od?				
What is an apparent good?				

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St Thomas Aquinas's Natural Law Theory

Application of Theory

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Overview

When examining any kind of ethical theory, one must examine how it is applied in the practical world. Important, practical ethical dilemmas are faced by human beings throughout their lifetime and, therefore, it is important to understand these dilemmas as a result of their interpretation or ideas of their ethical standpoint. For people who ascribe to religions such as Roman Catholicism, natural law plays a key role in teaching and practice on this issue.

For example, many Catholic teachings in their important texts, like the Catechism of the Catholic Church, are influenced by Aquinas and at times even directly reference Aquinas's writings.

Key Points

General Principles

- The two issues which will be examined here are the issues of euthanasia and abortion.
- These are two issues which come under the wider heading of 'medical ethics'.
- Abortion is the medical termination of a pregnancy. It is legal in the United Kingdom if two doctors agree there is sufficient reason for an abortion to take place.
- Euthanasia is the intentional ending of an individual's life or aiding of an individual to end their life, usually as a result of their wishes due to their suffering from a long-term or curable illness.
- Largely concerning these two issues are two wider themes of the sanctity of life and quality of life.
- The sanctity of life is the belief that life is a gift from God and should, therefore, be protected.
- Quality of life is the idea that the value of an individual's life derives from the extent to which or not an individual is experiencing or will experience suffering.

Abortion

- Abortion is a subject of much controversy. It was only made legal in the United Kingdom in 1967, before this it was a criminal offence as part of the Offence against the Person Act (1861). The 1967 Act made abortion legal under certain circumstances.
- The name of this law is telling – it was named such because the foetus was considered to be a person. **Personhood** of the foetus is the crux of this debate.
- Pro-life (i.e. anti-abortion) stances can be justified by appeal to the tenets of natural law theory.
- Two **primary precepts**, 'to preserve life' and 'to reproduce', can be brought to bear on the issue: if we accept that an embryo or foetus is a life, then it has the *potential to become a person*. Then abortion, by destroying it, directly contradicts the precept 'to preserve life'. Furthermore, since it ends a pregnancy, it also directly contradicts the precept 'to reproduce'.
- Furthermore, some people (usually Christians) would argue that it also violates the second commandment of God because it can be viewed as being the breaking of God's law.
- This is usually argued to be a result of certain biblical teachings.
- If one views a foetus as being a human life, then abortion becomes the intentional killing of a human. This violates one of the Ten Commandments, the key teachings which Christians believe were given to humans via Moses on Mount Sinai, as Exodus 20:13 states that 'You shall not kill'.
- It is for this reason that the use of contraception is also considered wrong by many Christians (and other denominations) have equated use of some forms of birth control with the intentional killing of a human life. Some forms which allow for conception but make the womb uninhabitable.
- That said, the **doctrine of double effect** has often been invoked by the Catholic Church in certain special circumstances, usually if, by giving birth, the mother's life is put at risk.

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performing an abortion results in a bad consequence (the death of an unborn child or the mother's life) is good.

- Natural law is often combined with the idea of sanctity of life when concerning about abortion (and also about euthanasia).
- This is the idea that each and every life has *intrinsic* and *absolute* value. Those who believe in the sanctity of life often do so for religious reasons, in the belief that, since life is a gift from God, it is *sacred* and so it is always wrong to end it. Advocates for the sanctity of life are more likely to be against embryo research, IVF, abortion, assisted dying and euthanasia.

Voluntary Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide

- Euthanasia is currently illegal in the United Kingdom; however, there is a great deal of campaigning underway by individuals who are impacted by the issue in an attempt to change this.
- It is currently legal in other countries, such as Switzerland, home of the famous clinic known as Dignitas.
- Assisted suicide is the action of enabling an individual to make the means to end their own life in a peaceful and comfortable manner, usually using drugs.
- It is different from euthanasia in that euthanasia involves the acting agent being other than the dying person; assisted suicide instead is aiding someone to end their own life by action themselves, e.g. providing the medication for someone to end their own life.
- Euthanasia always involves *ending* a life, hence it breaks the primary precept which states that we should not kill. On this basis we might conclude that natural law theory holds euthanasia is *always* wrong.
- Another primary precept which a natural law theorist may bring to bear on this issue is the notion that we should strive to create an orderly, harmonious society. This is the established structure of society, a doctor's role is to save lives. In euthanasia, the doctor is argued to be a disruption of the order of society.
- However, it is worth pausing a moment and considering the **doctrine of double effect**.
- This holds that certain actions with bad consequences are admissible so long as the intention is about good consequences.
- Is it possible that some forms of euthanasia would satisfy this criterion?
- Here is one case which just might: sometimes, when faced with a patient who has no hope of recovery, doctors have been known to administer a fatal dose of painkillers.
- The doctor's intention is not, of course, to kill the patient (a bad consequence) but to end to their suffering (a good consequence). In this instance, within the doctrine of double effect, natural law, euthanasia via double effect may be considered to be acceptable.

Key Texts

Catechism of the Catholic Church

- This is an important document for Catholics within the Catholic faith.
- This document contains significant reference to the works of Aquinas as a source of moral teaching.

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Student Checklist

What Do I Know?	No Idea ☹	Some Idea ☺	Good Idea ☺	
What is abortion?				
What is euthanasia?				
In what ways does natural law challenge the practice of abortion?				
Can natural law ever support abortion?				
In what ways does natural law challenge the practice of euthanasia?				
Can natural law ever support euthanasia?				
What is the impact of the doctrine of double effect?				

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Practice Exam-style Question

1. (a) Explain the importance of virtues in Aquinas's natural law.

HINTS

In your answer you should:

- exhibit awareness and comprehension of relevant beliefs, including:
 - the key ideas of natural law, including the primary and key principles
 - the key ideas of virtues in natural law
 - the role of virtues as being integral in good moral behaviour

- (b) *The ideas of natural law make it impossible to apply to modern societies.*
Evaluate this statement.

HINTS

In your answer you should:

- evaluate and assess facets of religious approaches and differing views and impact, such as:
 - application of natural law to abortion
 - application of natural law to euthanasia
 - how the virtues impact these discussions
 - how the precepts impact these discussions

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Theme Three (Part 1): Teleologic Situation Ethics

G₂ L₁ O₁

Agape	The Christian principle of unconditional love.
Consequentialist	A form of ethical theory which is focused on the consequence of an action.
Four Principles	The ways which Fletcher gives the followers of his logic of situation ethics to practice.
Joseph Fletcher	The founder of Christian situation ethics.
Personalism	Stimulated by the needs and importance of people in a situation, rather than moral laws.
Positivism	The idea that the moral agent has to positively assert what is right and act accordingly.
Pragmatism	Morality should be practical and the result should achieve the best result, which is love.
Relativism	All situations should be assessed on how best to determine the right action through following moral laws which use the words 'right' and 'wrong'.
Sexual Ethics	The moral or ethical practice related to sexual practice.
Situation Ethics	A form of Christian ethical practice which puts the emphasis on the principle of agape.
Six Propositions	The six ideas which Fletcher believes should support the principle of agape.
Teleological	A type of ethical practice which focuses on the end or purpose of an action.
Telos	The Greek term for end or purpose.

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Joseph Fletcher's Situation Ethics: Other Forms of Ethics and Accepta

Overview

Situation ethics is a form of teleological ethics.

The word 'teleological' comes from the Greek root 'telos', which means 'end' or 'purpose'. Models which are considered to be teleological are focused on the purposed outcome. Situation ethics is a form of normative ethics, suggesting that an action is good as long as it works towards something that is considered to be good.

Within situation ethics, this end goal is agape. This is a Christian idea about love – selfless love. It is on this principle that Fletcher argues moral actions should be taken. If an action is based on love, then it can be said to be moral.

Key Points

General

- Joseph Fletcher wrote about situation ethics after J A T Robinson, whose ideas of situationalism preceded Fletcher's.
- In his book *Situation Ethics* (1966), Fletcher put forward his ideas. Unlike some conservative elements of the Church, Fletcher believed that social change occurred. His writing of his text (and ethical theory) meant that the Church needed to navigate moral issues.
- Equally, however, he did not think a life unconstrained by any moral norms was desirable. What was needed instead was a marriage of the old with the new – traditional Christian ethics that would make it fit for a world very different from the one Gospel writers had lived in. What was needed was a **situational** approach. This is because as the moral rulings will change relative to the situation.
- Fletcher puts forward that the conscience of a Christian will help them to decide which situation best serves the interest of agape.
- In the teachings of situationalism, as long as the interests of agape, unconditional love, are served, an action can be said to be moral. From agape, the correct way to act in a situation is determined. For example, if lying in a certain situation is considered to serve the interests of agape, then lying is moral, even if the Bible says it is wrong.
- Fletcher considered situationalism a middle way between two equally unattractive extremes (Aristotle considered each virtue to lie between two vices). One is an ethic that holds to fixed guiding moral principles, a position which maintains people should be free to do as they please in any given situation.
- Fletcher termed this approach **antinomianism**, which literally translates from the Greek as 'against the law'.
- At the opposite end of the spectrum are those moral philosophies which hold that moral actions should always be made in accordance with a set of strict rules or commands. Fletcher argued against this because, like the legal system, it is concerned with the proper application of rules rather than with the interests of agape.
- Situation ethics is a moral relativist form of ethical thought as it posits that the moral status of an action is dependent on the situation; morality in this case is not fixed or absolute when compared to traditionally Christian viewpoints of ethical practice such as the Ten Commandments.
- It is a consequentialist theory of ethical practice as it is dependent on the consequences of an action rather than adhering to principles which govern actions regardless of the outcome.

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Moral extreme

Middle ground

Antinomianism

The view that there are no moral laws or rules. People should instead act spontaneously in each situation to decide what is right.

Situationalism

Fletcher argues that situation ethics is not antinomianism because individuals have 'the ethical maxims of his community and its heritage' to draw on. It does not become legalism because these maxims can be abandoned if agape love is better achieved in another way.

Agape: One of the Greek words for love. It is an attitude of generosity and respect for others. It is the love Jesus showed humanity.

'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'

Biblical Evidence for Situation Ethics


- The concept of agape underpins both Fletcher's and Robinson's arguments on situation ethics.
- There are a number of verses from the Bible which can be used to support the view. The Bible continually emphasised the need for people to show compassion, love and mercy. It sends a very clear message of forgiveness.
- Agape is argued by Robinson to have basis in the following biblical passages:
 - When Jesus declared that the 'the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath'. This meant that strict rules regarding what should not be done on the Sabbath could be broken where it will best serve others.
 - When Jesus heals individuals with leprosy, instead of considering following the law that they are unclean and sinners, and, therefore, should not be touched (**Luke 17:14**).
 - When Jesus saved a woman from being stoned to death by declaring, 'Whoever is without sin, let them throw the first stone' (**John 8:7**). Jesus is showing a situationalist approach. If the woman would be following the law, it would be hypocritical and unfair.

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- Throughout the Bible, numerous references are made to the importance of ministry it persists as a central theme and guiding force behind moral action. The tradition of the Jewish elders and Pharisees as depicted in the Gospels.
 - In **Luke 10: 25–37**, Jesus delivers the famous parable of the good Samaritan. He teaches that those who the listening Jewish audience would expect to be his race hated by the local Jewish people of the time, making this choice of listeners.
 - He told this parable in answer to the question regarding what someone should do to love their neighbour. This indicates that within the teachings of Jesus, one of the most important things is to show love and care for those in need
 - An excerpt of this passage follows:


 In reply Jesus said: 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going the same way, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But when the Samaritan came where the man was, and when he saw him, he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. He put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii[c] and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

'Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?'

The expert in the law replied, 'The one who had mercy on him.'

Jesus told him, 'Go and do likewise.'

- In 1 Corinthians 13:4–8, one of the most well-known passages in the New Testament elaborates on the Christian ideal of love. Paul compares the eternal nature of love with the concepts of prophecy, language and knowledge.
- St Paul is an important figure in early Christian teaching, whose teachings in the New Testament continue to be influential in Christian circles to this day.

 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not easily angered, it does not keep a record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. Where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

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Key Figures

Joseph Fletcher

- Joseph Fletcher developed Robinson's ideas as he too felt that Christian ethics needed a more flexible approach.
- Fletcher's approach towards Christian situation ethics is posed as a midway point between legalistic ethics and antinomianism.

J A T Robinson

- Robinson's works on 'man come of age' ethics preceded Fletcher's work and introduced themes of the importance of agape and the need for a more flexible approach.
- He introduced the idea of applying the idea of agape in order to enable Christian ethics to be more flexible.
- His ideas centred around the Bible verse Matthew 22:39, which is where Jesus gave his Greatest Commandment to love your neighbour as yourself.

Key Texts

Situation Ethics: The New Morality

- This is the text published in 1997 in which Joseph Fletcher put forward his theory of situation ethics.
- It is in this text that he outlines his ideas regarding the working principles and putting forward and providing practical regulation for situation ethics.

Luke 10:25–37

- This is an account in the New Testament where Jesus specifically teaches his followers about love – regardless of who their neighbour is. He does this by using the example of the Samaritan.
- The Samaritans were, at the time of teaching of this passage, a group of people who were not Jews (the audience of this parable).
- Therefore, by framing the helper in the story as being a Samaritan, rather than a Jew, the natural assumption, Jesus is teaching his followers that agape love shows love across divisions within society.



1 Corinthians 13

- This is a letter written by St Paul to the church in Corinth during the time of the apostles.
- It details specifically the characteristics of Christian agape love, including patience, kindness and forgiveness.

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Student Checklist

What Do I Know?	No Idea ☹	Some Idea ☺	Good Idea ☺	
What is situation ethics?				
What is ag... 				
What is antinomianism?				
What is situationalism?				
What is legalism?				
What does 1 Corinthians 1... at 12 				
What does Luke 10:25-37 teach?				

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Joseph Fletcher's Situation Ethics

The Principles as a Means of Assessment

Overview

The principle of agape is a fairly general one which is difficult to put into practice. To simply say that love must always be served is too vague and too flexible. There is much ethical disagreement among those attempting to follow this ethical method. Fletcher developed rules which could be used as a yardstick to gauge the approach. Whether or not it serves agape.

For this reason, Fletcher developed a series of **principles** and **propositions** which could be used as a yardstick to gauge the approach. Whether or not it serves agape.

Key Points

General Points

- The basic principle of situation ethics is the principle of serving agape.
- Agape is a particular kind of love – selfless love.
- This is the kind of love which is referred to in the Bible in Matthew 22:39 where the second Commandment is given – to 'Love your neighbour as yourself'.
- This principle is hugely general and could leave the theory vulnerable to manipulation. People could serve their own interests under the guise of agape. It is also a relatively vague principle. The idea that love should always be served does little in the way of laying out a clear and practical set of principles for adherents to follow.
- For this reason, Fletcher developed two sets of principles and propositions designed to be practical in moral situations and enable people to live out this form of ethical decision-making.
- Fletcher argues that there is only one thing that is intrinsically good: agape.
- This is important as it defines two important points about situation ethics.
- The first is that love is the end of all actions. It is an intrinsic, not an instrumental good. Love is not used in the pursuit of another idea or concept.
- It simply is the sole guiding purpose behind all actions a person makes.
- The second point is that identifying this form of love as an end in itself allows people to stand against their own ethical principles or sensibilities.
- Therefore, while someone might intensely dislike and disagree with another person's choice, they should still love agape love for them when considering their choices in any ethically difficult situation.

Four Working Principles

- In order to help those who wished to put Christian situation ethics into practice, Fletcher put forward four working principles in order to aid the implementation of situation ethics.
- These are things which moral choices ethically should involve and are intrinsically good. They are practical and applicable principles against which individuals wishing to practise situation ethics can measure their moral choices in a given situation.
- These four principles are central to his discussion of situation ethics.

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- The four working principles are as follows:

	Fletcher's Four Working Principles	Explanation
1.	Pragmatism	Moral demands should be practical and achieve a result, which is love.
2.	Relativism	All situations should be assessed on how best to solve them rather than through following moral laws which use a one-size-fits-all approach.
3.	Positivism	Being able to say that 'God is love' on the basis of religious experience. The moral agent has to decide, based on their own experience, that love is the most important thing of all. ²
4.	Personalism	Love is the most important thing of all. It is the needs and importance of the individual that determine the demands of moral laws.

Six Fundamental Principles

- Fletcher put forward six fundamental principles (sometimes called 'propositions') as a basis for situation ethics. These are intended to show how **agape** should be applied in different ethical situations.
- The propositions reveal a lot about situation ethics – for example, proposition 1 justifies the means.
- Therefore, this is a form of consequentialist ethics, also known as teleological ethics, where the outcome of a moral action rather than the intent behind the action itself is what matters.
- Furthermore, these are intentionally directed towards the defining concept of situation ethics: love.
- Conversely, the four principles which should be applied to moral choices.
- These six propositions are as follows:

	Fundamental Proposition	Explanation
1.	'Only one thing is intrinsically good; namely love: nothing else at all'	The only intrinsically good thing is love. Love is not instrumentally good because it works towards an end.
2.	'The ruling norm of Christian decision is love: nothing else'	The Jewish laws have been broken because they do not show love to one's neighbour as much as to follow the law.
3.	'Love and justice are the same, for justice is love distributed, nothing else'	Love and justice are the same thing. It is what man what he owed and must do to help him to decide how to deal with different people.
4.	'Love wills the neighbour's good, whether we like him or not'	Love should be shown regardless of whether the other person or not. It is not about the relationship or love in the past but about showing agape and having a good will towards the other.
5.	'Only the end justifies the means, nothing else'	If love is the outcome of our actions then the only actions taken to achieve this are justified. Only the outcome that matters.
6.	'Love's decisions are made situationally, not prescriptively'	Decisions must be made based on the situation that specific factors can be taken into account. Rules should not be made on the basis of what to behave.

² Vardy, C and Vardy P, Ethics Matters (London: SCM Press, 2012), p. 126.

Key Figures



Joseph Fletcher

- Joseph Fletcher developed Robinson's ideas as he too felt that a more flexible approach.
- Fletcher's approach towards Christian situation ethics is posed against legalistic ethics and antinomianism.

Key Texts

Situation Ethics: The New Morality

- This is the text published in 1997 in which Joseph Fletcher put forward his theory.
- It is in this text that he outlines his ideas regarding the working principles and putting forward and providing practical regulation for situation ethics.

Student Checklist

What Do I Know?	No Idea ☹	Some Idea ☺	Good Idea ☺
What is the 'boss principle' of situation ethics?			
What is pragmatism?			
What is relativism?			
What is positivism?			
What is personalism?			
What are the six fundamental principles?			

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Joseph Fletcher's Situation Ethics

Application of the Theory

Overview

As with every other ethical theory, we must see how this theory is applied. Situation ethics is no different – one could argue that within situation ethics it is even more so. It is an ethical system which revolves around specific situations.

Two examples which will be used in order to illustrate the use of situation ethics are homosexual relationships and polyamorous relationships.

Key Points

General Points

- Sexual ethics and romantic ethics have traditionally caused a great deal of controversy. Within Christian ethical circles and societies they continue to be controversial and certain types of relationships are not permitted.
- Within Christian ethical circles, traditionally it has been held that sex should only be practised by heterosexual married couples. This is based on multiple Old Testament verses and 20:22–24, which teach that only heterosexual sexual unions are permissible sexual relations.
- Furthermore, while Jesus gave little teaching on homosexuality in the New Testament, his stance on the monogamous nature of marriage, which he emphasised was a union of two people only, which can be read as a teaching against polyamory.
- However, many people have struggled with feelings of same-sex attraction which do not reconcile with Christian teaching on sexuality. This has led to a great deal of controversy. Teaching has also traditionally been at the centre of society in the UK, meaning that homosexual relationships were not legal until 1967.
- Polyamory is not illegal, but it is generally not accepted within society. It is certainly today it would not be considered to be the norm.
- Situation ethics is a form of Christian ethical practice, however, that could be argued that some types of relationships are not wrong despite biblical teaching.
- When one applies the principle of agape, the situation ethicist would argue that if a relationship being upheld within the relationship then it would be permissible.

Homosexual Relationships

- The basic, or ruling, principle of situation ethics is the principle of serving agape (love).
- Within traditional Christian teaching, homosexual relationships had been considered wrong. For example, within the realm of natural law, this was considered due to the procreative purpose of sex. God. It is considered to be worship of God to fulfil and follow biblical commandments.
- It could also be considered to be a violation of the precept of reproduction, meaning that contraception, as with homosexual relations there is no chance of natural reproduction.
- However, situation ethics takes a different stance. Situation ethicists might argue that the Biblical teaching regarding homosexual relationships may be more based in the attitudes of the Bible writers rather than on the will of God.
- A situation ethicist would be highly likely to accept a homosexual relationship if it supported the principle of agape.

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Polyamorous Relationships

- Polyamory is the practice of partaking in multiple romantic relationships simultaneously with the consent of all parties involved.
- For example, Bob and Jane could be married, but Jane could also have another husband. Bob may also have another partner. All those involved are happy with the arrangement and are aware of the other partners involved.
- There is a huge variety in the way in which polyamory is practised, so the definition is a generalisation.
- Polyamory was a generally accepted practice in Old Testament times. For example, characters such as Abraham, Jacob, David and Solomon all had multiple wives. It should be noted that this generally tended to only extend to men – women's multiple husbands are not featured.
- However, Genesis 2:24 does state that 'for this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh' – note the continual use of the singular 'one' that while polyamory is permitted (arguably for cultural reasons) within the marriage, the ideal is being between just one man and one woman.
- However, situation ethicists would not necessarily see things as black and white as long as love is served selflessly within a relationship, and all members of the relationship are respected and valued, then a polygamous relationship is permissible.
- However, some situation ethicists might point out that this still may not be the best arrangement as it might not be happy in a relationship where there are only two people involved, so it might be better to have love among multiple romantic partners.
- It also leaves the door open for jealous emotions more readily than monogamy.
- It is also important within polyamorous relationships that the motivations behind the relationship cannot be carried out so that sexual benefit can be felt by one individual enjoying the relationship. Consent by all is important, otherwise this is simply cheating.

Key Texts

Leviticus 18:22

- 'You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination.'

Genesis 2:24

- 'For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.'

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Student Checklist

What Do I Know?	No Idea ☹	Some Idea ☺	Good Idea ☺	
What is the traditionally accepted view of sexual relationships in Christian teaching?				
How is this related to the primary precepts of natural law?				
What is homosexuality?				
How might situation ethics support homosexuality?				
What is polyamory?				
How might situation ethics support polyamory?				
How might situation ethics oppose polyamory?				

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Practice Exam-style Question

1. (a) Explain how situation ethics can be applied practically.

HINTS

In your answer you should:

- exhibit awareness and comprehension of relevant beliefs, including
 - the key ideas of situation ethics
 - the agape principle
 - the six propositions and the four principles

- (b) 'Situation ethics can be used to justify unbiblical sexual ethics.'
Evaluate this statement.

HINTS

In your answer you should:

- evaluate and assess facets of religious approaches and differing ideas and impact, such as:
 - examples of situations where situation ethics might contradict biblical teaching
 - the use of the principles and propositions
 - the role of agape in decision-making, and its link to the teaching of Jesus

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Theme Three (Part 2): Teleologic Utilitarianism

G₂ L₁ O

Act Utilitarianism	The form of utilitarianism that holds that the right action is the one that produces the greatest happiness for the greatest number; this is more flexible utilitarianism, depending on individual actions.
Consequentialist	This is a form of ethics which is concerned with the results of an action. In contrast, duty-based ethics is not concerned with the consequences of an action, only the intent.
Harm Principle	The principle introduced by John Stuart Mill to utilitarianism that the amount of suffering allowed.
Hedonism	From the Greek word for pleasure, 'hēdonē', it is a philosophy that pleasure is the ultimate good in life.
Higher Pleasures	Intellectual pleasures that Mill considered to have higher value than physical pleasures, such as philosophy.
Jeremy Bentham	Founder of utilitarian thought.
John Stuart Mill	Utilitarian thinker who posited act utilitarianism.
Lower Pleasures	Pleasures that serve our base instincts such as food or sex.
Majority	The largest group or percentage.
Pleasure	The experience of a positive emotion such as happiness.
Reason	The human ability to use logic in order to make a decision.
Rule Utilitarianism	The theory which holds that the right action is the one which produces the highest number while minimising suffering for the greatest number. It is a form of utilitarianism which is far more governed by rules.
The Utility Principle	The principle that the most moral action is one which creates the greatest utility for the greatest number.
Utilitarianism	The moral philosophy concerned with creating the greatest happiness for the greatest number.

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Jeremy Bentham's Act Utilitarianism

Happiness as the Basis of Moral Action

Overview

Utilitarianism is one of the most famous and popular modern forms of ethical philosophy. It maximises the greatest good for the greatest number of people – majority rules, so to speak.

There are multiple forms of utilitarianism, but the two main forms are known as act utilitarianism. Act utilitarianism was first posited by Jeremy Bentham, followed by John Stuart Mill.

Key Points

General Points

- Utilitarianism is a form of secular ethics, although it is not totally excluded from the religious sphere. It is centred on the key ideas of happiness/pleasure and pain. It was first developed by Bentham and further developed by John Stuart Mill and others.
- Utilitarianism is also a form of teleological ethics as this is a form of ethics which focuses on the consequence of an action.
- Classical utilitarianism was born as a result of, and influenced by, the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment was a cultural and intellectual movement in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which challenged the understanding of morality as being solely derived from religious faith and sacred texts. Other cultural factors included the Industrial Revolution and the rise of empirical science.
- This is reflected in Bentham's focus on empirical human experience and deducing the best way for humans to work to achieve happiness.
- One useful way to explain and engage with the ideas of utilitarianism is by using the trolley problem. This is a hypothetical dilemma which asks whether it is better to allow a trolley to crash into five people or to use the lever to switch the tracks and only kill one person. No action would be taken if the trolley is on the track with five people, but taking action to save those five would involve intentionally causing the death of one person.

Bentham's Utility Principle

- At the very foundation of utilitarian ethics are the concepts of pain and pleasure.
- Bentham is arguing that being ruled by pain and pleasure is just the way human nature is; we must seek pleasure, and we must avoid pain. He goes on to argue that acting in a way which is not based on decision-making (that is, how we decide what to do) on anything else would be irrational.
- The utility principle is the means by which this is communicated within Bentham's utilitarianism.
- Having made this claim about human nature (these are sometimes called *desires*), Bentham goes on to make his *maximising claim* (he wants to maximise pleasure and minimise pain). This is the *principle of utility* which states that when faced with an ethical decision, we should choose the action which *maximises pleasure and minimises pain for the greatest number of people*.

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Bentham's Act Utilitarianism and Hedonic Calculus

- The general principle of utilitarianism is that an act can be considered to be morally right if the action generates the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people – utility, which was developed by Jeremy Bentham.
- To that end he devised what has come to be known as the hedonic calculus, a method for calculating quantitatively (in terms of quantities, i.e. numbers) the right course of action (a balance of pleasure above all else; like many other terms, it comes from the Greek; in this case it means 'pleasure').
- Bentham listed seven factors which must be taken into account when calculating the utility of an act will produce. They included '**intensity**' (the strength of a pleasure), '**duration**' (how long the pleasure will last) and '**fecundity**' (how likely one pleasure was to lead to more pleasures).
- The calculus is a distinctive feature of Bentham's version of utilitarianism.
- Significantly, it maintains that ethical decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis, rather than utilitarianism.
- The seven factors of the hedonic calculus are listed below along with their definitions.

	Factor of Happiness	Definition
1	Intensity	How intense or weak the happiness is
2	Duration	How long the happiness will last for
3	Certainty	How likely or unlikely the happiness is to occur
4	Propinquity/Remoteness	How near or remote in time the happiness is
5	Fecundity/Richness	How likely or unlikely the happiness is to result in further happiness
6	Purity	How free from pain the happiness is
7	Extent	How far the happiness will reach

Happiness as the Basis of Morality: Analysis: Strengths

- Utilitarianism on the surface appears to work well, and is generally accepted as a moral theory.
- Maximising happiness and minimising pain is arguably how most people already live. This makes it practical and relevant to people's lives. This also makes it an acceptable ethical theory.
- It would only allow extreme actions in extreme situations. It could, for example, allow the torture of one person if it would prevent five others from being tortured. Such a theory, however, but act utilitarianism provides the flexibility to respond in the most appropriate way.
- Act utilitarianism's focus on the majority is similar to democracy, which is widely accepted as the best way to govern a country. It ensures the wants of a minority are not allowed to dominate the majority.

Happiness as the Basis of Morality: Analysis: Challenges

- Utilitarianism on the surface appears to work well, and is generally accepted as a moral theory. However, it has one relatively glaring flaw – it relies on the goodness of people to do the best thing for the majority if the minor. This is an issue which is not exclusive to utilitarianism, however, and can be addressed by other different ethical theories.
- Happiness cannot be quantified (made measurable) in the way the hedonic calculus allows. It is far more complex and subtle than the hedonic calculus allows.
- If the greatest good for the greatest number is a moral atrocity, then under act utilitarianism it would be justified. This is a problem which is attempted to be solved by rule utilitarianism, as proposed by John Stuart Mill.

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- There is no protection of justice for minority groups in society.
- Without knowledge of the future, humans are unable to know, or accurately measure, how much happiness will be achieved through their actions.
- It also does not consider the motive or intention of individuals to have any moral value.
- Different people have different opinions on what will be most pleasurable. There is no way of knowing how much pain might be sufferable for a later benefit. There is a lot of subjectivity about what is the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people.
- It is too simplistic to apply to the complexities of ethical decision-making and the situations that arise; one principle is not sufficient for this.
- Other values are arguably more important than happiness, such as justice or equality.

Key Figures



Jeremy Bentham

- Bentham was a British philosopher, juror and writer who posited the principle of utility. He believed that the most ethical action is the one which posits the principle of utility. An ethical thing achieves the highest amount of happiness to the greatest number of people.
- Bentham was an atheist and developed an ethical theory which was based on the principle of utility, rather than belief in God.

Student Checklist

What Do I Know?	No Idea ☹	Some Idea ☺	Good Idea ☺	
What is utilitarianism?				
What is the importance of pleasure in utilitarianism?				
What is the utility principle?				
What is the hedonic calculus?				
What are the strengths of utilitarianism?				
What are the weaknesses of utilitarianism?				

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John Stuart Mill's Development of Utilitarianism

Types of Pleasure, Harm Principle and

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Overview

Utilitarianism can be considered to widely be a very successful ethical theory, as discussed, issues within the original formulation that beg amendments – not used to justify horrific acts as long as it benefits the majority.

It is in answer to these issues that John Stuart Mill posited his form of utilitarianism, which added amendments of sorts to Bentham's form of utilitarianism. Important features include the harm principle and the differentiation between different kinds of pleasures.

Key Points

General Points

- Bentham's utilitarianism, while popular, has a fairly glaring issue – namely the theory can be used to justify wholly unethical behaviour. This issue is addressed in Mill's utilitarianism.
- This was a theory posited after, and influenced directly by, the theory of act utilitarianism.
- It was developed by John Stuart Mill, who published his work *Utilitarianism*. Mill's ideas of utilitarianism, as his father was a great friend of Jeremy Bentham himself.
- Mill found issues with Bentham's formulation of the utilitarian ethical system. He had his own, largely influenced by Bentham, but with a few key differences which he addressed. Some issues within act utilitarianism.
- He introduced the idea of differing kinds of pleasures, which had differing levels of utility. Ideas such as the harm principle, designed to address what Mill felt were issues with Bentham's theory. He also felt that not every single action needed to be individually assessed and that the harm principle was a useful tool to avoid too much flexibility in the use of classical utilitarianism. This was a way to stopping misuse of the utilitarian theory.
- It is somewhat of a hybrid between deontological and teleological ethics as it focuses on the result but also with the intended end of the action.

John Stuart Mill's Rule Utilitarianism

- Bentham was Mill's godfather, although the two men had rather different characterisations. Mill, was himself a utilitarian philosopher and economist who was keen that he should carry on his intellectual legacy.
- As a result, Mill's childhood was devoted almost entirely to learning and he was very much into utilitarianism from a young age.
- Mill's sensibilities as a result of his rigorously academic childhood are reflected in his theory of pleasure, and, therefore, led to his view on putting forward what came to be known as higher pleasures.
- For Bentham, all pleasures were in the same sense equal, it was simply a case of **quantity** of pleasure.
- Mill, on the other hand, was much more concerned with the **quality** of pleasure.
- One way to describe the difference between the two theories is the old adage 'it's not the quantity of pleasure that counts, it's the quality'.

Higher and Lower Pleasures

- Mill's thought was that there is something different about pleasures of the mind, such as reading or listening to music, and bodily pleasures such as sex or drink. It's the difference between a five-course dinner prepared in a Michelin-starred restaurant, and a 99p cheeseburger from a discount fast-food chain.

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- Mill differentiates between different kinds of pleasures as a result, positing two kinds of pleasures:
 - **Higher pleasures:** Pleasures which help people to reach their full intellectual and moral potential.
 - **Lower pleasures:** Pleasures which fulfil the base, instinctual wants of human nature.
- Examples of higher pleasures include philosophy and academics, while lower pleasures include food and sex.
- Mill states the test for determining whether a pleasure is of a higher quality than another: 'Pleasure P1 is more desirable than pleasure P2 if: all or almost all people who have experienced both give a decided preference to P1, irrespective of any feeling that they ought to prefer it.'
- Therefore, if we take this and apply it to an ethical situation – while the greater good is achieved within a corporation by taking advantage of the environment, this is a lower quality pleasure. The need of greed. The corporation should instead choose to care for the environment, a higher pleasure.

The 'Harm Principle'

- Another part of Bentham's philosophy that Mill rejected outright was the idea of utilitarianism being based on the calculation of happiness.
- Mill argued that happiness was 'much too complex and indefinite' to be calculated.
- Therefore, he thought rules should be developed which guide moral agents as to what is right.
- These **rules** would be developed through trial and error, rather than the utility principle. For example, hitting others nearly always causes unhappiness, so we could develop the rule that we should not hit others.
- Followed en masse by everyone in society, these rules will generate, on the whole, the least pain for the greatest number of people.
- Note the amendment made here to the utility principle – the actions of an individual are judged on whether they are probable to cause **harm or pain** to others. This is known as the harm principle.
- This solves the issue of utilitarianism being able to be used to justify atrocities. For example, the actions of the Nazis in Second World War Germany – under actual utilitarianism, if it benefited the majority this could theoretically be justified. The harm principle states that this cannot be.

Types of Pleasure, Harm Principle and Use of Rules: Analysis

- Act utilitarianism recognises that we have a strong internal conviction that an action is right because it produces happiness – other principles are also important and need to be considered.
- Rule utilitarianism is easier to apply in ethical decision-making than act utilitarianism as it has rules to follow.
- It removes the need to work out how best to apply the principle of utility in each situation, which is difficult and time-consuming.
- It still allows some flexibility with the notion of strong and weak utilitarianism.

Types of Pleasure, Harm Principle and Use of Rules: Analysis

- Henry Sidgwick raises questions about how moral agents are supposed to be able to distinguish between higher and lower pleasures. Mill does not provide a way to categorise pleasures, so such a categorisation would presumably be subjective.
- The introduction of more regulated utilitarianism (i.e. the harm principle and the use of rules) removes some of the benefits of situationalism and consequentialism. There are drawbacks experienced by those who were using the principle of utility may not be the case with rule utilitarianism.
- There is the difficulty of knowing when rules can be broken in order to achieve the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. This means the need for length of time has not been removed – simply shifted.

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Key Figures



John Stuart Mill

- John Stuart Mill was the godson of Bentham and the founder of a new version of utilitarianism.
- He was raised on utilitarian ideals but published his own version of utilitarianism, which addressed some of the issues left by Bentham's formulation of the ethical theory.
- To the theory, he contributed the development of the principle of utility, which states that the right action is the one that produces the greatest amount of pleasure for the greatest number of people. He also added the idea that pleasures should be measured in terms of their quality, not just their quantity.

Student Checklist

What do you know?	No Idea ☹	Some Idea ☺	Good Idea ☺
What is rule utilitarianism?			
Who posited this theory?			
What is the difference between higher and lower pleasures?			
What is an example of a higher pleasure?			
What is an example of a lower pleasure?			
What is the principle of utility?			
How does rule utilitarianism attempt to improve on act utilitarianism?			

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Bentham's Act Utilitarianism and Utilitarianism: Application of the

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Overview

In order to evaluate any ethical theory works, we must test it by real-life dilemmas.

In order to do this, this section will be occupied with the issue of the use of animals for purposes of medical development and the issue of the use of nuclear weapons as these are somewhat controversial.

Key Points

General Points

- Utilitarianism – both act and rule utilitarianism can be applied to real-life situations in order to evaluate the methods of ethical theories work in real-life situations.
- Scientific experimentation is the intentional use of animals as test subjects for medical development to ensure they are safe for human use – quite literally, they are being used for the development of scientific endeavour.
- This might be done for a variety of reasons.
- Within the medical sphere, experimentation on animals may aid scientific endeavours to cure diseases which are killing human beings.
- It may enable scientists to develop new strategies for treating current illnesses based on theories they may have on the animal counterparts. This has the possibility of developing new treatments to save countless human lives or improve the lives of those previously impaired.
- Nuclear weapons are a form of weapons which cause mass destruction. They are used to kill and devastate the planet and populations.
- A historical example of the use of nuclear weapons is the bombing of Japan during the Second World War, the results of which are still felt today. Clearly, nuclear weapons have the capacity to cause a huge amount of suffering.
- At the time of writing, nine states have declared possession of nuclear warheads, including the UK, the USA, China and Russia.

The Use of Animal Experimentation for Medical Research

- Animal experimentation is the use of animals as subjects for specific testing of products or medication to ensure they are safe for human use.
- The attitude of utilitarianism towards the use of animals for experimentation is generally negative, with a couple of potential exceptions.
- For example, Mill would argue that using an animal for experimentation for pleasure would be serving lower pleasure (vanity). However, using an animal for scientific experimentation is considered serving higher pleasures, such as scientific research or the higher pleasures of knowledge.
- Specifically for Bentham, the use of animals for medical research would depend on whether the amount of happiness to be gained will be greater than the amount of pain to be suffered – the quantity of pleasure and happiness produced must outweigh the suffering.
- For example, the suffering of one animal may result in the joy of millions of people. The pain and suffering result in a cure for a disease which was causing widespread suffering.
- The ethical consideration here is as follows: which is more important – the pain to the animal or the potential benefit for humans?
- Both Bentham and Mill considered that all suffering and all happiness must be counted equally.
- Interestingly, both Bentham and Mill believed that importance should be given to the suffering of the animal that not only should their suffering be considered but that it cannot be ignored.

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- Therefore, within utilitarian thinking the use of animals for experimentation is justified in the case that the suffering of the animal(s) is minimised and outweighs the medical treatment developed.
- Having said this, however, it is far more flexible regarding animal testing for cosmetic purposes – to which a utilitarian would answer a resounding no.

The Use of Nuclear Weapons as a Deterrent

- The main justification given for the possession of nuclear weapons by a state is generally **deterrence** – the argument is made that since other states also possess nuclear weapons, in order to remain viably defensible a state must possess nuclear weapons also. The idea is that neither will use them, but will be engaged in a stakes unending Mexican standoff.
- As utilitarianism is a consequentialist form of ethics, in order to examine it in the context of nuclear weapons we must examine the consequences.
- Theoretically, if the consequences are positive – the avoidance of war, and, therefore, peace for a majority of people – then under both act and rule utilitarianism nuclear weapons as a deterrent could be morally fine.
- However, there can be accidents caused by nuclear power which can lead to nuclear war.
- This is an important factor specifically within rule utilitarianism (for example, rule utilitarians have issues in light of events such as the Hiroshima bombing in 1945).
- Nuclear weapons effectively ended the conflict between the USA and Japan during the Second World War. An act utilitarian would argue that the use of nuclear weapons in this instance was justified as the harm to the majority (worldwide) was minimised as it ended the conflict.
- However, others may point out that this did not occur in a vacuum – they might argue that the harm has been endured by innocents and their families since the dropping of the bomb. The good done by ending the war. Theoretically (although it is unlikely – and the harm caused by nuclear weapons is undeniably vast and far-reaching. The repercussions are still felt by descendants today, almost 100 years later. The harm cannot be undone.
- The principle of no harm would probably lead a rule utilitarian to oppose the use of nuclear weapons as the harm caused by nuclear weapons is undeniably vast and far-reaching. The repercussions are still felt by descendants today, almost 100 years later. The harm cannot be undone.

Student Checklist

What Do I Know?	No Idea ☹	Some Idea ☺	Good Idea ☺
What is animal experimentation?			
Why is this done within the medical sphere?			
What would be the view of an act utilitarian?			
What would be the view of a rule utilitarian?			
What is nuclear deterrence?			
What would be the view of an act utilitarian?			
What would be the view of a rule utilitarian?			

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Practice Exam-style Question

4. (a) Explain the theory of classical utilitarianism.

HINTS

In your answer you should:

- exhibit awareness and comprehension of relevant beliefs, including
 - the key ideas of Jeremy Bentham
 - the utility principle
 - the hedonic calculus

- (b) *'Utilitarianism is flawed because it can justify horrific acts.'*
Evaluate this statement.

HINTS

In your answer you should:

- evaluate and assess facets of religious approaches and differing beliefs and impact, such as:
 - key issues with Bentham's utility principle
 - the difference between classical utilitarianism and rule utilitarianism
 - the key ideas of John Stuart Mill
 - the harm principle
 - applications of utilitarian ethics to real-life examples



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Mark Scheme

AO1

Band	Marks	Aims
5	21–25 (AS) 17–20 (A Level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extensive and correct knowledge and understanding of the religion and belief. Wide-ranging and focused answer providing pertinent detail. Excellent breadth and depth of knowledge should be shown. Where applicable, correct reference should be given to sacred texts or important writings. Links between theories or viewpoints are made clearly. A wide span of scholarly views or systems of thought should be used. (A Level only) Both specialist vocabulary and terms should be used expertly to demonstrate understanding of key concepts.
4	 (AS) 13–16 (A Level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Correct information is given to demonstrate knowledge of relevant concepts including religion and belief where applicable. A comprehensive and pertinent answer will provide the detail required. Very good breadth and depth of knowledge should be shown. Correct use of sacred texts, writings or important works where applicable. Intentional links between theories are made. (A Level only) A variety of scholarly views or systems of thought should be used. (A Level only) Both specialist vocabulary and terms should be used well to demonstrate understanding of key concepts.
3	11–15 (AS) 9–12 (A Level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Largely correct information is given to demonstrate knowledge of relevant concepts including religion and belief where applicable. A suitable and pertinent answer will provide the detail required. A good breadth and depth of knowledge should be shown, however, this might be limited in some areas of knowledge. Generally correct use of sacred texts, writings or important works where applicable. Some links between theories are made. (A Level only) Some scholarly views or systems of thought should be used. (A Level only) Both specialist vocabulary and terms should be used generally to demonstrate understanding of key concepts.
2	6–10 (AS) 5–8 (A Level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A restricted demonstration of correct information is given to demonstrate understanding of the relevant concepts including religion and belief where applicable. A simple but generally correct answer will provide the detail required. Narrow breadth and depth of knowledge should be shown. Some correct use of sacred texts, writings or important works where applicable. Some limited connections between theories are made. Some scholarly views or systems of thought should be used, where these might be relevant. (A Level only) Both specialist vocabulary and terms are used in a limited way to demonstrate understanding of key concepts.
1	 1–5 (AS) 1–4 (A Level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Largely incomplete information is given to demonstrate understanding of the relevant concepts including religion and belief where applicable. An answer which is incomplete or contains mostly irrelevant detail. A largely inadequate breadth and depth of knowledge shown, with examples which will be lacking. Incomplete or very limited use of sacred texts, writings or important works when applicable. Very tenuous links are made between theories. (A Level only) Largely incomplete discussion of scholarly views or systems of thought where appropriate. (A Level only) Largely incomplete use of specialist vocabulary or language.
0	0	No content provided, or content provided bears no relevance to the question.

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AO2

Band	Marks	Aims
5	21–25 (AS) 25–30 (A Level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Competent, skilful analysis and evaluation of the desired content. Expertly and succinctly recognises and deals with the content of the question. Throughout the answer, well-developed knowledge of the different viewpoints and schools of thought is both analysed and evaluated, and supported by appropriate evidence. The links between differing viewpoints and schools of thought are subsequently both analysed and evaluated, and supported by appropriate evidence. The links between differing viewpoints and schools of thought are subsequently excellently analysed in order to demonstrate a well-developed discussion. (A Level only) Extensive, correct and skilful use of specialist phrases will be used.
4	16–20 (AS) 19–24 (A Level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very good, skilful analysis and evaluation of the desired content. Correctly recognises and deals with the content of the question. Throughout the answer, very good knowledge of the different viewpoints and schools of thought is both analysed and evaluated, and supported by appropriate evidence. The links between differing viewpoints and schools of thought are subsequently well analysed in order to demonstrate a well-developed discussion. (A Level only) Very good, correct and skilful use of specialist phrases will be used.
3	11–15 (AS) 13–18 (A Level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sufficient analysis and evaluation of the desired content. Largely recognises and deals with the content of the question. Throughout the answer, sufficient knowledge of the different viewpoints and schools of thought is both analysed and evaluated, and supported by appropriate evidence. The links between differing viewpoints and schools of thought are subsequently sufficiently analysed in order to demonstrate a well-developed discussion. (A Level only) Sufficient and correct use of specialist phrases will be used.
2	6–10 (AS) 7–12 (A Level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A basic but generally correct analysis and evaluation of the desired content. There is incomplete recognition of key issues, and some are not dealt with in their entirety. Throughout the answer, some knowledge of the different viewpoints and schools of thought is both analysed and evaluated, and supported by appropriate evidence. The links between differing viewpoints and schools of thought are subsequently generally analysed in order to demonstrate a well-developed discussion; however, this might be lacking precision. (A Level only) There is generally correct but incomplete use of specialist phrases.
1	1–5 (AS) 1–6 (A Level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A largely incomplete and simple analysis and evaluation of the desired content. An effort has been made to recognise and deal with the content of the question in scope. Very limited justification is given for statements made. Use of scholars, views or schools of thought to support the analysis of links between scholarly viewpoints or schools of thought. (A Level only) There is incomplete use of specialised phrases, language and specialist terminology.
0	0	No content provided or the content provided bears no relevance to the question.

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Indicative Content

- Explain the approach of ethical egoism to making moral decisions.
 - 'Ethical egoism is too flawed to work, a better system of ethics is found in divine command theory. Evaluate this statement.

(a)

(AO1) Students may describe and explain the ideas below:

- Ethical egoism is an ethical theory which surrounds the idea that a moral agent in a given situation make the choice in an ethical dilemma that best benefits the individual. In layman's terms – do what is best for yourself.
- Sedgwick argued that ethical egoism can be compared to the more familiar utilitarianism; however, utilitarianism focuses on the greatest good for the greatest number whereas egoism focuses on the greatest good for the individual person, not the majority of others.
- It argues that we should instinctively know our needs, and act on them.
- There are three different forms of this form of ethics. These are as follows:
 - The individual form: I should act in my own interest
 - The personal form: he or she should act in his or her interest
 - The universal form: everyone should act in their own interest
- It juxtaposes suffering and dying with enjoying life. Argues that our moral duty is to act in self-interest.

(b)

(AO2) Students may analyse and evaluate the question through the arguments below:

Responses in favour of the statement:

- The biggest flaw of ethical egoism, which can be used to argue against it, is that it is self-defeating.
- An example should be used to illustrate this, and any relevant and effective example could be the use of natural resources. It might bring some comfort in the short term, but large amounts of natural resources to help them in the moment, but in the long term they actually benefit them negatively.
- It is unclear, and what is good and best for each individual is subjective.
- It relies on people acting in their interest assuming that their interests will not harm to others – for example, a serial killer may justify their actions using ethical egoism.
- It is the best thing for them and their murderous impulses, but the majority of people would consider such behaviour to be immoral.
- Another flaw within the system of ethical egoism can be presented via the concept of the commons (students could here give a brief description) which is a flaw not present in divine command theory – common belief has historically proven to bind people to a higher moral standard.

Responses against the statement:

- Ethical egoism does work in some ways as it marries well with the naturalistic approach to ethics.
- It is the closest ethical theory to what is considered to be the natural human condition – therefore, it clearly appeals to and fits with human nature.
- It should be understood, however, that if a student goes along with this line of argument, ethical egoism is not the same thing as psychological egoism.
- A student might refute this statement by showing how there are flaws within ethical egoism.
- One issue present in divine command theory, which is not an issue within ethical egoism, is the presence of contradictions within religious texts or lack of direct rulings.
- If one is using religious commands in order to garner guidance as to how to act, then you come to the situation where you have to choose an interpretation of the text, which can differ.
- Divine command theory is inconsistent and causes issues when developing a meaningful ethical system.
- Ethical egoism also does not have issues with Euthyphro's dilemma, which those who follow divine command theory will inevitably be posed with.
- The independence problem refers to the issue that if we come to the conclusion that we are good in and of ourselves (and, therefore, are good independently of God), then there is the possibility that there is an even greater power who has termed them good, which limits the power of a supposedly omniscient God.
- Those who follow ethical egoism are not burdened with the additional religious obligations of God and arguments relating to that sphere of philosophy. Ethical egoists do not believe in God, but God is not central to their ideas.

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2. (a) Explain the importance of virtues in Aquinas's natural law
 (b) 'The ideas of natural law make it impossible to apply to modern situations such as homosexuality'. Evaluate this statement.

(a)

(AO1) Students may describe and explain the ideas below:

- Natural moral law theory is most closely associated with the medieval philosopher Thomas Aquinas. It is a form of religious deontological ethics.
- Natural moral law, as it is understood today, is built upon the twin pillars of the Bible, heavily influenced by the life, work and ideas of St Thomas Aquinas, as referenced by the Vatican and the Catechism of the Catholic Church in the 1990s.
- He reasoned that all humans have a natural purpose towards which God calls them. This purpose, or telos, will bring humans into union and fellowship with God, and the reaching of the highest human potential.
- There were two sources Aquinas believed that humans could use to understand what God had given humanity: the Bible and the world and reason.
- Aquinas believed that humanity was given reason and freedom by God so that we are able to understand and fulfil our natural purpose. All humans had the ability to do this, but only if they were able to follow natural moral law if they chose to.
- Aquinas believes that everyone has a specific purpose unique to them that they can achieve through the skills and talents given to them by God.
- Ideas about morality, or moral rules, therefore, come from inside human beings as innate ideas; however, these ideas in turn come from God, according to Aquinas, as he made humans with these ideas.

(b)

(AO2) Students may analyse and evaluate the question through the arguments below:

Responses in favour of the statement:

- Joseph Fletcher posited situation ethics, which has been used to show a more flexible and legalistic approach to Christian ethics. Some people argue that this has led to a complete violation of biblical ethical codes, and to play more into what is considered right within modern culture rather than what is considered right in the eyes of God.
- The basic, or ruling, principle of situation ethics is the principle of serving the greatest good for the greatest number, a vague principle, and, even when used in the context of Fletcher's principle, is not a conclusive way to approach issues of sexuality.
- Within traditional Christian teaching, homosexual relationships had been condemned. The Bible repeats in various verses that homosexual sexual interactions are not the design of God.
- If an individual considers these to be the literal teachings of God, then the use of situation ethics can be used to justify unbiblical sexual ethics.
- A further example of this concerning homosexuality can be found within natural moral law, as Aquinas believed that homosexuality was condemned due to the fact that it does not worship God to fulfil and follow biblical commandments.
- He may also consider it a violation of the precept of the ordering of society to function (e.g. sex being between a married couple).
- It could also be considered to be a violation of the precept of reproductive ethics, as within homosexual relationships there is no chance of natural procreation. The precept is more than just based on natural law because it has roots in the Bible.
- This is an example of situation ethics not just coming into contact with biblical law, but the biblical law on which this is built (e.g. 'Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it', i.e. procreate).
- Furthermore, situation ethics could, in theory, be used to justify polyamory, which is being in a sexual or potentially romantic relationship with more than one person at the same time. This is condemned within the Old Testament (although practised by biblical figures, and interestingly especially by Jesus, who emphasised faithfulness and monogamy).
- Genesis 2:24 states that 'For this reason, a man shall leave his father and his mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh' – meaning that a monogamous relationship is the biblical ideal. Here someone who is opposed to situation ethics could cite Old Testament figures to be contextual information, rather than a direct commandment. However, someone who would, however, consider Genesis 2:24 to be a direct biblical teaching would argue that an ethicist used the idea of agape to justify committed and loving homosexual relationships. A Christian who disagrees would use such Bible passages to refute these ideas.

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Responses against the statement:

- However, situation ethics takes a different stance. Situation ethicists may argue that the biblical ruling regarding homosexual relationship may be more based in the attitudes of the Bible writers rather than on the will of God.
- They might argue that repeatedly throughout the New Testament Jesus gave legalistic teaching on various acts but in one instance he preached acceptance of someone who was caught in adultery (in the context, sex outside of marriage was considered an immoral act. In this instance, he emphasised love rather than judgement).
- For this reason, a situation ethicist might use this Biblical instance (as well as the legalistic teachings of Jesus) in order to justify their stance that non-biblical acts might be considered permissible.
- A situation ethicist would be highly likely to accept a homosexual relationship as loving, and supported the principle of agape.
- It might be argued that the Bible mentions polyamorous relationships, such as characters within the Old Testament that had multiple wives and concubines. biblical characters such as Abraham, Jacob, David and Solomon all practised polygamy. It is noted that this practice generally tended to only extend to men – women with multiple partners were not mentioned.

3. (a) Explain how situation ethics can be applied practically.
 (b) 'Situation ethics can be used to justify unbiblical sexual ethics.'
 Evaluate this statement.

(a)

(AO1) Students may describe and explain the ideas below:

- Joseph Fletcher posited situation ethics in 1966. Unlike some more conservative members of the Church, Fletcher believed that social change occurring at the time of the 1960s (and ethical theory) meant that the Church needed to reconsider how it operated. Therefore, at its very formation situation ethics was concerned with practicality.
- He sought in his situational approach a middle ground between antinomianism and legalism. He argued that a more flexible approach which he viewed as being more in keeping with the teachings of Jesus. He argued against legalism.
- In the teachings of situationalism, as long as the interests of agape, a spirit of selfless, unconditional love, are served, then an action can be said to be morally good.
- From agape, maxims are derived.
- Situation ethics is distinctive within the bounds of ethics in Christian circles. It is a form of ethics which works situation to situation – two people in similar situations may make different choices depending on what choice in their situations best serves the interests of agape.
- Fletcher also introduces six propositions and four principles in order to help those who wish to apply them to make moral decisions as agape could be a somewhat vague concept.
- The six propositions are:
 - 1: *The only intrinsically good thing is love. It is good in itself – is love.*
 - 2: *It is now more important to love than to follow the law.*
 - 3: *Love and justice are the same thing because justice is giving a man what he needs (agape).*
 - 4: *Love should be shown regardless of whether you like the other person.*
 - 5: *Love is the only outcome that matters.*
 - 6: *Decisions must be made then and there in the situation so that special circumstances are taken into account.*
- The four principles are:
 - 1: *Pragmatism*
 - 2: *Relativism*
 - 3: *Positivism*
 - 4: *Personalism*
- These principles and propositions aid situation ethicists in making moral decisions.

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(b)

(AO2) Students may analyse and evaluate the question through the argument

Responses in favour of the statement:

- Biblical sexual ethics can often be considered to be legislated by legalists
- These are largely found in the Old Testament, which some people might see as being superseded by the teachings of Jesus; however, on some issues of sexual ethics Jesus is direct.
- Leviticus 18:22 specifically condemns homosexuality.
- Situation ethics, however, would accept a homosexual relationship between loving individuals as it would serve the purpose of agape – it promotes love.
- Therefore, it could be argued that by permitting relationships which the Bible considers unbiblical.
- Verses such as Genesis 2:24 specify that the ideal of marriage as being one man and one woman for life.
- This is further reiterated in the New Testament.
- As marriage is considered the context for sex, and this is considered the biblical precedent for marriage, it could be argued that any sexual relationship outside of this is unbiblical.
- If situation ethics allows for such things, it could be (and is) argued that this is a form of unbiblical sexual ethics.

Responses against the statement:

- The use of situation ethics to justify polyamory if it is considered to be the best thing to do in a certain situation could technically be biblical in some people's eyes.
- The Old Testament of the Bible contains many different people who have had polyamorous relationships, e.g. men with multiple wives, who are held up as good biblical examples (e.g. Solomon, David and Abraham).
- And those in this instance might argue that there is a biblical basis.
- It is important to remember that there are issues with establishing what is and what is not biblical.
- As the Bible is a holy text, it is up for debate and interpretation.
- People argue that certain passages within the Bible are not actually the original context and cultural practice of the time.
- This could extend further to be applied to homosexual relationships – if the biblical principle of agape as reiterated by Jesus ('love thy neighbour') is applied to homosexual relationships, then they could also be argued to be biblical.
- To love one's neighbour would mean that you do not want them to experience pain. Therefore, it could be argued that advocating for polyamorous relationships could be biblical.

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4. (a) Explain the theory of classical utilitarianism.
 (b) 'Utilitarianism is flawed because it can justify horrific acts.'
 Evaluate this statement.

(a)

(AO1) Students may describe and explain the ideas below:

- Utilitarianism is a hugely popular form of ethical practice, and has a wide reach. The theory itself found its most sustained treatment in the works of the English philosophers Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill.
- This has come to be known as classical utilitarianism. There are two forms of utilitarianism which make up classical utilitarianism – act (Bentham's formula) and rule utilitarianism.
- The utility principle is the means by which this is communicated within utilitarianism.
- According to Bentham's formulation, the utility principle argument is the principle that argues that when faced with an ethical decision, we should choose the option which maximises pleasure and minimises pain for the greatest number of people.
- For Bentham, all pleasures were in a sense equal; it was simply a case of quantity.
- Mill, on the other hand, is much more concerned with the quality of pleasures. In this utilitarianism works differently from Bentham's.
- One way to describe the difference between the two theories is the old saying 'quantity over quality'.
- Another distinction which Mill stipulates which is absent from Bentham's theory is that which states that a thing is the most moral assuming it creates the greatest pleasure for the greatest number and the minimal amount of pain.

(b)

(AO2) Students may analyse and evaluate the question through the argument:

Responses in favour of the statement:

- In its purest form, act utilitarianism, as posited by Jeremy Bentham, does not address the issue.
- The utility principle emphasises the greatest good for the greatest number. Sometimes, the greatest good for the greatest number involves bad actions which we otherwise consider to be immoral.
- Theoretically, it can be used to justify horrendous acts of violence. One commonly used to make this point is that the atrocities committed by the Nazis against the Jewish people (among others) could theoretically be justified under utilitarianism.
- This is because the Jews were a minority – there were fewer people in total than were in the whole of Germany.
- While rule utilitarianism does go some way to solving this, it still runs into the issue that the happiness of the majority could outweigh the suffering experience, thus justifying immoral acts.
- This would mean that even under rule utilitarianism, the issue of the majority benefiting while the minority suffers would remain.
- Different people have different opinions on what will be most pleasurable and there are different views on how much pain might be acceptable if it provides a large amount of happiness. There is a lot of subjectivity in what would constitute the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people.

Responses against the statement:

- Rule utilitarianism solves this issue by introducing the principle of no harm. This would mean that this would stop rule utilitarians from using the utility principle to justify atrocities in the name of the majority.
- Furthermore, whatever kind of pleasure can be derived by justifying acts of violence could not be considered by Mill to be high pleasures and, therefore, they would be lower in comparison to the high pleasure of maintaining a harmonious society.
- Theoretically, it could also be argued that it is unfair to call out just utilitarianism. For example, other ethical theories can also be used to justify things which we would otherwise consider to be horrific or immoral.
- For example, the axe murder dilemma used to explain Kantian ethics does not see many people as being obviously moral – telling a killer intent on murdering your friend where your friend is hiding is immoral, but one is duty-bound to tell the truth.

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