



A2 Religious Studies



PHILOSOPHY & ETHICS

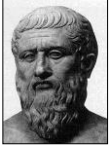
Revision Summary Notes

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION 2

The Body and Soul

Introduction

- **Materialism** is the view that the mind cannot be separated from the body
- **Idealism** is the view that the mind is the only reality and the body is unreal.
- **Dualism** is the view that the mind and body both exist and are linked in some way.



Plato

Review Plato's distinction between body and soul in the foundation unit so that you can make comparisons with the thinking of Hick and of Dawkins.



John Hick

Philosophy of Religion (1973); Death and Eternal Life (1976)

- The soul is a name for the moral, spiritual self formed by the interaction of genes and environment. The human is a psychophysical person with a divine purpose.
- The person shall be resurrected through a divine act of recreation or reconstitution in resurrection, rather than reincarnation as Plato would have it, through God's creative love.
- The new body is not the old one brought back to life but a spiritual body inhabiting a spiritual world just as the physical body inhabited a physical world.
- Hick conducts a thought experiment with a hypothetical person called John Smith. Smith disappears from the USA and reappears in Calcutta, India. He is physically identical with the same memories, emotions, fingerprints, and so on. People would agree he was Smith. If he died and reappeared in this world, again identical, people would agree he was Smith. If he died and reappeared in another world with other resurrected people, he would be Smith. This is called the replica theory.
- God is not restricted by death and holds man beyond natural mortality.
- Martin Luther wrote: 'Anyone with whom God speaks, whether in wrath or mercy, the same is certainly immortal.'



Richard Dawkins

The Selfish Gene (1976); River out of Eden (1986); The Blind

Watchmaker (1995)

- Dawkins the evolutionist argues that humans are merely carriers of DNA, 'just bytes and bytes of digital information.' Information flows through time, the bones and tissues do not.
- The belief in an immortal soul is anachronistic and damaging to human endeavor. There is 'no spirit-driven life force, no throbbing, heaving, pullulating, protoplasmic, mystic jelly'
- Dawkins argues that myths (such as Plato's Forms) and faiths are not

Critical comments

Dawkins rejects any idea of a soul that lives beyond death: 'When we die, there are two things we can leave behind us: genes and memes. We were built as gene machines, created to pass on our genes, but that aspect of us will be forgotten in three generations. Your child, even your grandchild, may bear a passing resemblance to you, perhaps in a talent for music, in the colour of her hair. But as each generation passes, the contribution of your genes is halved. It does not take long to reach negligible proportions. Our genes may be immortal but the collection of genes which is any one of us is bound to crumble away. Elizabeth II is a direct descendent of William the Conqueror, yet it is quite probable that she bears not a single one of the old king's genes. We should seek immortality in reproduction, but if you contribute to the world's culture, if you have a good idea, or compose a tune, invent a sparking plug, write a poem, it may live on intact, long after your genes have dissolved in the common pool.'

(Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 1976)

supported by evidence; scientific beliefs are. Life lacks purpose and is indifferent to suffering. There is no creator God.

- Evolution is the only rational theory. It is not our soul that guides us but our genetic make-up. Over time, the good genes survive and the bad genes die out.
- We are as we are because of our genetic make-up, not the efforts of our soul to guide us towards the realm of Ideas. No soul continues, only DNA, the function of life.
- Our sense of self and individuality is based on digital information, not the soul. Our genes are a colony of information that wants to be replicated. It is easier for this to happen in a multi-cell organism. 'We are survival machines - robot vehicles blindly programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes.' (*The Selfish Gene*, 1976)
- The genes are found in behaviour, so the bodies acquire individuality. We feel like a single organism, not a colony, as selection has favoured genes that co-operate.
- Genes working together give us a sense of individuality not the soul. The colony needs a central control. The genetic model becomes more complex and thinks about itself as an individual and considers the consequences of its actions.
- 'Consciousness arises when the brain's simulation of the world becomes so complete that it must include a model of itself.' (*The Selfish Gene*, 1976)
- This leads to human culture, a 'replicator' or 'meme' (tunes, catchphrases, quotes, teachings), which are heard and lodged in the brain and then imitated by it.
- At death, we leave behind genes and memes, though the genes will quickly be dispersed. DNA survival brings about the body and individual consciousness creates culture. This is the soul.

Debates about the body/soul distinction

- Aquinas believed the soul animated the body and gave it life. The soul is the anima, the source of all activity. It survives death taking the identity of its body
- Descartes rejected the naturalistic idea that the soul gave life to the body and when it left the body died. He thought the relation of the soul with the body came from the connection that we could move our bodies and also that we could experience changes on or in our bodies.
- The body is corporeal, the mind non-corporeal. The mind is where thoughts and feelings are known and the body performs physical actions.
- We do not move the body as a mind steering a ship. The soul/mind is united with the body. The soul is joined to all parts of the body and informs it. We know that the mind is affected by things we do to the body, especially chemical abuse. When we die, the soul moves on to God.
- Descartes also maintained that the body and soul were complete substances leading to a tension between that and the idea the body is not steered by the soul.
- Hick argues that there is evidence of the existence of a spiritual aspect of the person that may be found in parapsychology. such as ESP, telepathy, clairvoyance, apparitions, séances, reincarnation memories, out of body experiences (OOBE), near-death experiences (NDE), and so on.
- The evidence is not conclusive, though it is wrong to take absence of knowledge to mean knowledge of absence. It is not irrational to believe the self survives death in the soul. A personal survival is a necessary condition for immortality.

Glossary

Anima: Aquinas' view of the soul; the source of all activity

Memes: A replicator of human culture, which is passed on.

Replica theory: Hick's theory that if a person vanished and a replica appeared in another world, people would presume that

- Some religious texts talk about the soul, which would be an argument for a religious believer that they exist on the basis of the authority of these sacred texts.
- If a person believes in God, then it naturally extends, according to Hick, that souls exist. It is contradictory for God to create people to live in fellowship with God if they are limited.

- Perry (*A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality*, 1978) argues that souls cannot establish a personal identity since souls are immaterial. 'Whether or not any souls exist, or have ever existed, they are unobservable and could never be testable. There is no evidence that it is the same personal identity Even if the soul had passed from one temporal form to another in the afterlife, only divine inspiration could tell for sure.'
- Perry also argues against those who use memory as evidence. A being in the next world may have a memory of being in the first, but memory can be misleading or even false and cannot be relied upon.
- Gilbert Ryle (1900—76) (*The Concept of Mind*, 1949) argues that we make a categorical mistake b thinking that the noun 'soul' refers to a concrete object in the way that the noun 'body' does.
- The soul does not exist as a separate thing, in the same way the spirit in 'team spirit' does not exist in a separate way. *
- Ryle opposed the dualist separation between a tangible body and an intangible mind or soul. All references to the mental must be understood in terms of witnessable activities. The body/soul distinction is a myth and scientifically literate people have no use of it. The soul is a name for the set of properties or dispositions of the person.
- Hegel (1770—1831) argued that the mind imposes order on the senses and so we cannot be certain of any physical objects. Our souls come from the underlying universal soul. History is the development of the spirit through time.

Tips for A2 exam questions

'The body/soul distinction is a myth invented by philosophers such as Plato.' Discuss.

- Explain the distinction formulated by Plato and his belief in an immortal soul and reincarnation. The soul contemplates the Forms between incarnations. The distinction expresses a belief in life beyond the physical demise of the body.
- One approach could be to explain that Christian beliefs in the soul, as expressed by people such as Hick, do not encompass reincarnation but do hold that the soul moves on to live beyond this world. Reference could be made to Descartes' view of the soul.
- Hick's evidence of supernatural events could be considered as evidence.
- Hick's reasoning that in principle the soul could exist beyond this world should be explored as well as the religious reasons for belief in the soul once belief in God was accepted.
- Dawkins' alternative explanation of the sense of personal identity could be considered.

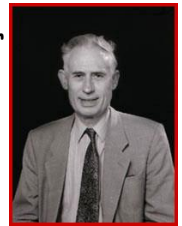
Life after death

Introduction

Life may be disembodied (separate from the body) as Plato argued, leaving the body to corrupt on earth, or life continues in some bodily form. Peter Geach, a contemporary British philosopher, writes, 'Apart from the possibility of resurrection, it seems to me a mere illusion to have any hope for life after death. I am of the mind of Judas Maccabeus: if there is no resurrection, it is superfluous and vain to pray for the dead.'

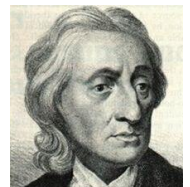
Disembodied survival after death

- Descartes, Lewis and Swinburne are dualists arguing that we exist beyond our bodies. If people are distinct from their bodies, then after death they exist in a disembodied state. Descartes thought this was possible.
- H.D. Lewis argues that we detect mental processes quite distinct from physical ones, suggesting a non-physical self. Richard Swinburne argues that people could conceivably not be limited to using a chunk of matter for perception, knowledge and control.
- Descartes argues that the body is divisible, parts can be severed, but the mind is not. We conceive ourselves as separate from the body. Yet while Descartes may feel he cannot divide his mind, it is not proof that it cannot be done.
- Descartes argues that he can doubt his body but not that he exists. Norman Malcolm argues against Descartes, suggesting that if Descartes were right, we could doubt that a thinking being exists, but that would not imply we were not thinking beings.
- Swinburne argues that it is coherent to describe someone as disembodied, although Brian Davies questions whether we conceive ourselves as disembodied. To live means to participate in activities, which requires a body



Bodily survival after death

- While it may be possible for me to conceive of life in a new bodily form, it does not mean I actually will have life with a new bodily form.
- Hick argues for the possibility of replica bodies (see previous section). Brian Davies argues that he would not be content to receive a lethal injection on the basis that a replica with identical memories, feelings, thoughts and physique would exist.
- John Locke (1632–1704) argued that the body is distinct from the person. A person is a thinking, intelligent being with reason and reflection. A person can exist in a spiritual world and can move from body to body.
- Brian Davies argues that it might be the case that after death we continue as a being that is physically continuous with what has died.



Resurrection and rebirth

Resurrection is a belief held by Christians that the body, a spiritual body, will rise again after its death. The 'I' that lives now will rise again and be identifiable in the afterlife.

- The Christian Gospels state that Jesus rose from the dead. St Paul considers this fundamental to Christianity — proof both of Jesus' identity and that God's plan will come to fruition.



- Jesus said those who believed in him would have eternal life. St Paul described the new life as being with spiritual bodies. The Nicene and Apostle's Creeds both confirm the resurrection of the body.
- Rebirth is a common idea in Eastern religions. There is continuity from one life to another. The body dies but the person lives a different life in a new body. The nature of the new life is determined by the law of karma, by what was done by the person

in the previous life.

- In Hindu belief, the atman (soul) moves from body to body until it becomes the one spirit or undifferentiated consciousness.
- Buddhists hold that the life of the person is connected through the law of karma to another life, although the soul as such does not exist. The process is linked and the individuality that a person feels is related to the process and context. This life is determined by our acts in the last life.

The concept of Heaven and Hell

- In the New Testament, Heaven is a place with God where good people go when they die after the Day of Judgement.
- Roman Catholic theology sees eternal life as a timeless Beatific Vision of God. On death, the person goes to Heaven, Hell or Purgatory.
- The New Testament speaks of God's wrath and punishment. In Matthew 25, the unrighteous are sent to the 'eternal fire' on the Day of Judgement. Parables say that no-one can return from this place.
- Hick argues that the idea of Hell is something that humanity could achieve on earth without the need for a reality in the next world. However, if Hell is not to be interpreted literally, why not treat Heaven similarly?
- Hick also argues that one could conceive of another place that is no distance or direction from me. There could be many of these other worlds.



- Hell may be viewed less literally and taken as the suffering of this life. A contemporary way for viewing Hell is a person determined to freely turn away from God after death. God will not force someone to God.
- Purgatory is a place of cleansing of the soul; a temporal punishment for lesser sins before Heaven. A contemporary view of

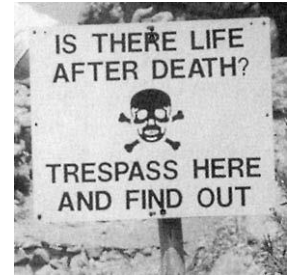


Purgatory is the journey from selfishness to selflessness. Heaven is the timeless and completely satisfying vision of God.

Is it reasonable to believe in life after death?

- Some evidence put forward is parapsychological (or psychical), such as near-death experiences, mediums, and so on, though the data generated from such evidence is contested.

- Plato argues that life is opposite to death. Death comes from life, so logically life must come from death otherwise all would end up dead and there would be no life. However, life and death are not attributes to be acquired.
- Descartes argues that the human person/self is not divisible, not identified with the body, and continues after the body. However, there is no reason to suppose only things that have parts will die.
- Kant's moral argument for the existence of God is also an



argument for life after death. However, some dispute the existence of a moral imperative.

- Arguably, morality could make sense without the need for life after death as it would bring about a better world.
- Some people argue that their faith is a reason for believing in life after death.
- Most people do not remember anything of previous lives, undermining the argument for the soul from memory. On the other hand, some claim to recover memories from a previous life through hypnosis, though this cannot be

tested empirically

- Hick says that memory is important evidence for the continuity of the same person. If memory is wiped at rebirth, then how can we be sure it is the same person?
- The body is different, and possibly also the memory. The only comparable aspect is character or dispositions, but there are many broad similarities between hundreds of thousands of people living now and many hundreds of thousands of people living previously. This, too, does not provide solid evidence.
- Modern physics denies the possibility of resurrection. It seems scientifically implausible that God could resurrect the disintegrated body. However, this objection ignores the idea that the body is a spiritual body, a new body.
- Is belief in life after death an answer to the problem of evil? It seems unjust that people are moral, have a hard life and die with no reward. The possibility of judgement and Hell vindicates the good and punishes the bad. However, the matter of natural evil is not addressed by this possibility and it could be argued that the suffering is not worth the prize of Heaven. Also, it does not explain why suffering seems to be so arbitrary — are people who happen to have good fortune and comfortable lives going to receive less after death through no fault of their own?
- The concept of karma, from Eastern religions, seems to justify the evil and suffering in the world. It is down to the actions of that person in a previous life. However, when the person suffering cannot remember that past life, or is too young to understand the philosophy of karma, questions might be asked as to whether the system is fair. In Hinduism, though, the question of fairness does not arise as the results of karma are not 'reward' or 'punishment', they are just the results of your own actions according to the eternal laws of the universe.



Tips for A2 exam questions

'It is impossible to justify innocent suffering unless there is life after death' Discuss.

- Explain how the existence of the suffering of the innocent, be it through natural or human evil, seems unjust.
- The doctrine of original sin could be explored as a form of justification, or the argument of karma, though the limitations of these ideas should also be explored.
- The traditional theodicies could be explored, in which the suffering is argued to have a purpose, enabling the individual to mature and to exercise free will, with consideration both to Augustine and Irenaeus.
- The extent of suffering, citing extreme cases such as genocide and child starvation, and the fact that it seems arbitrary, could be contrasted with the view of Hick that everything will be revealed and put right after death in the next world.
- Animals suffer, but Christianity does not see animals going to Heaven — what is the purpose, then, of this suffering?

Critical comments

'Life after death is possible, but we have seen no decisive philosophical reason for believing in it. Many religious believers would say that there are other reasons for belief in life after death. According to them, we can be sure that people survive death because survival after death is an item of faith.' (Brian Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 1993)

'Many people today find the very idea of resurrection absurd, and it must be admitted that the physics of resurrection raises some fascinating difficulties. Let me mention the oldest philosophical objection ever raised against resurrection. Virtually all the Church fathers who discussed resurrection tried to answer it. What if a Christian dies at sea and his body is eaten by various sea creatures who then scatter to the oceans of the world? How can God possibly reconstruct that body? Or what if another Christian is eaten by cannibals so that the material of her body becomes the material of their bodies? And suppose God later wants to raise all of them, both the Christian and the cannibals. Who gets which bodily particles? How does God decide?'

(Stephen T Davis, 'Survival of Death', in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Religion*, 1997)

Revelation – Experience and Scripture

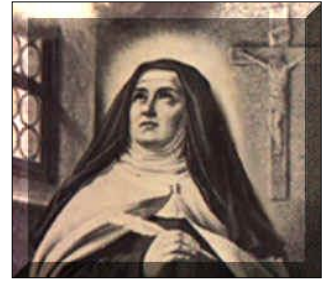
Introduction

- Revelation means God revealing himself to people. For some, God's presence is revealed through God's work in the world (the design argument), but in this form the revelation is of an event that seems to have direct meaning and/or breaks natural laws. It conveys knowledge of God.
- Examples could include God speaking to Moses through the burning bush or the Angel Jibril speaking the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Experience of God implies a direct sensory experience.



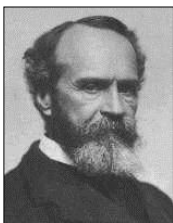
Visions, voices and the 'numinous' experience

- St Teresa of Avila had intense and extraordinary experiences of 'heavenly communications' including a 'mystical marriage', the 'espousal' of her soul to the person of Christ. She also had bodily manifestations of her spiritual elevation.
- Rudolph Otto (*The Idea of the Holy*, 1936) uses the word 'numinous' to mean being in the presence of an awesome power. Religion comes from a being separate from the world.
- The numinous is the holy, the ineffable core of religion. Experience of it cannot be described in terms of other experiences. Those who have a numinous experience sense dependency on an external force greater than themselves.
- Otto describes it as, 'The deepest and most fundamental element in all strong and sincerely felt religious emotion.' It is found in personal piety rites and liturgies, religious buildings and monuments. It may be peaceful or fast moving and even violent. It can cause intoxication, frenzy and ecstasy.
- Visions and voices seem to break natural laws. Saul heard God speaking to him when he fell from his horse. Moses heard a voice within the burning bush speak to him.
- Visions may be seen, such as the three visitors who came to Abraham. In Western society today, talk of visions and voices draws scepticism from most people.



Conversion experience

- This means a change to a religious way of life because of some experience of divine truth directly or indirectly, such as St Paul's road to Damascus experience or Siddhartha Gotama's (the Buddha's) enlightenment experience under the Bodhi Tree.
- In the mind of the person, there is a transformation and a single aim or priority replaces all others. Religious aims become central to the person's life.
- William James (*The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 1902) believed it was necessary for religious ideas to form 'the habitual centre of his personal energy' and it could be triggered by explosive emotions.
- Conversion involves a recognition that the current lifestyle is wrong or incomplete and a change to lifestyle to bring about a better way.
- Sudden conversion may not be permanent but gradual conversion is more likely to be permanent.
- Conversion may be seen in intellectual terms or moral terms as coming to a new point of view.



- E.D. Starbuck (*The Psychology of Religion*, 1899) said conversion may be conscious and volitional (voluntary) and is a gradual process, or involuntary (self-surrender), which may be more sudden and which we finally surrender to.
- William James argued that some people could never be converted due to cynicism or strong atheistic beliefs and that this was a weakness.

Corporate religious experience and the 'Toronto Blessing'

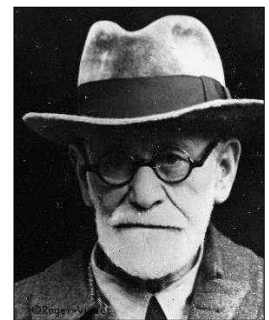
- Usually, religious experiences are private, but there are cases when groups of people are involved. Corporate religious experience is public.
- An individual might see God or God's action in a public place or object. Such an event might involve a breach in natural law, such as Jesus walking on water or the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.



- Pastor Randy Clark encountered Howard-Browne in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and came under his influence. Clark was preaching at Toronto Airport Vineyard Church on 20 January 1994. Following the sermon, people began to laugh hysterically, cry, leap, dance, and even roar. This is seen as a result of the move of the Holy Spirit.
- The 'move of the Holy Spirit' has not stopped. Over the years, tens of thousands of people have flown to Toronto to participate. Afterwards, many people often become zealous and spread the activities to other places. The 'Toronto Blessing' has spread to evangelical congregations around the world.

Discussions

- Some see conversion as part of adolescent identity crisis as it tends to happen during that period. It could be a way of reorganising cognitive structures, seeing problems from a different perspective. However, there are cases of adult conversion.
- A psychological criticism of conversion came from Freud (1928), who considers it as a way of revitalising the ego through a positive internalised love object. Some suggest that people who have conversion experiences had prior childhood problems.
- Visions and voices can sometimes be explained through the use of hallucinogenic drugs, such as LSD. Some religions used hallucinogens to induce states of religious experience. Does this mean the experience would not be God? Can corporate experiences be explained as group hysteria?
- Religious experiences are subjective and not testable by empirical means. Even group witness statements are not necessarily a solid basis for evidence. Nevertheless, if religious people are prepared to change their life and take a more challenging course of action, they clearly believe their experience to be of divine origin. Many things we say are true cannot be tested or proven, such as whether a painting is beautiful, that a mother genuinely loves her baby rather than acting as if she does, for example.
- There may be neurological or physiological explanations of visions, or voices linked to medical conditions, or drugs. Believers argue God reveals himself in nature and through actions that do not break the laws of nature but are seen to have meaning: scientific explanations do not exclude God.
- It could be argued that genuinely-felt religious experiences make positive spiritual contributions to life.



Revelation through Holy Scripture

- For many believers of many religions, sacred scripture reveals something of the divine and the divine will. Most religions have sacred writings, though some, such as Hinduism, do not have a central single text.
- Disagreement emerges in the interpretation of scripture, how it is understood to reveal God. Some believers interpret scripture literally. This is true of most Muslims and many Christians, for example. The truth expressed is understood to be 'true' in an actual historical direct meaning.
- For Muslims, the Arabic Qur'an is the only real Qur'an as Allah revealed the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in Arabic. Translations carry the meaning only Orthodox Jews may interpret the Torah literally, while reform and liberal Jews might interpret the message for modern times.
- Many Christians argue that scripture is divinely inspired. That is to say the words were written by a human but God, in some way, spoke through those words. Some suggest every word was intended by God. More liberal Christians may argue that the general meaning is God's intention, not every word.
- There are tensions between literal interpretations and knowledge of science, such as with the case of the miracles of the Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament, as well as matters of morality
- Liberal religious believers often interpret their holy scriptures as divinely inspired but with cultural and historical influences that are relevant to the time of writing and not the present. The authors' own influence may also be responsible for some texts.
- Literalists criticise liberals for picking and choosing their interpretation. Liberal Christians might accept the story of the resurrection but not Jesus walking on water. Literalist Christians might argue that this picking and choosing is arbitrary and subjective.



Tips for A2 exam questions

'Revelation through scripture is more reliable than revelation through religious experience.'
Discuss.

- ▣ You could either approach the question from the general arguments about religious experience or the argument for God's existence.
- ▣ You could investigate the validity of the evidence, exploring examples of specific religious experience.
- ▣ Arguments against from verification and psychology could be examined.
- ▣ Links with religious language could be explored.

Critical comments

*'Of course, if there is a God who does appear directly or indirectly to individuals, then this is going to be either the timeless or the everlasting God. Interestingly, Nicholas Lash in his book *Easter in Ordinary* (1988), although affirming a creator God, rejects the possibility of this God appearing in any extraordinary way to human beings. Lash says that God is instead to be found in the ordinary things of life. If Lash is right — and I am not at all sure that he is — this places even greater weight on the individual's interpretation of his or her experience and hence, again, on his or her existing presuppositions. I am not convinced, therefore, that reports of religious experiences (to be contrasted with religious experiences which you or I may have personally) provide a sound foundation for faith.'*

(Peter Vardy, *The Puzzle of God*, 1990)


Revelation — Miracle

The concept of miracle

- A miracle is held to be an action of God, or an invisible agent, which goes against the laws of nature and has some religious meaning or significance.
- Hume (*An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 1748) argues that nothing which can happen in nature can be classed as a miracle.
 - Hick argues that as natural laws are made by observing what has happened, miracles are a priori impossible. When new things are observed, the understanding of natural law must be widened.
 - Aquinas held that a miracle was something done by God which nature could not do, or could not do in that order, or is done in nature but without the usual operation of nature, for example, the sun going backwards, a person living after death, or an instantaneous cure of someone who may have been cured in time naturally.
 - Swinburne (*Miracles*, 1989) gives examples of miracles as levitation, resurrection, water turning into wine. He notes that on its own a transgression of a natural law with no meaning is not considered a miracle.
 - R.F. Holland ('The Miraculous,' in *Religions and Understanding*, 1967) notes that coincidences that do not break natural laws but have religious significance can sometimes be referred to as a miracle.
- However, striking coincidences happen all the time. Are they all miracles and, if not, how do you know which is which?

Criticisms of miracle made by Hume

An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (1748)

- Hume argues not that miracles do not happen but it would be impossible to prove one had happened. He says we must weigh the improbability of miracles against the evidence that they occur. Rational people will reject the evidence.
- 
 - Rationality requires that the belief is proportionate to the evidence. Evidence from the past supports the natural laws. Evidence suggests humans do not resurrect or walk on water.
 - Witnesses who claim to have seen miracles cannot be given more credence than the absence of such miracles happening now. They are often less educated and may be fascinated by the fantastical nature of it so they suspend their reason.
 - Hume suggests that different miracles in different religions cancel each other out. Since different religions have different claims to truth, you cannot have real miracles in all of them.

Responses to Hume

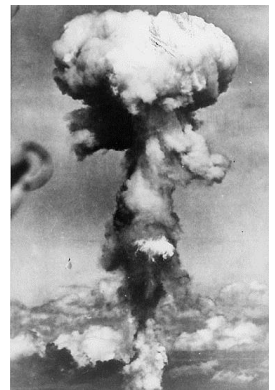
- C.D. Broad (1887–1971) notes that Hume assumes there are known fixed laws of nature, but science has observed exceptions to laws and on that basis revised the laws. Hume neglects the possibility that some of nature's laws are incorrectly understood.

- Hume does not address miracles he might witness, only the reports, which he discounts. Are all witness reports necessarily unreliable?
- Vardy (The Puzzle of God, 1990) notes that there is more evidence of miracles today than in Hume's time, such as the 74 attested miracles from Lourdes, which have been tested by objective scientists.
- Religions do not usually require people to believe on the basis of miracles. In the New Testament, faith came first and Jesus resisted the devil's attempt to tempt him to use miracles for his own aggrandisement.
- The statement that not enough people of significant education report miracles is problematic. How many exactly is 'enough' and what standing is enough? Who says that uneducated people are less truthful than educated ones; where is the evidence for that? In considering other religions, Hume suggests that different miracles in different religions are mutually exclusive and cancel each other out. Swinburne notes that evidence of a miracle in one religion might challenge the other but evidence of a miracle in another religion would mean there was evidence of miracles in both religions, or one could be true, and the other false.
- Is it acceptable to reject the evidence of others when it goes against what is probably the case? Thomas Sherlock notes that a person living in a warm climate where rivers never freeze might disbelieve reports from a cold climate where they do on the same basis.

Criticisms of miracle made by Maurice Wiles

God's Action in the World (1986)

- God never intervenes for individual acts, 'the primary usage for the idea of divine action should be in relation to the world as a whole rather than to particular occurrences within it.'
- The existence of individual divine acts is problematic. Why are they so rare? Why did they not occur when terrible things happened such as the atomic bombing of Hiroshima or the massacre of Jews in the Holocaust?
- An interventionist God is a weak idea of God. If God acts in the world, it raises all the issues of the problem of evil. God would seem to be arbitrary: allowing some suffering and evil to occur despite showing the possibility of divine intervention in particular cases elsewhere.
- It is better to conceive of God as having made the world as a single creative act rather than having to keep making small changes here and there.



Christianity and miracles

- For some believers, their religion is proved by signs and miracles, evidence of God's power and work.
- The Roman Catholic Church upholds the possibility of miracles and supports the literal interpretation of miracles in the Bible.
- Mark's Gospel suggests miracles do not come to make people believe but as a result of their faith.
- Literalist Christians hold that the stories of miracles must be taken as described and point to a divine ruler of the universe.

- Others give symbolic or metaphorical meaning to the stories — there is no breaking of any natural laws.

Critical comments

'A source of serious puzzlement has been that if spectacular miracles like the splitting of the Sea of Reeds, which was witnessed by over a million people and lasted for several hours, are to be believed, why is it that for centuries nothing comparable has been recorded as having happened? It may be noted that this problem constitutes part of the pressure of theists to renounce their belief that such fantastic events are genuinely historical. And, indeed, in the last hundred years or so, the denial of miracles has not been universally regarded as incompatible with theistic belief. No less a person than the Anglican bishop of Birmingham said that "miracles as they are narrated [in the scriptures] cannot in the light of our modern knowledge of the uniformity of nature, be accepted as historical".'

(George N. Schlesinger, 'Miracles,' in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, 1997)

Tips for A2 exam questions

'Stories about miracles are an obstacle to faith for modern people.' Discuss.

- Explore the criticisms of Hume and Wiles and whether the concept of miracle is valid for modern people.
- Consider the argument that miracle stories support faith by demonstrating the nature and power of God.
- Consider the argument that miracle stories should be 'demythologised' to enable modern people to have faith without attempting to suspend their rational disbelief.

Religious language

The via negativa (Apophatic way)

- 'Apophatic' comes from the Greek word 'apophasis', which means 'negation'. It argues that God cannot be known in terms of human categories. God is beyond all signs and language. The great Jewish scholar Maimonides wrote that we come nearer to knowledge of God through negative attributes, for example, God is not limited, and so on.
- Arguably, speaking about God in negative terms avoids the problem of misrepresenting God.

Verification

- Logical positivism, developed from the Vienna Circle (a group of philosophers), looks at how we can verify knowledge empirically.
- The only propositions that are knowable are those which are analytic — a priori (through logical reasoning, without using external empirical evidence) and those which are synthetic (a posteriori) (which can be proved true or false (verified) through empirical experiment).
- The verification principle states that we know the meaning of a proposition if we know the conditions under which the proposition is true or false. Anything that cannot be measured analytically or empirically is meaningless. Talk of God, art and ethics are in this meaningless category for logical empiricists.



- A.J. Ayer, the British logical positivist, argued that propositions of science are meaningful as they are based on experimentation, but religious language is meaningless. Strong verification means there is no doubt about a statement; for example, 'The squirrel is red.'

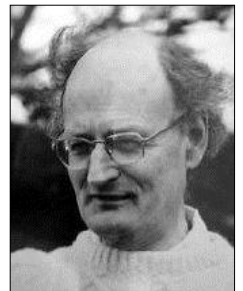
- Weak verification means there are some observations that indicate truth, such as those about historical events that cannot be experienced now; for example, 'Julius Caesar was murdered.' However, the statements made by logical positivism cannot be proved by its own criteria analytically or synthetically
- Hick argues that at the point of death we will have evidence of God's existence as we will perceive God. God will be shown to exist to those who already thought God did exist. He calls this 'eschatological verification'.
- Weak verification supports the claim that God is creator, with evidence from the design argument.

Falsification



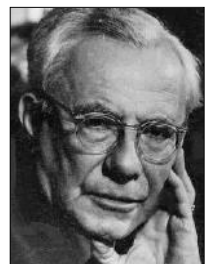
Dr. Antony Flew

- Anthony Flew argues that religious statements have no facts that can be proved true or false. An assertion must be subject to change if proved invalid and yet religious assertions can have no evidence placed before them and so cannot change. Therefore they are not valid assertions. Recently, this life-long atheist has begun to confess that he believes a creator God probably does exist.
- Richard Swinburne argues that we can still derive meaning from unverifiable statements, for example, 'The toys come out of the cupboard when we are not looking.' We still understand what this statement means, even though we cannot verify it.
- R.M. Hare argues that religious propositions are non-cognitive but have meaning because they affect how people view the world, such as the student who believed his teachers were plotting to kill him, despite no evidence to prove it. His behaviour was affected.
- It can be argued that believers have a prior commitment to faith in God and do not allow evidence to undermine it.



Symbol

- Metaphors and symbols help bring understanding about God. Paul Tillich (1886–1965) believes they communicate religious experiences. Arguably, symbol and metaphor are closer to poetry more mythical and evocative of the experience. Symbols go beyond the external world and open up levels of reality and depths to our soul. They participate in the greater reality
- Some might argue, though, that symbols do not relate to factual information and are meaningless as they cannot be verified or falsified. Symbols cannot give insight to things beyond human knowledge. They cannot be tested for accuracy. Symbols relate to the real world, not beyond it.
- Paul Ricoeur (*The Metaphorical Process*, 1975) argues that 'the function of language is to articulate our experience of the world, to give form to this experience.' Through language we communicate our experience to others, forming new ways to conceive the world.
- Rather than suspending reality for Ricoeur, a metaphor creates a new way of 'seeing' or constructing reality and opening new understandings of God that are impossible to communicate by the literal use of language.



Analogy

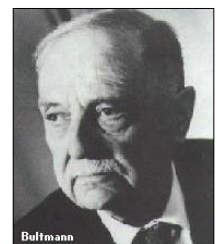
- How can language about the physical world be used to describe God?
- Aquinas rejected the claim that religious language could be univocal. Human love, in time and space, is not the same as God's love, which is beyond both.
- Aquinas also said religious language cannot be equivocal. The words cannot mean entirely different things. If there was no link between the two meanings, then we could know nothing about 'God'.
- Aquinas looked to analogy He used this comparison: the animal is healthy and the animal's urine is healthy
- The health of urine and animal are different but they are connected as the animal produced the urine. God created the world and it depends on God, so when we talk of God's goodness there is a connection between it and the goodness of a human being.
- To say, 'God is good' is analogy of attribution. God is the cause of the goodness that a person has.
- Aquinas uses the example of the sun. The effects of the sun are similar to those of God. This example shows the remote resemblance between language about God's creation and language about God. You would learn very little about the sun by studying a tree.
- Another analogy is analogy of proportion: 'I know what a perfect circle is, so when you say God is perfect, I have a notion of perfection.'
- With both forms of analogy we are able to use language about God but cannot fully understand the meaning of this language.



- Ian Ramsey extends analogy He talks about models and qualifiers. In 'God is good', 'good' is the model that we have a human understanding about. We add the word 'infinitely' (a qualifier) to 'good' so we can think in greater depth and get closer to an understanding of God's goodness.

Discussions

- Problems in gaining knowledge about the attributes of God do not necessarily imply God does not exist, nor do they support the possibility of God's existence.
- People talking about God do not normally want to talk about God in terms of negation. Believers describe God in positive terms and in personal terms, rejecting the via negativa.
- Symbols and metaphors can give more imaginative understandings of God but could be too subjective to be of value. Metaphorical talk can be challenged by literal understandings. People can say, 'Is God really like that?' out of a desire for a literal understanding.
- God talk can be understood as having a truth embedded in myth. Rudolf Bultmann, in his essay 'New Testament and Mythology' (Kerygma and Myth, 1953), argued that theology must strip away to get at the truth. However, whether it is as easy to decide what is the mythological language that should be stripped away, as Bultmann suggests, is questionable. In any case, it is arguable that mythological language itself holds meaning.



Tips for A2 exam questions

'Speaking of God using symbol and analogy creates more problems than it resolves.'
Discuss.

- You could explore philosophers' use of symbol and analogy, referring to Tillich for symbol and Aquinas for analogy, though any modern writers you have studied for this could also be explored.
- You could consider whether symbol touches the imagination more satisfactorily than analogy; whether it offers new insights or subjective views.
- You could consider whether the use of symbol and analogy are only of use for believers.
- Symbol and analogy may be culturally determined, so you might want to argue they can be misleading — the symbol of God as a shepherd does not convey as much in an urban society as in a traditional rural one, for example. There are the feminist issues of symbol and analogy being often anthropocentric, with perhaps the need for more feminised symbols to be included.

Critical comments

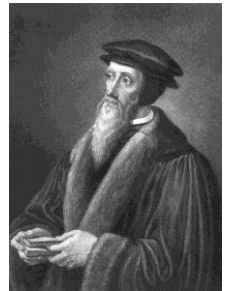
'It is not just a matter of saying that there must be some grounds for ascribing perfections to God. We must also insist that if we ascribe the same terms to God and creatures, then there must be a connection between the relevant criteria of evidence and truth. Thus the grounds for ascribing terms like "love", "father", "exist" and "life" must bear some relationship to the grounds used for our normal everyday application of these terms. Similarly, even if "God created the world" expressed a unique relationship, its truth conditions must bear some resemblance to our familiar uses of terms like "make" or "depends on" (which is not to say that we must expect to be able to verify the doctrine of creation empirically here and now).' (Patrick Sherry, *Analogy Today* Philosophy, 51, 1976)

RELIGIOUS ETHICS 2

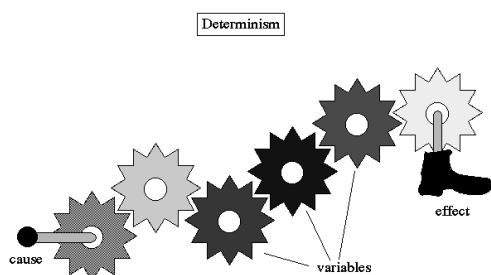
Freewill and Determinism

Hard Determinism

- Hard determinism maintains that we are not free and cannot be held morally responsible for our actions: 'All our choices, decisions, intentions, other mental events, and our actions are no more than effects of other equally necessitated events.' (Honderich)
- Predestination is a Christian view held by some Protestants that God has already decided who will be saved and who will not, suggesting that humans are not free to secure salvation. John Calvin (1506–64) described it as 'the eternal decree of God, by which God determined what God wished to make of every man. For God does not create everyone in the same condition, but ordains eternal life for some and eternal damnation for others.' (Institutes, 1559)



- Augustine (Divine Election, 4th-5th century) implied that God has some role in our formation as good or bad people: **'The potter has authority over the clay from the same lump to make one vessel for honour and another for contempt.'**
 - All actions have a prior cause. This challenges the notion of moral responsibility as people do not have freedom to deliberate or make a free choice.
- The sense of deliberation is an illusion. Spinoza wrote: **'Men think themselves free on account of this alone, that they are conscious of their actions and ignorant of the causes of them'** (Ethica Online Geometrico Demonstrata, 1674).
- Traditional understandings of the scientific world and modern understandings of genetic engineering suggests there may be causal relationships or strong influences between one action and another action.
- Determinism means that we are mistaken to praise some people for being good or for blaming others for being bad as determinism calls the idea of moral responsibility into question.
- Determinism has been used in criminal cases as a justification for a lesser punishment when it demonstrated that the accused was not in full control of themselves (such as diminished responsibility when an abused wife murders her abuser husband).
- The upbringing of a person (nurture) can affect their ability to make moral decisions,



- though this does not necessarily mean they should not be punished.
 - Some argue that determinism undermines moral responsibility and the possibility for using words like 'moral' or 'immoral'. Kant said, 'ought implies can,' defining moral actions as freely undertaken actions. If we are not free to act, we are not morally responsible for the act.

Soft determinism

- Some acts are determined, but we have some moral responsibility for our actions.
- Determinism does not rule out free will — the two are compatible and so moral decisions and moral debate remains possible.
- Some of our actions are conditioned, while others have so complex a collection of causes that they may properly be described as freely decided or willed.
- Soft determinists are criticised by hard determinists for failing to realise the extent to which human freedom is limited, and by libertarians for failing to realise the degree of human freedom that exists.
- Soft determinism offers an agreeable account of moral freedom as moral responsibility and judgement is possible.
- Soft determinists have not agreed on precisely what is and what is not a determining factor in human action.

Libertarianism

- According to libertarianism, we are free and morally responsible for our actions.
- Human beings believe that they have self-determination or freedom to act: 'By liberty then, we can only mean a power of acting or not acting, according to the determinations of the will; that is, if we choose to remain at rest, we may; if we choose to move, we also may' (David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 1748)
- 'Man chooses not of necessity but freely' (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1273)
- Moral actions are not chance or random events but result from the values and character of the moral agent.
- Humans have a sense of decision-making or deliberation and some give in to temptation, while others hold out.
- Libertarianism rejects cause and effect as a reason for human action but does not offer an alternative explanation for human action. It does not account for a human motive, which has cause of some sort.



Critical comments

Benedict Spinoza (*Ethica Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata*, 1674) notes that people are aware of their free action: 'An infant thinks it freely seeks milk, an angry child thinks that it freely desires vengeance, or a timid child thinks it freely chooses flight. Again, a drunken man thinks that he speaks by the free decision of the mind those things which, if he were sober, he would keep to himself. . . So experience teaches as clearly as reason that men think themselves free on account of this alone, that they are conscious of their actions and ignorant of the causes of them.'

A.J. Ayer (*Philosophical Essays*, 1959) argues that actions are either determined or not: 'Either it is an accident that I choose to act as I do or it is not. If it is an accident, then it is merely a matter of chance that I did not choose otherwise; and if it is merely a matter of chance that I did not choose otherwise, it is surely irrational to hold me morally responsible for choosing as I did. But if it is not an accident that I choose to do one thing rather than another, then presumably there is some causal explanation of my choice: and in that case we are led back to determinism.'

Tips for A2 exam questions

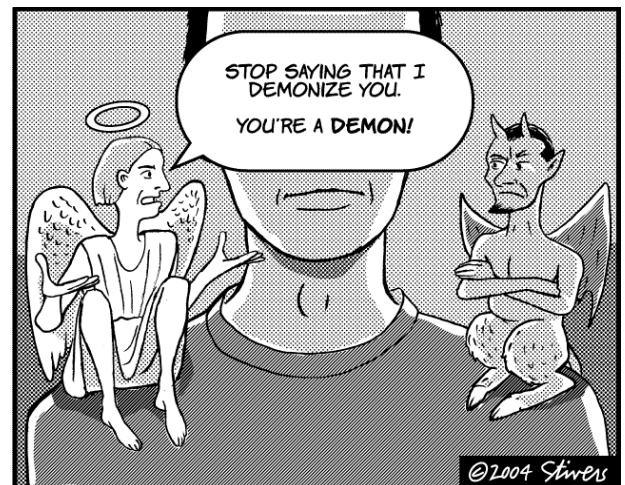
'Unless we assume that everyone is free to make moral choices, we have no right to punish criminals.' Discuss.

- You could explore the implications of the idea of freedom of moral choice for moral responsibility; with reference to libertarianism and possibly Kant.
- You might explain how determinism implies a lack of moral freedom as criminals might be predetermined to offend because of nurture or nature (genetic disposition or upbringing). Examples should be given to illustrate this idea.
- If behaviour is inevitable and beyond the control of the criminal, should they be blamed or punished? Should good behaviour be praised or rewarded?
- The arguments of soft determinists could be included to contrast with hard determinists.
- Would it be possible for society to operate without a legal system and the presumption of some degree of moral freedom, even if it is only apparent and not actual?

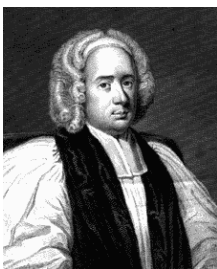
Conscience

Conscience and Aquinas

- Aquinas believed conscience is the power of reason, a device or faculty for distinguishing right from wrong actions rather than an inner knowledge of right and wrong.
- People basically tend towards good and away from evil. Conscience is 'reason making right decisions'. (*Summa Theologica*, 1273)
- When making a moral decision, synderesis is right reason, an awareness of the moral principle to do good and avoid evil, and conscientia distinguishes between right and wrong and makes the moral decision.



Conscience and Joseph Butler (1692–1752)



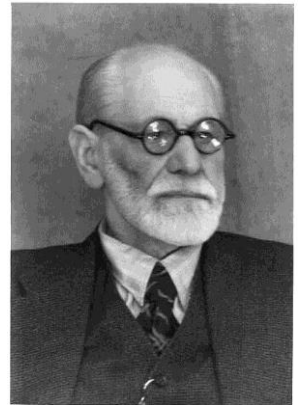
- Butler stated that conscience is intuitive and a powerful moral authority, the final decision-maker.
- 'There is a principle of reflection in men by which they distinguish between approval and disapproval of their own actions.. this principle in man.. is conscience.' (Butler, *Fifteen Sermons*, 1726)
- Humans are influenced by two basic principles: self-love and the love of others. Conscience directs us towards focusing on the happiness of others and away from focusing on ourselves.
- Conscience determines and judges the right/wrongness of actions without introspection.



- Butler said, 'Had it strength as it had right, had it power as it had manifest authority, it would absolutely govern the world.' Conscience is 'our natural guide, the guide assigned us by the Author of our nature.'

Conscience and Freud

- Sigmund Freud saw conscience as guilt (The Outline of Psychoanalysis, 1938). The human psyche is inspired by powerful instinctive desires that have to be satisfied.
- Children learn that the world restricts these desires. Humans create the ego, which takes account of the realities of the world and society. A 'superego' internalises and reflects anger and disapproval of others.
- A guilty conscience is created, which grows into a life and power of its own, irrespective of the rational thought and reflection of the individual.
- The mature and healthy conscience is the ego's reflection on the best way of achieving integrity. The immature conscience (the superego) is a mass of feelings of guilt.
- The psychological account of conscience can undermine both Aquinas and Butler.



Newman and Piaget



- Cardinal Newman wrote: 'Conscience is a law of the mind.. a messenger of him, who, both in nature and in grace, speaks to us behind a veil, and teaches and rules us by his representatives.'
- Following conscience was following divine law. Conscience is God speaking to us and has ultimate authority: 'I toast the Pope, but I toast conscience first.'
- You must do what you sincerely believe to be right and are

justified in doing so even if you are mistaken.

- However, tensions between individual conscience and moral absolutes can occur.
- Piaget argues in The Awakening (1974) that there is a distinction between the conscience's deliberation of a moral rule and the practice of that rule. In effect, the practice is the effective moral behaviour and it is difficult to know at what point conscience coincides with practice.



Issues

- Conscience may be a moral source found within the human being, like the soul, which is distinctively human and provides a source for guilt and sense of moral obligation. Such an approach is challenged by Freud who argues that the external world forms the internal.
- Conscience could be a capacity that may be developed through moral education, but, on the other hand, may be left underdeveloped, leaving a person amoral and insensitive towards moral factors in life. This might be compatible with Freudian interpretations of conscience.
- Conscience could be a divine faculty that connects the person to the divine laws intuitively

"Conscience is the inner voice that warns us somebody may be looking"

Henry Louis Mencken

or through reason, though atheists would naturally dispute this possibility

- Conscience may not be useful in ethics as we cannot measure what someone else's conscience is telling them, so conscience is difficult to evaluate.
- We may manipulate our conscience to justify our actions. Aquinas notes that it may be misled or misinformed, which could explain this.
- If conscience is the voice of God, how do we account for situations where conscience conflicts? Butler gives conscience ultimate authority, but some people commit horrific crimes which they justify by their conscience.
- People may not listen to their conscience correctly and may not inform their conscience, and so make mistakes.
- Conscience may not provide clear-cut moral guidance where there are conflicting obligations or duties, but instead may be more of a process or reasoned judgement.
- It is reasonable to consider conscience as part of the moral decision-making process. People can act with integrity and in accordance to ethical principles important to them.
- The judgement of those who break the law because of conscience must be moderated between those who seem to act for accepted ethical principles, while nevertheless breaking the law and those who break fundamental ethical principles.

Tips for A2 exam questions

To what extent is conscience a reliable guide in sexual ethics?

- You should choose a particular topic from sexual ethics, such as homosexuality, to discuss.
- The tension between trusting conscience to act with integrity against the difficulty of acting impartially in matters of a sexual nature.
- There should be a discussion of Aquinas' comments about the possible weaknesses of conscience and the danger of ignorance as perhaps illustrated when conscience advises people to go against established moral laws.
- Consideration should be given to whether other moral sources should be used, such as moral laws/teachings, of the situation, and consequences of actions.
- There could be some discussion of the term 'reliable' how can we tell whether we are really being driven by our conscience or whether that 'voice' is coming from our parents' teaching, or our own will, or an outmoded religious stance, and so on?

Assess critically the nature and role of the conscience in ethical decision-making.

- Explore the different views of conscience, as well as psychological views.
- You could make an evaluation of ethical decision-making in relation to conscience, perhaps with an example.
- You could consider the limitations of conscience when informed by ignorance, as could the possibility of developing or refining it, and the dangers of guilt or the desire to satisfy others overriding reason.
- You might like to consider whether conscience alone is a satisfactory moral authority — what about the law, religious teachings?
- You could look at the reliability of conscience and factors that could undermine it.
- Give examples in your discussion illustrating the different moral dimension of action, including consequences, situations, and intentions, as well as psychological,

cultural and scientific influences.

Critical comments

Henry David Thoreau (1817–62) (*On the Duty of Civil Disobedience*, 1849) argued for the ultimate supremacy of conscience over the law: After all, the practical reason why, when the power is once in the hands of the people, a majority are permitted, and for a long period to continue, to rule is not because they are most likely to be in the right, nor because this seems fairest to the minority but because they are physically the strongest. But a government in which the majority rule in all cases can not be based on justice, even as far as men understand it. Can there not be a government in which the majorities do not virtually decide right and wrong, but conscience? Which majorities decide only those questions to which the rule of expediency is applicable? Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator? Why has every man a conscience then? I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterwards. It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think right.'

Christian ethics

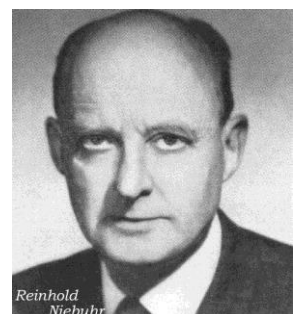
Sources of Roman Catholic ethics

- There are diverse approaches to Christian ethics according to the denomination.
- Roman Catholic ethics are based in part on Aquinas' Natural Law and in part on Virtue Ethics.
- Natural Law is a key ethical theory underpinning Roman Catholic Christianity with its emphasis on reason as a tool to perceive Natural Law and its deontological emphasis in the application of the primary precepts. Some acts are intrinsically right or wrong, good or evil in themselves.
- Conscience also plays a role for Roman Catholic ethics with Aquinas' view that conscience is reason, making moral decisions that must be informed by prayer and worship, the teaching of the Church, experience, and the inner voice of the Holy Spirit.
- The Roman Catholic Church also refers to Virtue Ethics: Aristotle's idea that our moral actions determine the nature of our character and Aquinas' idea that we must practise the virtues to make good behaviour habitual.
- Sacred scripture is an important source of ethical guidance in Roman Catholic Christianity which cannot be changed. The Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and other key texts about Christian discipleship and behaviour form what is known as 'divine positive law', which no human can change.
- The role of the person is important as well as the acts themselves.



Protestant Christian ethics

- There are different approaches to ethics amongst Protestant churches.
- Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971) applies the Gospel to social issues through love: 'The primary issue is to derive a social ethics from the absolute ethic of the Gospel.. social ethics must be concerned with the establishment of tolerable harmonies of life, tolerable forms of justice.'



- Paul Ramsey (Basic Christian Ethics, 1950) sees Christian ethics as 'obedient love' or 'love fulfilling the law'. Analysing ethical problems from the viewpoint of Christian love simply means that Jesus Christ is the centre.
- Joseph Fletcher (Situation Ethics, 1966) sees ethics as depending on the situation rather than any deontological basis, and argues that the person should seek the most loving outcome.
- More conservative Protestants offer an absolutist interpretation of Christian ethics. Robertson McQuilkin (An Introduction to Biblical Ethics, 1995) sees the Bible as a revelation by God of God's will for human nature and that universal Bible norms are absolute.
- Lewis B. Smedes (Mere Mortality, 1987) focuses on the commandments, fulfilled by the coming of Jesus, as embodying an enduring human law.
- There is a sharp divide between those who take a deontological approach to moral norms espoused in the Bible and those who focus on Jesus' love as a power that overcomes the constraints of laws.
- Protestant Christians have different views on current issues such as abortion and homosexuality. Evangelical Christians prohibit abortion and homosexual sex as acts that contravene biblical laws, while more liberal Christians have exceptions through the application of love.

The purpose of ethical behaviour

- For most Christian Churches, ethical behaviour comes from a sense of obedience to God and a desire to live life in the way that God advocates.
- Christian discipleship is the attempt to live in a way that imitates Christ and in doing so helps to bring about the Kingdom of God.
- Many Christians also see moral behaviour as behaving in a way that suits the human being. God has made humans and gives advice on how they can live life to the full.
- There is also a fundamental sense in which moral behaviour enables the Christian to enter into God's kingdom or Heaven, though in itself good acts are not the critical factor. More important are acts of repentance and a desire to do good.



Christian ethics: deontological or teleological?

- Most Christian ethics are deontological with Catholics often seeing acts as intrinsically right or wrong according to their compatibility with Natural Law, and, along with many other Christians, a sense of obedience to the divine law reflected in the biblical ethical teachings.
- More radical is the Situationist approach, which is both teleological, as it pursues a most loving outcome, and relative, as it considers each situation separately with no idea that actions are right or wrong in themselves.
- Some liberal strands of Roman Catholic ethics are personalist with an emphasis on putting the person at the centre of the moral equation rather than the act or the consequence.
- There is also the Virtue Ethics dimension, based on Aristotle, which sees the improvement of human character in terms of living a more Christ-like life. Here, the focus is on becoming more fully human.

- Virtue Ethics is a source of Roman Catholic ethics — our moral actions determine the nature of our character and there are desirable virtues to cultivate within.

Tips for A2 exam questions

To what extent is the religion you have studied consistent with a Utilitarian approach to ethics?

- You could start by outlining the general situation that religious ethics tends to be focused on acts, while Utilitarianism is focused on ends.
- You might consider how religious ethics (with examples from Natural Law or divine command sources, perhaps) contrasts with Utilitarianism, which applies a principle that evaluates the options, looking for the best possible results.
- You could explore the consequences of these differences: that Utilitarianism might be prepared to break commonly agreed rules, sacrificing an individual for a greater good, while many religious ethical systems would not allow rules to be abandoned in this way.
- You might consider the exception of Situationism, which seems to cross the barriers, and Fletcher's justification that Situationism is a religious ethic.
- While happiness or pleasure is a core idea of Utilitarianism, love or compassion is a far more important idea in some religious ethics. Consider the case that love can be sought in the way Situationism claims.

Critical comments

Reinhold Niebuhr (*An Interpretation of christian Ethics*, 1935) writes: 'I still believe, as I have believed then, that love may be the motive of social action but that justice must be the instrument of love in the world in which self interest is bound to defy the canons of love at every level. . . The primary issue is to derive a social ethics from the absolute ethic of the Gospel. The Gospel ethic is absolute because it merely presents the final law of human freedom: the love of God and the neighbour. A social ethics must be concerned with the establishment of tolerable harmonies of life, tolerable forms of justice.'

Robertson McQuilkin (*An Introduction to Biblical Ethics*, 1995) sees the Bible as 'a revelation by God of his will for human nature.. Those laws or other teachings that derive from, interpret, or reinforce one of the Ten Commandments should thus be recognised as having enduring authority'

Environmental ethics

What is environmental ethics?

- 'Environmental ethics' includes the preservation of species, the conservation of habitats, the depletion of biodiversity and natural resources, the ozone layer, and the effects of pollution.
- It is concerned with our attitudes towards and impact on the biological and geological dimensions of the planet, how that affects humanity, and the well-being and diversity of other forms of life on earth and geological systems.
- There are concerns among many scientists that human activity is unsustainable and will



harm the future well-being of human life, that of other forms of life on earth, and will damage permanently the earth's geological systems.

- A few challenge this view arguing that development protects us from the environment and enables us to counter the extremes of weather and failures of crops.

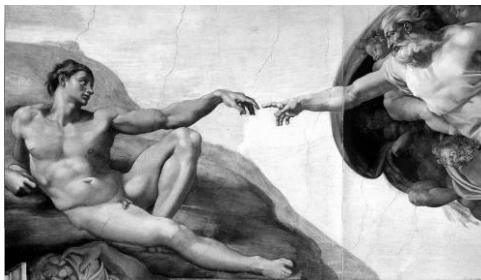
Criticism of religious approaches to environmental ethics

- The Judaeo-Christian Bible is accused of encouraging human domination and exploitation of the world: 'Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air.' (Genesis 1.26) Thomas Aquinas maintained that 'all animals are naturally subject to man'.
- Some philosophers criticise the Judaeo-Christian tradition for placing humans at the moral centre and leaving the environment as morally insignificant (an anthropocentric view).
- Genesis makes humans dominant over the world and humans are encouraged to multiply over it and subdue it —the natural world exists for the benefit of humans and nature has no intrinsic value.
- Revised beliefs and values could be proposed that emphasise the responsibility humans have for the earth, prioritise the improvement in the quality of life over material production, and to use material resources carefully and protect the quality of the environment.



Defence of religious approaches to environmental ethics

- Religious ethics are often theocentric (God-centred) as God is the underlying reason for moral behaviour. This includes environmental ethics. They are also anthropocentric in that Christian/agape love of neighbour is the fundamental principle for human relations as the environment affects the quality and ease of human life, and geo/biocentric in that creation is 'God-made' and good and therefore must be preserved because it is a good in itself.
- The environment is God's sacred creation. Humans are stewards, responsible to God for their use of the world God has made. Humans are created and their activity has worth as



part of God's creative process. Technology and science are not intrinsically bad. God works in and through nature and it is important to God (see Psalm 19).

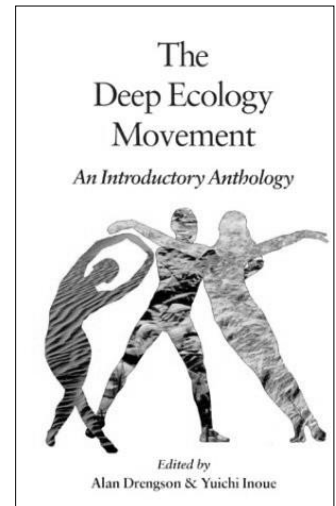
- Pope John Paul II writes that environmental damage has come about because humans have set themselves in place of God and tyrannised nature, ignoring God's purpose for it.
- Christians can be called to reject lifestyles that disregard and damage God's creation, that force the poor into greater poverty, and that threaten the right of future generations to a healthy environment.
- Creation has value in itself and reveals God. Christianity teaches that human acts should reflect God's own love for creation as human life depends on it. Sin distorts the human

relationship with the natural world, damaging the balance of nature. A Christian's relationship with God is affected by how he or she uses creation's gifts.

- 'What is wrong is a style of life which is presumed to be better when it is directed towards having rather than being and which wants to have more, not in order to be more but in order to spend life in enjoyment as an end in itself.' (Pope John Paul II)
- Humans must observe environmental justice, which means the impact of their lifestyles on others and the world. The desire for affluence and greater wealth can dominate.

Deep ecology and some criticism

- Deep ecology is an attempt to define a secular environmental ethic that recognises value in all life forms, the natural systems and diversity of earth, and rejects anthropocentric ethics.
- Leopold (Round River, 1949) called for a new ethic dealing with humans' relation to land and the animals and plants that grow upon it. He sought to enlarge the boundary of the moral community to include soils, waters, plants and animals, or collectively the land.
- Leopold says: 'A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.'
- Arne Naess and George Sessions ('Basic Principles of Deep Ecology,' *Ecophilosophy*, Vol. 6, 1984) proposed that all life was intrinsically valuable, irrespective of its usefulness. They argued that deep ecology sought to 'preserve the integrity of the biosphere for its own sake', not for any possible human benefits.
- Some extend this to include natural objects or systems, arguing that all organisms and entities in the ecosphere, as parts of the interrelated whole, are equal in intrinsic worth.
- J. Lovelock's hypothesis sees the ecosystem as an entity that must be considered in any moral deliberation (*Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*, 1979).
- Singer (*Practical Ethics*, 1993) maintains that while life forms can have value as part of the diverse interrelated geophysiological structure of the planet, only sentient life has intrinsic value. Other organisms cannot truly be said to desire to flourish or have experiences.
- Singer believes Lovelock's use of the Greek Goddess Gaia to describe the world confers on the earth a consciousness which is not there.



Critical comments

Kakadu National Park, in Australia's Northern Territory contains rugged woodlands, swamps and waterways, supporting a rich variety of life. It contains species found nowhere else, such as the hooded parrot and the pig-nosed turtle, which are endangered. Kakadu affords aesthetic enjoyment and recreational and research opportunities. Many think it is a place of immense beauty and ecological significance. It is of spiritual significance to the Jawoyn aboriginals. Kakadu is also rich in gold, platinum, palladium and uranium, which some think should be mined. If this happens, then, environmentalists claim, aesthetic, recreational and research opportunities will be reduced, the beauty of Kakadu will be lessened, species will disappear, ecological richness will decrease, the naturalness of the place will be compromised and the spiritual values of the Jawoyn discounted. Mining already goes on in the Kakadu area and there is pressure to allow more. Should more mining be allowed? Should any mining at all be allowed? (Robert Elliot, 'Environmental Ethics,' in *A Companion to Ethics*, 1997)

Tips for A2 exam questions

How far would you agree that environmental issues are more of a concern to a religious believer than to a Utilitarian?

- You could consider the potentially destructive ends that misuse of the environment might lead to and how a Utilitarian should react, as Utilitarians should consider the greater good.
- You may also consider that a religious believer may feel very protective of what s/he sees as a divinely created world, which must be protected as it is.
- Alternatively, you could explore the idea that the believer sees the world as created for him/her to use, with no concern to allow the natural world to be protected for any other reason than service to humanity.
- You might also explore the idea that a Utilitarian would only see the world as a resource for humankind and not consider any natural feature as anything other than a resource.
- These different arguments could be considered in relation to the arguments from religious environmentalists, deep ecologists and the other arguments discussed above.

Sex and relationships

Christian approaches to sexuality

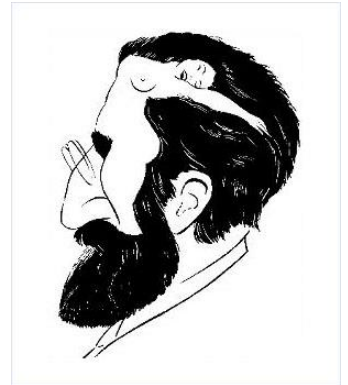
- Early Christians saw celibacy as a holy state. Jesus' second coming was believed to be imminent, bringing with it the end of the world, so marriage and reproduction were no longer thought necessary. Also, Jesus did not marry and St Paul recommended celibacy for all who could withstand the temptations of the flesh. The Roman Catholic Church requires celibacy for its priests. Most other Christian denominations do not.
- Most Christian Churches envisage sex as a practice exclusively for those committed in permanent loving relationships. Sex outside marriage, adultery, masturbation, and homosexual sex may be seen as sinful either because of biblical statements or Natural Law ethics.
- Genesis relates sex to having children. Natural Law sees reproduction as the only purpose of sex and contraception is forbidden for preventing God's purpose.
- Christianity traditionally identified the purpose of marriage as fidelity to one another, procreation and union of the parties. Recently, a greater emphasis has been given to the uniting element of marriage. The Anglican Church has said that 'the commitment is made in love for love'.
- Jack Dominion (*Passionate and Compassionate Love*, 1991) believes that a new definition or description of sex is needed; one that sees sex as a personal expression that communicates recognition and appreciation, confirms sexual identity, brings reconciliation and healing, celebrates life, and is a profound way of thanking each other for the loving partnership that they have.

Other approaches to sexuality

- Contemporary presentations of sex emphasise a libertarian and contractarian ethic — sex is morally permissible if there is mutual agreement or consent between the participating

parties. Sex is not linked with marriage or reproduction. Freedom and autonomy preside.

- Libertarians may adopt the harm principle and observe that no harm is done to either party or other third parties: 'My freedom must not restrict another's or harm them.'
- Adulterous sex harms the betrayed spouse, so the act is wrong.
- This view celebrates sexual liberation embracing freedom and endorses a more tolerant and permissive attitude towards women, homosexuals and sex outside marriage generally
- Feminists criticise both the traditional Christian approaches to sexuality and the liberal ones. Christian approaches rest on a defined cultural role for women, that of the child bearer, wife and submissive. This disempowers women, restricting their status in society and socialising them to meet the desires of men.
- The Hebrew and Greek view of women has meant that for centuries they have had little access to politics, wealth and very little free choice. Sexual behaviour assumes male dominance and female submission — most sexual crimes are committed against women.
- Liberal approaches to sexuality are criticised by feminists because these approaches assume a level playing field between the sexes. Feminists argue that women may not be as free as men to enter sexual relationships due to their oppression by men.
- The feminist Catharine Mackinnon (*Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law*, 1987) argues that sexuality must be re-imagined and remade before moral sexual relationships are possible. Until this is done, sexual activity is immoral.



Christianity and homosexuality

- There is a growing belief that there is no moral issue about same-sex relationships beyond the issues that apply to heterosexual relationships, and yet prejudice against homosexuals exists, as seen in the nail bombing of a gay bar in London's Soho district.
- Homosexual acts were once crimes in the UK and homosexuality was considered a mental illness. In medieval times, homosexuals were burnt at the stake.



- Christianity has traditionally seen homosexuality as wrong because there is no possibility of life from the act (Natural Law), because it is outside marriage (only sex in marriage is permissible), and because of specific Bible passages, which imply a divine prohibition.
- Biblical texts are used as a basis for the condemnation of homosexuality: 'You shall not lie with a man as with a woman: that is an abomination' (Leviticus 18.22), and it is punishable by death (Leviticus 20.13). St Paul describes people engaging in same-sex sexual acts as 'dishonouring their bodies', and his statement is often cited to justify

condemnation of gay relationships.

- The worldwide Anglican community stated that the ordinations of 'practising homosexuals' and the blessing of same-sex unions call into question the authority of holy scripture'.

- Critics of this approach do not accept that scripture can be interpreted and applied in this way. Other rules from similar texts are not enforced in the same way. So Gareth Moore (*The Body in Context: Sex and Catholicism*, 1992), for example, writes that if some Christians arbitrarily follow the law in Leviticus, which says it is immoral for a man to lie with a man, they are still unlikely to follow the passage later on that advocates beheading as punishment or Leviticus 19.19, which forbids the wearing of garments made of two kinds of material.
- The Roman Catholic Church maintains there is no sin involved in an inclination towards a member of the same sex. The homosexual person should be treated with respect, compassion and sensitivity, and not discriminated against. They are called to chastity. Homosexual acts themselves are sinful, depraved and intrinsically disordered.
- Critics of the Natural Law approach to homosexuality argue that sex has a non-



reproductive purpose, the uniting act between a loving couple. Most sexual acts cannot lead to pregnancy, such as sex in the non-fertile part of the monthly cycle, sex after the menopause, sex when one or both partners are infertile, or sex when the woman is already pregnant. If the reproductive imperative in sex is rejected, then Natural Law no longer opposes homosexual sex.

- Sexual organs are suited for reproduction and the production of intense pleasure in oneself and others. To condemn people for using their sexual organs for their own pleasure reveals the prejudices and taboos of our society.
- Liberal Christian writers maintain that the quality of the relationship, be it heterosexual or homosexual, is what determines its moral value. They dispute the interpretation of biblical passages and draw on the teaching that all are made 'in the image and likeness of God'. God created homosexual men and women, so they must be good. A good God could not intentionally create disordered human beings.
- Gareth Moore argues that there is a Christian basis for an inclusive attitude towards homosexuals because it is a religion that positively seeks to make room for the marginalised, outcasts and failures in society.

Critical comments

'We are convinced that homosexuality and lesbianism are clearly a deviation from the natural norm and divine order and those who practise homosexuality and lesbianism are in sin (Romans 1.24–7).. Some Westerners have introduced homosexual practices in the Great Lakes Region of Africa, but we, as Africans, repudiate the practice and do not wish it to be seen in our Province. We want to promote stable, monogamous marriage between a man and a woman within the love of God.' (Statement on homosexuality by the Anglican Province of Rwanda, 31 January 1998, <http://newark.rutgers.edu/lcrew/rwanda.html>)

Desmond Tutu, the Anglican Archbishop of South Africa, wrote on homophobia: 'We reject them [homosexuals], treat them as pariahs, and push them outside our church communities, and thereby we negate the consequences of their baptism and ours. We make them doubt that they are the children of God, and this must be nearly the ultimate blasphemy. We blame them for something that is becoming increasingly clear they can do little about.' (February 1996, www.religioustolerance.org/horn_ang2.htm)

Tips for A2 exam questions

'Absolute moral rules have no place in personal relationships.' Discuss.

- Are personal relationships so individual that general universal principles cannot be

applied?

- Does the application of deontological absolutist rules cause harm to people's unique relationships?
- Consider whether there are any principles or some categorical imperatives that are binding in every relationship. For example, is adultery wrong if no one involved is hurt or concerned about it?
- Should homosexual relationships be condemned if no one is harmed and some people find fulfilment through them?
- Ethical theory and its point of view should be applied, be it Utilitarian, Natural Law, Kantian, Situation Ethics or Virtue Ethics, to support your discussion.

How effective is Natural Law when applied to an issue of sexual ethics?

- You could explain that Natural Law ethics is deontological and expresses primary precepts, which all actions must be measured against.
- The priority of reproduction in sexual matters could be explained and you could give the examples of how that is interpreted by the Roman Catholic Church in relation to contraception, homosexuality, and masturbation.
- You could consider whether there is a single human nature with regard to sexuality.
- You could look at the idea of a purpose for human sexual organs and the impact that it has on sexual ethics issues such as masturbation and homosexuality
- You could discuss whether matters of sexual ethics can have deontological laws applied and, if so, which these might be and whether they might be incompatible with certain lifestyles.
- You could explore whether the precepts that Natural Law traditionally outlines need to be refined or rejected or whether the theory in itself provides a corrective to modern-day excesses.

War, peace and justice

Holy wars

- Wars against the Muslim control of Jerusalem in the Middle Ages were seen as holy wars or crusades, some churchmen saw the First World War as a war for the Kingdom of God.
- A holy war is guided by God but Christian Churches have rejected this idea.
- Islam has a concept called 'jihad' (the Arabic for 'fight', or 'conflict'), which is a personal individual struggle against evil in the way of Allah. It can also be a collective defence of a Muslim community
- Most modern theologians reject holy war as it expresses a simplistic view of God that supports one particular national interest and rejects mercy for the enemy.

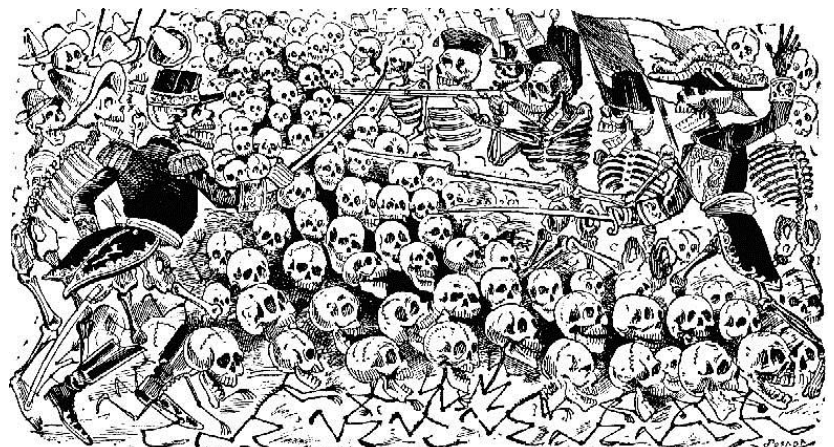


Just War

- Just War theory explains when it is right to fight and how war should be fought. It was

explained by Thomas Aquinas.

- The Old Testament portrays God as leading the Hebrews to victory in battle and St Paul argues that rulers are servants of God when they execute God's wrath on domestic wrongdoers.
- Just authority means war started by a legitimate authority Wars cannot be started by private citizens or incompetent governments.
- Wars should be fought for a just cause, which means those who are attacked should deserve it. The just cause might be to protect innocent life, or guaranteeing basic human rights, for example. The intention should be just, which means for the advancement of good or the avoidance of evil.
- During the conflict, right intention means pursuit of peace and reconciliation including the avoidance of unnecessarily destructive acts or imposing unreasonable conditions.
- There has to be proportionality between the injustice that led to the war and the damage done by war in terms of suffering and loss of human life. The damage to be inflicted and the costs incurred by war must be proportionate to the good expected by taking up arms.
- War must be the last resort with all peaceful attempts at resolution exhausted before violence. There should be a fair chance that the war will be won. Hopeless suffering and loss of life for no constructive purpose is wrong.
- There should be comparative justice, so both sides to the conflict must be fairly considered.
- There are rules of conduct in Just War theory, although such rules have often been ignored in practice.
- International agreements, such as the Geneva and Hague Conventions, seek to limit certain kinds of warfare. Senior Serb commanders were successfully tried for war crimes in the war in Bosnia.
- Christianity has advocated conditions of conduct to limit destruction and who may be killed. Only the minimal force necessary should be used and non-combatants should not be killed.
- Just War theory attempts to maintain core moral principles in a framework to permit the use of violence in controlled circumstances and against certain targets.
- It does not allow wanton acts of violence in the national interest but only the use of minimal force, and seeks to preserve basic human rights and take account of justice.
- Realists argue that the Just War conditions are ambiguous or too simplistic. Wars are caused by complex reasons, there may not be a single 'just' cause. Outcomes of war are difficult to calculate and it is not always clear that peace



will be the result or that success is likely. To expect fighting soldiers who have to kill their opponents to keep their thoughts free from malice or prejudice towards those opponents is implausible.

- It is unclear who is a 'just target' in war. A soldier is a combatant, but a civilian population supporting the army through industrial activity is also supporting the war machinery.

Pacifism

- Pacifists argue that Just War theory ignores Jesus' rejection of violence to prevent his capture and also his advocacy of love of enemies.
- Pacifists argue that war is always wrong. In its most extreme form, pacifism is the opposition to all forms of violence as a means of settling disputes, either between individuals or between countries, including self-defence.
- Siddhartha Gotama, the founder of Buddhism, required that his followers renounce violence.
- Early Christians refused to fight in the Roman Imperial army, interpreting pacifism from Jesus' teachings about loving our neighbours as ourselves, turning the other cheek, and from his order to Peter to drop his sword.
- Several Reformation churches are pacifist, including Moravians, the Society of Friends (Quakers), and the Church of the Brethren. Members refuse to bear arms and fight.
- Some are pacifists for philosophical reasons, believing that killing or physically attacking another human is intrinsically wrong, and the loss of life, human suffering and tremendous economic, social and moral damage caused by war is too great.
- Pacifism is difficult to maintain, especially as it takes away from the victim the right to judge whether a violent response is just (self-defence).
- The widespread use of mass deportations, and even mass exterminations, shows the weakness of pacifist principles.

Critical comments

'We utterly deny...all outward wars and strife and fighting with outward weapons for any end or under any...pretence whatsoever; this is our testimony to the whole world...The Spirit of Christ by which we are guided is not changeable, so as once to command...us from a thing of evil and again to move us into it; and we certainly know and testify to...the world that the Spirit of Christ which leads us into all truth will never move us to...fight and war against any man with outward weapons, neither for the Kingdom of Christ nor...for the kingdoms of this world...therefore we cannot learn war anymore.' (Excerpts from a statement made by the Religious Society of Friends to King Charles II, 1660)

'I...told them I knew from whence all wars arose...and that I lived in the virtue of that life...and power that took away the occasion of all wars; and that I was come into the covenant...of peace which was before all wars and strife.' (George Fox, founder of the Religious Society of Friends, 1650)

Realism

- Some Christians, such as Reinhold Niebuhr, rejected pacifism for 'Christian realism'.
- Realism considers human nature to be evil, so human communities must use force to maintain a just and ordered society.
- The usual moral rules that restrict harming or killing each other do not apply to communities or states that have special rights necessitated by their status.
- A war that serves the national interest is morally acceptable.
- Christian realists see pacifism as a heresy, which assumes that love is guaranteed victory over the world. Pacifists expect God's will to prevail without realising they have a duty to be proactive in the world. They do not recognise that God rules through human institutions

such as governments and the courts.

- Some might question the special rights that national governments are granted by realism, arguing that there is no moral difference just because a number are gathered together.
- Pacifism places limitations on individual rights of self-defence, which, given the existence in the world of weapons of mass destruction and the practice of genocide, appear unacceptable.
- Realism provides no limitations to a government's actions in war and in an era where there are war crimes against large civilian populations. Arguably, there should be some limitations on governments in war.

Tips for A2 exam questions

Discuss how ethical theories might be applied to issues of war and peace.

- You could consider the application of deontological ethical theories to killing, such as whether Kant would group warfare in the same terms as murder, or whether the Natural Law precept to protect life means not killing or defending with lethal force those in danger of being unjustly killed. You could consider whether both could advocate pacifism based on a 'kingdom of ends' (Kant) and preserving life.
- You could explore the teleological theories of Utilitarianism and Situationism and how they might provide a more pragmatic approach than absolute pacifism, or a justification for war if the consequences merited it.
- Contrast the pacifist argument with the Just War theory that war in certain circumstance may be justified if fought in a certain way — consider the Second World War in this light.
- The weaknesses of any ethical justification of war could be illustrated through other conflicts of contested morality, such as the second Iraq War, the Falklands War, or the Vietnam War.

CONNECTIONS IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES (THE SYNOPTIC PAPER)

Answering synoptic questions

Answers to the synoptic questions are marked at the same standard as the rest of the A2 papers. You are not expected to be more knowledgeable and intelligent in the synoptic section. The marks are divided in the same way for knowledge and understanding and evaluative skills. The important thing is to answer the question specifically rather than trying to include everything you have done on the related topics. You do not have to try and divide what you say between philosophy material and ethics material as long as you address the question.

Conscience and the moral argument; Conscience or the sense of moral responsibility as possible evidence for the existence of God

- This topic links the work you have done on conscience in ethics with the work you have done on the moral argument for the existence of God and the criticisms of it in philosophy.
- People have a concept of conscience linked to their sense of moral responsibility and guilt. It is considered important to act with integrity in accordance with what a person believes to be right. That belief is informed by their conscience.
- Aquinas, Butler and Newman all argue that conscience exists and is informed by God, be it understood as a rational tool for discerning the Natural Law or an intuitive way of hearing the 'voice of God'.
- Conscience seems to indicate the existence of morality. We have a clear notion of having done the right thing or not. Sometimes we feel obliged to do the thing we do not want to do, out of a sense of moral obligation, even if it will not be easy and may harm us.
- Conscience implies some sort of moral authority, a guiding principle or objective voice.
- Newman argues that conscience suggests the existence of God. Adams conceives rightness as in accordance with God's will. If God does not exist, there is no morality.
- The sense of moral obligation informed by conscience is evidence supporting Kant's contention that human beings discern the moral law.
- Moral people act out of obedience to this moral voice. Kant argues that in a perfect world, moral behaviour should lead to happiness, but as this does not always happen, Heaven must exist as a place where this is the case, implying that God exists.
- God's existence is morally necessary and conscience is evidence supporting the argument.

Arguments against conscience as possible evidence for the existence of God

- Freud provides a non-religious argument for conscience, identifying it as the superego, the internalised parent that conveys disapproval when we act in a way that contravenes our parents' morals. It may be more mature and is the name for a sense of moral integrity. It could be argued that God uses the human psyche as a way of conveying morals in this mature sense.
- Arguments against a religious interpretation of conscience undermine its use as evidence of God. Consciences seem to vary, suggesting that if God exists and works through conscience, God is arbitrary or that, in fact, conscience is not connected with a divine objective moral code but personal emotions.

- Conscience is used to justify actions that others consider immoral. Conscience may be able to be manipulated. This tends to suggest it is not evidence of God's existence.
- Even if conscience is informed by God, it is not empirically testable and could not be used as evidence to support the moral argument if the person had no sense of morality. However, many people do have a sense of right and wrong.
- Those who already accept the existence of an objective right and wrong may be inclined to believe there is a God and those who believe in God already may accept conscience as evidence of that fact. However, many atheists do have a belief in morality and would be unlikely to accept conscience as evidence for the moral argument.

The concept of free will and determinism in relation to the nature of an omniscient God

- This topic links the work you have done on hard and soft determinism and libertarianism with philosophical ideas about the nature of God.
- Does an omniscient God remove the possibility of human freedom?
- If God created us and knows every aspect of our genes and personalities, if God has created the people around us who influence us, and when God created us, if God knew all the choices that would ever confront us and what we would choose, are we acting freely when we make our moral choices? If God knows the future actions of every person, in what sense are humans free?
- The God of classical theism is considered to be omniscient (all-knowing). A God that is not all-knowing might seem unworthy of worship or status.
- If God is all-knowing, is human action affectively predetermined or predestined? Some Christians argue that God has already decided who will receive eternal punishment and who will receive eternal damnation.
- Determinism holds that humans are not free. All acts are necessitated by prior causes and any sense of true freedom is false.
- This raises a number of questions. Why would God create automatons and then punish them for the sins they committed by his or her design? Would sin exist in a meaningful sense as the person had not willed to go against God but simply followed his or her design?
- Many philosophers argue that moral responsibility is only possible with free will and that humans have freedom to act.
- Libertarianism is the belief that people are free to act and morally culpable for their actions.
- People have a sense of freedom. They have a sense of moral deliberation when deciding what to do. They feel temptation, which they may give in to or resist.
- Some argue that while humans are affected in part by the physical bodies that they have, when it comes to morality they are free.
- If humans are in fact free, then how can God be truly omniscient? If God has foreknowledge of our actions, then are we free? Some argue that God's foreknowledge does not take the freedom away.
- A parent who knows their child may have strong reasons for thinking that the child will abuse a freedom the child requests, yet at the same time, the parent may feel he/she must afford the child the freedom they request, even if they then watch the child making the very mistake they expected. The freedom of the child is real just as the parent's foreknowledge is reliable.

Issues of the extent to which God can be held to know the future, and the implications of this for human responsibility

- Some argue that God is limited to knowledge of the present and past but is not in a position to know the future acts of individuals. Traditionally, some have argued that God is eternal and exists beyond time and space and knows all events in time, while others argue God is everlasting and exists within time and so does not perceive the future of that time in the same way.
- Traditionally, people are thought to be free to act and only morally responsible for those actions if they are free. Kant says that moral imperatives imply a possibility to do them, 'ought implies can'.
- Human freedom is a defining feature of what it is to be human and we have a sense of moral deliberation.
- Augustine argues that we are created free to turn our will to God but God knows, if God is all-knowing, the evil that we will do if we turn away. God could have chosen not to create those God knew would do evil.
- On the other hand, while God has knowledge of our future actions, God has not willed us to do them. We have free will to act in such a way and must, therefore, be responsible for those actions.
- Horrendous moral actions and sufferings might question whether God's decision to create was a moral one.
- Irenaeus argues that God has created humans imperfect to become perfect in life. Perhaps God is responsible because we were created with the capacity for wrongdoing and God has the future knowledge of the inevitability of sin and our individual sins.
- Alternatively, perhaps God does not have knowledge of the future, just knowledge of the past and the present, though this seems to limit God beyond that of classical theism.
- Plato suggests that it is possible for human beings to seek out the good. Aquinas believes humans tend to the good and Kant believes people have a sense of the moral law

The relation between free will and the problem of evil

- Does evidence of human free will counter the challenge of the problem of evil?
- The problem of evil is how can there be a good God, all-powerful and all-knowing, when evil exists?
- According to Irenaeus, evil in the world is necessary to improve the souls of people. This implicates God in intentionally bringing about evil, which seems morally unjustifiable.
- According to Augustine, the presence of evil and suffering is a result of human action against the will of God. Swinburne argues that humans are necessarily given the capacity to do evil because they are free.
- Human beings seem to have free will to do good or bad and are morally responsible for those actions according to Aquinas and Hume.
- Humans have a sense of moral deliberation and we naturally blame people for doing bad things and praise people for doing good things.
- However, there is evidence that human freedom is limited. Some argue that there are genetic influences over human choices. Determinists argue that freedom is an illusion and all actions are the consequence of prior causes.
- If human action is determined by biological imperative, it is difficult to justify the human

suffering in the world. Without the free will defence, God's act of creating can be challenged as irrational and immoral.

- Determinism does not simply undermine the free will defence but the classic nature of God or God's existence. A more limited first cause God might be conceivable, but not a God involved in the world today

The implications for ethics of the theories of psychology and sociology

- This section brings together the work you have done on psychological and sociological challenges to religious belief and experience with the work you have done on moral relativism and the nature of conscience.

Is morality formed by the human mind rather than God?

- Freud sees religion as a collective neurosis built to prevent individuals falling into personal neurosis. It comes from an infantile desire to return to the bliss of the mother's breast.
- Religion offers a wish fulfilment to overcome the tension individuals have of living in society. Conscience and our sense of moral obligation comes from this tension. The superego is an internalised moral parent giving guilt to restrict our actions.
- On the other hand, Jung offers a psychological account that incorporates God. People have a collective unconscious in which there are archetypes, one of which creates religious images. This archetype is influenced by an external source. Moral ideas are related to this.
- While both psychologists provide psychological accounts for religion, they are each contested.
- Many believe there are certain moral laws that should not be broken and human moral behaviour could be seen as influenced by these socially perceived ideas. This does not mean that there is no God and no morality for arguably, God works through psychology

Is morality formed by society rather than God?

- It is the case that there are societal causes for the values that a community expresses, but that in itself does not mean morality is not linked to God. Some argue there are only the values expressed by society, while others argue there are objective values, which have a divine source.
- Marx argues that religion masks economic inequality by requiring adherence to a moral code and justifying the inequalities on earth in terms of heavenly justice, which will be received in the future.
- Durkheim argues that religious ideas and moral ideas are projections of the authority of society and that in the modern world we should replace the religious ideas with those of society
- Morality enables a society to cohere, but that in itself does not mean morality is formed by society. Indeed, a society's values may be considered by some to be immoral, such as those enforced by the Nazi German government.
- There are some differences in moral codes between societies and cultural relativists argue this is evidence that there is no objective moral code. On the other hand, some philosophers argue that there are enough common principles.

Does sociology demonstrate that God has nothing to do with morality?

- It might be argued that, even if moral codes are formed by societies for different purposes, this does not rule out the possibility of God as an absolute standard or judge.
- Sociologists are concerned with the function of religion and morality for a society rather than with the existence or otherwise of God or absolute moral norms, although some, such as Marx, have tried to use sociological arguments to explain away the need for religious ethical codes.

The relation between ethical language and religious language

- The argument of logical positivism affects both the meaning of ethical and religious language.
- The only propositions that are knowable are those that are analytic and those that are synthetic. Facts are either observable or logically necessary. Moral and religious statements are neither and so are not meaningful according to logical positivism.
- The verification principle states that we know the meaning of a proposition if we know the conditions under which the proposition is true or false. Anything that cannot be measured analytically or empirically is meaningless. Talk of God and ethics are in this category.
- A.J. Ayer considers moral statements to be emotive expressions. Anthony Flew argues that religious statements have no facts that can be proved true or false, and the same can be said for ethical statements.
- Richard Swinburne argues that we can derive meaning from unverifiable statements, such as, 'The toys come out of the cupboard when we are not looking.' We know what this statement means even if it is unverifiable.
- R.M. Hare argues that religious propositions are non-cognitive but have meaning because they affect how people view the world. Religious people give symbolic or analogical meaning to language in understanding God and live according to those understandings.

The relation between moral behaviour and life after death

- Is it worth behaving morally if there is no life after death?
- Why be moral? There could be non-religious reasons for being moral based on the secular humanist approach.
- Kant argues that there is a duty to follow the divine law, as does Aquinas, though there is no guarantee that doing good leads to moral happiness in this world.
- If people are simply being good to get into Heaven, is this selfish? Are their motives pure? Not according to Kant, who argues one should act out of duty not personal self-interest. Perhaps they need to have good motives in order to get to Heaven.
- It seems hard to justify the suffering that sometimes occurs for individuals being good, as a personal sacrifice, if they personally do not benefit in any way in the next world.
- The judgement of the wicked seems to justify the moral behaviour of the good.
- Hick's 'eschatological verification' for various claims made by religion can be considered.
- The universalist concept of life after death, in which all are forgiven and reconciled with God, might be considered to be a reason for not bothering to behave morally, as a person could enjoy a life of sin in the confidence of eventual forgiveness.
- In Eastern religious traditions, the point of behaving morally is to achieve good karma for the next life and ultimately an escape from endless rebirth. If you could not come back in

a lower life and were guaranteed oblivion at the point of death, why be moral?