



GCE

Religious Studies

**RS3 ETH:
Studies in Religion and Ethics (A2)**

by Gordon Reid

Topic 1: Aristotle's Virtue Theory

AIM

At the end of this topic you should be able to:

- Explain the nature of Virtue Ethics
- Examine the moral issues surrounding Aristotle's ideas
- Evaluate the arguments for and against Virtue Ethics
- Understand and examine religious viewpoints
- Evaluate Virtue Ethics against deontology and consequentialism
- Examine issues arising from the views of scholars

What are Virtue Ethics?

Virtue Ethics are concerned with the character-development of a person, rather than the rules of how they behave or the consequences of their actions. A virtue ethicist will say that it is not the action which someone takes or the consequences of that action which are important, but what the decision to act says about that person's moral character.

Aristotle and what makes a person 'good'

Virtue Ethics was first associated with the great Greek philosopher Aristotle. In 'Nicomachean Ethics' he said that all people have a purpose or function, which he called '**telos**'. That purpose, Aristotle argued, was for the person to fully realize their potential and to achieve their ultimate goal. That goal, in Aristotle's view, was for a human being to become 'good' and lead a good life. This meant that the person must spend their lives developing in themselves the characteristics of goodness, or what he called 'virtue'.

Aristotle believed that virtue was not found in what people do, but in what kind of person they are. He said that, whilst it was easy to do good things, for example by carrying out acts of kindness, that did not make someone a good or virtuous person. Goodness is about character and this is developed over a long period of time.



For Reflection:

Do human beings have an ultimate goal or purpose?

Aristotle called virtues *'the qualities that lead to a good life'* — qualities such as courage, compassion, truth and justice. The person who wants to live properly and realize their true potential must cultivate virtuous qualities in their lives. Most important of these was the quality of happiness (***eudaimonia***), which involves both being happy and living a good life. For Aristotle, everyone should aim to achieve eudaimonia in their own lives, through leading the good life in their community and through friendships and interaction with others because the society in which a person lives helps them to develop their characters.

However, he emphasized the point that acting virtuously was not to be used as a means to an end. A person does not act virtuously to achieve something, because this is a 'subordinate aim'. Instead, a person acts virtuously because happiness, goodness and virtue are 'superior aims' because they are important to that person and to the community and society in which they live. Those who develop the virtues in themselves will be able to act in a good and integrated way and get satisfaction from doing the right thing *because* it is the right thing, and not for any external reasons or goals. The good or virtuous person does not act in a particular way because they *ought* to do so or because they *want* to do so, but because they know that it is the *right* way to act. He said:

'It is easy to perform a good action, but not easy to acquire a settled habit of performing such actions.'



Seminar Topic:

Are happiness and the achievement of virtue really the ultimate goals for a person?

Are there any better goals?

What is 'eudaimonia'?

The Doctrine of the Mean

Aristotle said that the right way to act is to follow the '**golden mean**'. It means to act in the mid-point between extremes of excess, on the one hand, and deficiency on the other. Every virtue has a corresponding vice at either end of the spectrum – for instance, the mid-point between cowardice and foolhardiness (which are both vices), is courage, which is, therefore, the 'golden mean'. Aristotle said that people discover what the golden mean for a particular virtue is and how to act according to it by watching and learning from good role models and by training and developing the virtue until it becomes an automatic way of living and behaving and part of a person's character. In this way they will become virtuous people who will perform virtuous acts as their character gradually acquires the virtues.

Finding the mean is not easy and Aristotle did not say what the mid-point was for each different virtue. He certainly did not mean mid-point in the numerical sense, but spoke of the mean being 'the right amount at the right time'. In other words, what the mean is depends on the circumstances. For instance, spending time talking with a beggar and sharing lunch might, at some times, be more helpful to them (and more virtuous to you) than simply giving them a little money. But it does not mean this is always the case.



For reflection:

Is it really possible to know what to do by trying to find the mid-point of two extremes?

Intellectual and Moral Virtues

Aristotle said that the key concepts for virtue ethics are '*arete*' (virtue or moral excellence) and '*phronesis*' (moral and practical wisdom). He said that virtues were of two types – moral and intellectual which together would produce the necessary 'excellencies of character' for a good or virtuous person. These excellencies are:

- Being of 'great soul'
- Being Just and Fair
- Having practical wisdom in leadership
- Being a good friend
- Having the nobility (*kalokagathia*) of a gentleman

For Aristotle, the key to happiness was to be guided by reason and follow the sensible reasoning of others – this leads to wisdom and wisdom leads to happiness. A person who does this is the happiest because they are fulfilling their purpose as a rational soul and virtues function as a way of safeguarding human relationships such as friendship, without which a person cannot find true happiness. Aristotle argued that reason was the quality which separated humanity from everything else and that a human's highest functioning must include reason:

'The function of man is activity of soul in accordance with reason.'

Aristotle categorized virtues in the following way;

The Four Cardinal Virtues – the most important.

- Temperance
- Courage
- Wisdom
- Justice

The Intellectual Virtues:

- Sophia – theoretical wisdom
- Phronesis – practical wisdom
- Practical skill
- Common Sense
- Intuition
- Resourcefulness
- Understanding
- Judgement
- Cleverness

The Moral Virtues:

- Kindness
- Generosity
- Patience
- Truthfulness
- Friendliness
- Fortitude
- Liberality

In order to find true goodness, Aristotle said that people might seek the highest level of thinking:

'We should not follow popular advice and, being human, have only mortal thoughts, but should become immortal and do everything toward living the best in us.'



Seminar Topic

How relevant are the concepts of intellectual and moral virtues in ethical decision-making?

Criticisms of Aristotle's View

Aristotle's theory has had many criticisms levelled at it over the centuries. The major criticisms are:

- The Golden Mean is not easy to apply to all virtues. For instance, whilst courage is a mean between cowardice and foolhardiness, is there always a mean virtue?
- Aristotle gives no guidance in situations where virtues conflict and where people need rules to guide their actions.
- The emphasis on being rather than doing, produces a selfish theory, which places greater emphasis on personal development than the effect that a person's actions may have on others.
- The virtues valued by Aristotle are mainly masculine ones such as bravery and honour. Little credit is given to feminine virtues such as humility and empathy.
- Different cultures have different values
- Aristotle was writing against the background of the 4th century BC Greek city state in which inequalities between noblemen and slaves were the norm.



For reflection:

What is the difference between a 'good person' and a person who does good deeds?



Seminar Topic

To what extent do the criticisms of Aristotle's Virtue Ethics undermine it as a credible ethical theory?

The religious perspective on Virtue Ethics

Virtue ethics have a very close link to religious morality. For example, not only is Jesus Christ regarded by Christians as the perfect example of a virtuous person, his teachings offer a virtuous ethical system based on universal well-being for the individual and the community and are applicable in everyday life:

'Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you...' – Luke 6:27

'My command is this; Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.' – John 15:12

Indeed, not only does the Christian Church accept the Four cardinal Virtues, it has added three 'theological virtues' of its own— faith, hope and love:

'These three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.'

– 1 Corinthians 13: 13

These three, together with the Cardinal Virtues, have become known as the 'heavenly virtues'. In addition, the Church supports the so-called 'contrary virtues' which a person must follow in order to avoid the so-called 'seven deadly sins'. Thus:

<u>Contrary Virtues</u>	<u>Seven Deadly Sins</u>
Humility	Pride
Kindness	Envy
Abstinence	Gluttony
Chastity	Lust
Patience	Anger
Liberality	Greed
Diligence	Sloth

Richard Taylor in 'Virtue Ethics' (Prometheus 2002) argued that a system of morality which is based on divine commands can discourage people from achieving their potential. He claimed that Christianity places too much emphasis on human equality and does not encourage individuals to strive to be virtuous.



Seminar Topic

'Virtue Ethics is compatible with a Christian approach to morality'.

Evaluate this contention.

Virtue theory as deontological or consequentialist

Perhaps the best way to understand Virtue Ethics is to contrast it to other ethical theories, particularly deontological and consequentialist ethics.

In deontological ethics, the good person is one who follows a number of set, universal and unchanging rules, sometimes referred to as 'duties'. One of the most well known deontological theories is the Divine Command Theory, championed by Immanuel Kant, who suggested that these rules or duties are, in a sense, God-given, like the Ten Commandments and are moral absolutes which must be followed regardless of the circumstances.

In consequentialist ethics, on the other hand, a good person is one whose actions have the best outcome – the consequences are the most important thing. In other words, goodness comes from what a person does and the

effect of the outcome. One well-known ethic theory is Utilitarianism, which states that the consequence of an ethical decision ought to be the greatest happiness for the greatest number.

In contrast to the deontological focus on obeying rules and the consequentialist focus on achieving the best outcome, virtue ethics finds goodness in being rather than doing. Virtue ethics highlights those virtues or qualities that are desirable and encourages people to adopt them for their own sake. Why? Because the well-being of the individual is the key to their happiness and the achievement of 'eudaimonia'. This, for Aristotle, is the goal of human life – to practice and use virtues in order to grow, mature and find happiness.



Seminar topic

What features does Virtue Ethics share with (i) Deontology and (ii) consequentialism?

In what ways is Virtue Ethics different?

Which, in your opinion, is the most convincing and why?

Weaknesses of virtue ethics

- How do we decide which virtues are the most important to develop?
- Some virtues are more highly regarded than others in different cultures and societies – for example, some societies regard physical courage as the most important, whilst others prefer intellectual prowess.
- Some virtues can become vices – for example, showing courage in an oppressive war.
- Virtue ethics do not help people to decide what sort of actions to take to resolve a dilemma.
- Too much emphasis is given to personal development and not enough to practical guidance.
- A value judgment still has to be made as to which virtues are most desirable, and it is possible that even the most self-evidently virtuous person might not be considered by everyone to be the best role model.
- Susan Wolf: *I don't know whether there are moral saints. But if there are, I am glad that neither I nor those about whom I care most are among them* (cited in Ahluwalia, 2001).



For Research

'The ultimate goal of morality should be the achievement of virtue'.
Evaluate this contention.



For Reflection:

How would Virtue Ethics help a teenage girl to decide whether or not to get an abortion?

Modern approaches to Virtue Ethics

Virtue Ethics has become popular in recent years and a number of scholars have come out in support of it.

- ***Alastair MacIntyre***

In 'After Virtue' (Duckworth 1997) Alastair MacIntyre claimed that virtues are not static and unchanging but actually come out of the communities in which they are to be practiced - virtues belonging to particular times and places and have a historical context. This makes Virtue Ethics useful and appropriate for modern living because they can move and change as culture changes. He observes:

'The whole of human life reaches its highest point in the activity of a speculative philosopher with a reasonable income.'

MacIntyre noted that deontological and consequentialist theories are of little value as they are time-consuming and complex. A virtue-based approach to ethics is more realistic and applicable to everyday life because people, when faced with a moral or ethical problem, tend almost naturally, to turn to a virtue-based answer because it is more realistic and applicable.

MacIntyre supports, yet refines, Aristotle's original views. MacIntyre suggests that the main goal of virtue is to provide humans with a good reason for acting morally. He does this by introducing the notion of a '*practice*'. Practices are found in all human societies – and are ways of acting through '*internal goods*' which lead to standards of excellence. He writes:

'By a practice, I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially-established co-operative human activity, through which goods internal to that form of activity are released in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to that form of activity with the result that human powers to achieve excellence are extended.'

'*Goods internal*' are those things that can be achieved only through participation and which have known standards of excellence that can be attributed to them and which are good in themselves – for instance, social activities such as playing chess or qualities such as diligence which help people

to concentrate and work hard. For MacIntyre, carrying out such practices on a regular and sustained basis helps people to develop the virtues they need to fulfil their purpose. This says MacIntyre, gives them a rational reason for acting ethically.

MacIntyre also stressed the importance of '*external goods*', that is, practical matters such as good food, a safe home and clothes to wear. All of these were part of the eudaimonia life because they will make a person happier.

Finally, MacIntyre highlighted how virtues have changed – from earliest times, where small communities needed to defend themselves and the most important values were the masculine ones of strength and courage, to the later times of Aristotle and the city-states, where the main virtues became wisdom, justice and temperance.

- **Elizabeth Anscombe**

In her work 'Modern Moral Philosophy' (1958) Elizabeth Anscombe argued that ethical codes such as deontology that are based on moral absolutes and laws from God are out-of-date in a society where there is no longer a widespread religious belief. She believed that it was important for society to return to a moral system which is based on human development and personal growth – what she called 'human flourishing' and the promotion of virtue for its own sake – and she used the example that a person who gives to the poor out of compassion is morally superior to someone who helps them out of duty, because they act from a sense of virtue and morality – from the heart rather than the head.

Anscombe controversially claimed three things:

1. Modern morality should be laid aside until an adequate understanding of the psychology of moral reasoning was attained.
2. Concepts of moral obligation and moral duty should be abandoned until psychology has done its work. She rejected the idea that duty should be an end in itself and sees an emphasis on duty as being divorced from the needs and aspirations of human beings. She recognised that morality, like charity, could be cold and dehumanising and could be the reverse of what it intended to be.
3. Most modern moral philosophers are all equally misconceived as to the true nature of ethical reasoning or moral theorising.

Writing Task:

- (i) **Explain the main features of Aristotle's Virtue Ethics and give examples to illustrate your answer.**
- (ii) **'What kind of person should I be?' is an ethically more significant question than 'What should I do'. Examine this contention.**

Topic Two: Kant's Moral Theory

AIM

At the end of this topic you should be able to:

- Explain and evaluate the value of defining ethics without reference to a transcendent being and authority
- Explain and evaluate the concept of the highest good as the goal of morality
- Explain and evaluate the role of duty and human reason in ethical decision making and moral action
- Explain and evaluate the categorical imperative, synthetic and analytic statements
- Explain and evaluate the work of W D Ross in terms of *prima facie* duties

1. Ethics without divine authority

Kant believed in God, but didn't believe that morality should be simply a matter of obeying commands from God. Rather, he thought that morality should be about discovering what was acceptable to everyone who was able to think rationally about being moral. This approach, he believed, should lead humans to establish universal moral principles which could be embraced by everyone.

Particularly significant for our purposes, Kant was concerned to clarify the relation between religion and morality which he sees can be expressed in three ways:

- Firstly, he observes that, morality does not need religion at all either in the way we find out what our duty is or in our motivation for doing it.
- Secondly, morality leads inevitably to religion.
- Thirdly, religion is (subjectively regarded) the recognition of all duties as divine commands. As such it is an aid, useful if unnecessary, to the moral life.

However – and this is important – Kant observed that there can be no special duties to God in a universal religion of the kind which he sought to establish. Since God can receive nothing from sinful humanity, all 'means of grace' including prayer and sacraments, as well as church attendance, were described as 'fetish-faith'. Kant felt that they were mere illusions which were dangerously thought to be the end of moral living – ends in themselves which had moral value, rather than a means to an end of growing in moral goodness. Kant makes the bold claim that religion must be concerned with nothing other than duty towards fellow human beings, and that God himself, however he is understood, is part of that means to an end of human morality based on duty.

For Kant, the true church must be a kingdom on earth which grows out of the moral development of those who belong to it and even Jesus is significant only as an archetype or model of moral perfection and all ideas about him must be reinterpreted so they are not dependent on historical claims, but those which can be known through reason alone.

Furthermore, he believed that since all men possess reason and a conscience, it would be possible for all people to arrive at an understanding of moral truths independent of experience. Morality was known without experience to back it up or prove it, and because reason was universal then moral reasoning would lead to the same results over and over again. The acceptance of other guides to morality, such as Utilitarian principles, Kant called *heteronomy* – literally ‘an other law’ – which he claimed was always mistaken.



For reflection:

What is potentially so controversial about Kant's understanding of the relationship between religion and morality? What are the implications for many religious believers of stripping away the divine authority from morality? If following religious morality is not enough to be morally good, how can religious believers be sure they are doing the right thing? Discuss this with your teacher if you need to have this idea explained further.

Kant held strongly to the view that morality arises from human nature and understood the central point of morality to be that it imposes absolute duties, pointing to what humans have to do, no matter what else may happen or what other influences we may be under. However, in what appears to be almost a contradiction of logic, Kant held that this sense of moral obligation could only arise from a law we impose on *ourselves*. Kant's understanding of duty was not the oppressive understanding which it is sometimes given in the twenty-first century; it was not restrictive and forbidding, but essentially free. The knowledge that we *must* do something and that we *can* do it can only be truly the case if we are *free* to do it. To be truly free means that we must not be influenced by anyone or anything else and so we can genuinely make our own decisions.

Interestingly, this means that to act morally we cannot be acting instrumentally, or with an intended purpose other than to do good for good's sake. We cannot pursue natural goods – such as happiness, pleasure, rights or privileges – and we cannot act with the intention of conforming to the laws which God has handed down (divine command ethics) because God is an agent external to ourselves. It is not even a question of morality requiring us to do good to others. The only moral obligations we have are those which derive from a moral law which we *ourselves* legislate and which tells us to act in such a way that everyone could rationally agree to act – it sets universalisable principles.

The moral law, Kant holds, is not a requirement to do good to others. It tells us rather to act only in ways we could all rationally agree to act upon – ourselves and others. It sets universal principles which are independent of all factors which may otherwise influence our actions – even God himself. The purpose of this is to provide a moral test we can apply before we act: it functions as a test for our plans. Each of us, Kant holds, can ask ‘Can I, without self-contradiction will that this act become a law according to which everyone would always act?’ Only if our planned action passes that test can we act upon it.

Kant’s position thoroughly does away with the view that if an action yields good consequences, then it is deemed to be right, or if it serves as a means to an end of any kind – even obedience to God. Rather, for Kant we must always decide, by use of reason, what is *right* before we can know what is *good* and by legislating for ourselves, Kant believed that we generate a greater respect for the law we have imposed ourselves and we are genuinely and truly autonomous (self-governing).

Contrary to some misunderstandings of Kant’s moral theory, he did not suggest that divine reward was the justification for acting morally. ‘*Morality must not lower herself. Her own nature must be her recommendation. All else, even divine reward, is as nothing beside her... Moral grounds of impulse ought to be presented by themselves and for themselves*’. There could, therefore, be no grounds on which morality and self-interest could coincide. Rewards and punishments may offer additional reasons for doing what we ought to do, but they cannot constitute the only reason for doing so.

In *The Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant argued that only one thing was certain, and that was the existence of a moral law, the goal of which could only be fulfilled if God existed. He maintained that all humans, through use of reason, could discern a moral law evident in the universe and they had an obligation or duty to seek the highest form of the good, which he coined the **summum bonum**. This duty was a **categorical imperative** which humans were obliged to pursue for its own sake, and not for any **hypothetical imperatives** (which put preferences above that which is intrinsically good). Nevertheless since Kant observed that since the moral law would never be satisfied in this life, and that the *summum bonum* was beyond the capacity of humans to achieve unaided, then the existence of God was necessary if the goal of morality were to be realised.



Seminar Topic

In groups or pairs discuss how far you agree that morality must have no end but itself. Is this practical? How far do we legislate morality for ourselves? Does it seem more or less likely that we adopt a morality which others have legislated for us? Feedback the outcome of your discussions to the class.

Kant believed that because we impose moral duties on ourselves, we have a genuine reason to act upon them which arises from the free exercise of our reason. We are also free to impose moral constraints upon ourselves. This freedom is the source of human worth and dignity and distinguishes humans from other animals as we rationally assess the moral value of our actions independently of all self-interested desires. Self-interest motivates us to act on hypothetical imperatives and Kant essentially has no problem with this, as long as we recognise that such actions have no moral value because they determine our actions – we do them for a reason which motivates us to act. By contrast, when we act with no other motivation than to do that which is morally required of us, we act freely and with genuine autonomy.

For Kant, morality is never about getting what we desire, but about exercising our capacity to make a free moral choice, a capacity which is undermined if we allow our emotions to override our reasoning.

Kant had a particularly distinctive view that morality derived from human nature but both Thomas Reid (1710-96), founder of the nineteenth-century Scottish 'common sense' school, and Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), the best known proponent of utilitarianism also adopted the belief that everyday morality could be guided by the use of abstract moral principles. Kant had thus laid down a basic principle of moral action which could be universalised without contradiction.

The principle of universalisability is absolutely central to Kant's moral thinking. He wanted to offer a systematic way of determining when our actions are morally justified and the principle, 'Act as if the maxim of your action were to become by your will a universal law' provides the answer. This principle enables moral agents to act consistently by establishing maxims which can be applied to all similar cases. When we ask 'Can I universalise my maxim?' – for example, that whenever the weather is bad I should stay away from school – we need to ask whether we would consistently want all students to stay away from school when the weather is bad. Kant asked that we should not appeal to the consequences of this – for example, empty classes and slow progress through the course – but to whether the principle is coherent or not. The possible consequences are hypothetical only and we cannot all agree on what constitutes a good or bad consequence. However, the principle is incoherent, since if students stayed away from school when the weather was bad, teachers would also stop coming into school because there would be no students to teach and so it would be pointless to put forward the maxim that students should not go into school in bad weather because the school would be closed since there would be neither students nor teachers present.

Universalisability allows morality to be stable, since if notions of right or wrong vary between individuals, cultures or situations, moral life in society will lack the foundation of trust and coherence for us to develop morally. Morality therefore has to be rooted in something which is good without qualification, and this Kant calls the 'good will'. Anything else which we may value can be used for evil purposes, but the good will can be used for nothing but good

since it wills to follow the moral law. Even happiness, which is an important part of Utilitarian thinking, cannot be truly free from evil motivation as we know that humans are often selfish and put their own idea of happiness before the universal good. The good will acts on the only proper moral motive – a respect for the moral law – and nothing outside the agent's good will can affect the moral worth determined by such a motive.

Kant's ethics therefore rests on the principle that we are moral agents who are capable of rationally deliberating about moral behaviour and make a free choice derived from that deliberation. Significantly, this means that every moral agent must recognise that all individuals can go about the same rational process of deliberation and choice and as a result we must recognise the intrinsic worth of all human persons, capable of making rational, independent judgments regarding how to live. As a result, we must be committed to respecting the interests of others, and true morality must therefore go beyond preference and partiality, self interest or even commitment to God's moral law; nothing other but the motivation of the good will is sufficient to show us what is good.



Seminar Task:

Consider how consistent and useful the principle of universalisability may be. Think of three assertions which could be universalized in principle and decide if this is sufficient to designate them moral assertions. Do they have moral value *because* they can be universalized? Try to establish what criteria make a claim morally valuable rather than simply practically universalisable. For example, it may be practically universalisable to say 'Everyone must drive on the left hand side of the road' but does this make it a moral principle?

2. The Highest Good as the Goal of Morality

Kant believed that the highest good could be found in virtue rather than in any natural or external good, such as happiness, but ultimately, it had to include happiness also. Virtue is not dependent on happiness, but it does make humans worthy of experiencing happiness, and the highest conceivable good would lie in the perfect union of virtue and happiness in conformity to the moral law. Kant argued that 'nothing can be called good without qualification, except the good will', and the best that humans could do would be to work towards perfect goodness, although the struggle between the desire to obey the moral law and the temptation to sin, would never go away, hence the highest good could not be attainable in this life.

Kant's argument was based on the principle that we find it rationally satisfactory that true virtue should be rewarded by happiness, since goodness is not – although arguably, it should be – its own reward. The achievement of the *summum bonum*, was therefore an obligation, and as such, it must logically be something which is possible to achieve. However, since humans are so evidently unable to accomplish this perfect state of affairs, Kant maintained that: '*Accordingly, the existence of a cause of all nature, distinct from nature itself and containing the principle of this connection, namely of the exact harmony of happiness with morality, is also postulated... It follows that the postulate of the possibility of the highest derived good (the best world) is likewise the postulate of the reality of a highest original good, that is to say, of the existence of God.*' For Kant, this rational proof for the existence of God led to a proof of the absolute necessity of an afterlife, in which the *summum bonum* would ultimately be realised.



For reflection:

How far does Kant's argument make sense to you? If the highest good ought to be achieved, and yet it cannot be achieved by humans, do you find it satisfactory to resolve this problem by postulating the existence of God? Explain in writing why or why not.

Even though humans could not guarantee that through their own virtue, he believed that: '*Christianity supplies this defect... by presenting a world wherein reasonable beings single-mindedly devote themselves to the moral law; this is the Kingdom of God, in which nature and morality come into a harmony which is foreign to each as such, through a holy Author of the world who makes possible the highest good.* Kant argued that morality and its necessary postulate of a divine being that satisfied the moral law was known *a priori*. In other words, it was not our experience of the world which pointed to the existence of God, but reason alone required his existence. Moral behaviour would not be invalid if God did not exist, but if the highest good as the goal of morality was to be achieved, then God must exist to bring it about.

The weakness of this argument is simple, yet significant in that he argues that *ought* implies *can*, arguing that whilst humans *ought* to bring about the *summum bonum*, they are not *able* to do so, only to assume *a priori*, that the existence of God is the only solution to this problem. Furthermore, Kant maintains that obedience to the rational moral law must be the highest good and yet elsewhere in his ethics he maintains that a moral action must be performed independently of any anticipated reward or goal. Thus humans are required to have moral motivation that is independent of any anticipated goal, and yet at the same time, be rationally aware that the moral law must be justified by the achievement of the highest good.

Writing task:

- (i) Explain Kant's arguments that a moral action must be free and yet that morality must ultimately be justified by the highest good.
- (ii) To what extent do you find these arguments problematic?

3. Duty and Human Reason

Whilst Utilitarianism, being a teleological theory holds that the moral value of an action – whether it is right or wrong – depends on the outcome of action or the circumstances in which it is performed in accordance with what has already been deemed good, deontological theories are based on the view that there are certain actions which are right or wrong in themselves, irrespective of the consequences. Wrong actions are wrong *per se* and actions which are right are not necessarily those which maximise the good or any other desired goal, such as what is in the agent's personal interest. Deontology, however, identifies those actions which are wrong *even if* they produce predicted or actual good consequences, and right simply because of the kind of actions that they are. For the deontologist, morality is objective and based on what we *know* to be right, and there is no room for emotion or second guessing to get in the way.

Deontology may take several forms, and whilst all of them place duty at the heart of moral action, Kant was particularly concerned with the relationship between duty and morality, which deems an action to be morally right if it coheres with a set of agreed duties and obligations. Kant identified the performance of an individual's duty precisely because it *is* his duty as the '*greatest perfection of a human being*'. The deontologist is not simply obliged to perform actions which are good in themselves, they must also refrain from performing those actions which are known to be wrong. These are known as 'deontological constraints', or what we more commonly call rules or laws. Obedience to these constraints is typically inflexible and rigorously impartial. A deontologist will maintain that we are not permitted to violate a rule or constraint even if serious harm will occur and no individual can be favoured on grounds of partiality. In this way, deontology is frequently associated with moral absolutism, which adopts the position that there are absolute standards which are embedded in some fundamental source of morality, be it human nature, reason, the universe, or a divine lawgiver, and remain unchanging irrespective of the culture or beliefs of society.

Deontological constraints or laws are invariably formulated as negatives: 'do not' rather than 'do'. These constraints pave the way for defining what is obligatory or what constitutes our **duty**. Deontology therefore consists of two strands – identifying what is permissible and what is not permissible. That which is permissible, Charles Fried argues, should be the focus of the deontologist's concerns: '*After having avoided wrong and doing one's duty, an infinity of choices is left to be made*'.

- **Making moral decisions**

Firstly, a deontologist is not required to consider the consequences of an act because through use of reason they can say in advance whether an action is right or wrong. Intuition may inform reason, identifying, for example, how to treat people, the obligations we incur by making promises and agreements, and the rights of individuals not to be mistreated or to suffer betrayal, as well as the right to expect fair and equal treatment. But this list alone does not tell us why, for a deontologist, these actions are right other than the fundamental principle that it is a requirement of morality to treat others as rational beings. Still further, an action may be deontologically wrong if it is something we must *not* do, whatever the circumstances and the common reason of human kind may enable us to identify these actions. Above all, a moral action must be more than the obviously good and fulfilling moral and religious rules. Jesus taught that there was more to genuine goodness than this:

'If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even Gentiles do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.' (Matthew 5:46-48).

'Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone' (Luke 11:42).

Letter of the law deontology reduces morality to a set of rules we obey or disobey but put little value on human membership of a moral community – promoting the well being of others rather than just avoiding causing them harm.

Nevertheless, Kant's moral theory is often interpreted in this way, resting on the premise that the reason for performing any given action is that it is morally obligatory to do so. But following the correct moral rules is often not sufficient – instead, we must also have the correct motivation – but correct duties and obligations are, however, determined objectively and absolutely, not subjectively, otherwise they would be reduced to personal preferences, not universal obligations. For example, Kant cited the possibility of there being two shopkeepers, one who lowered his prices to be fair to his customers, whilst the other lowered his prices to generate more custom. Only the first shopkeeper could be considered truly moral, since he was acting purely out of duty to his customers. The second shopkeeper was merely prudent and resourceful, and acting on a self interested motive.



For reflection:

How does this position affect your understanding of morality? Are you convinced that a good moral action must be free of any personal motivation? Is it possible to develop a moral outlook that ensures we can act with such an unambiguous moral motivation? Is it desirable?

4. The Categorical Imperative.

Kant attempted to discover the rational principle that would stand as a **categorical imperative** grounding all other ethical judgments. The imperative would have to be categorical rather than **hypothetical**, since true morality could not depend on external factors, including preferences or variable circumstances. Kant believed that moral commands were not hypothetical imperatives since they tell us how to achieve a particular end. For example, if someone asks me how to do well in their A level exams, I will tell them to work hard. If they follow this imperative they will achieve their end, to do well. A categorical imperative – for example, ‘Be Kind’ - however, is an end in itself. It expresses our absolute and unconditional duty to act without condition in a certain way and Kant considered them to be the only guide to moral behaviour. Only a good will, cultivated by use of reason and working to be rid of those tendencies which make rational decision-making impossible, could operate purely on a categorical imperative. For Kant, actions of this kind are morally superior to all others: *‘The distinction between a good man and one who is evil... must depend upon... which of the two incentives he makes the condition of the other.’* For example, someone who makes ostentatious charitable donations still benefits the charity, but Kant would argue that it is not in itself a moral action as their primary incentive has been to draw attention to their generosity.

Personal preferences lead to hypothetical imperatives, or commands that have a reason behind them: *‘If you want to be well liked, be generous to others.’* This does not espouse generosity as an *a priori* principle, but offers a reason why one should be generous. Kant argued that whilst personal preferences and inclinations were not necessarily wrong, they could not be trusted as a reliable guide to what was morally right. Essentially, Kant argued that if we act according to our duty in any given circumstances we will act rightly. Duty supersedes personal inclinations and unworthy motives and ensures we act on a categorical imperative.



Seminar task

Think up more examples of this kind, where an action appears to be moral but which Kant would dismiss as having no moral worth because the person carrying it out had other motives for so doing. Discuss your examples with the rest of the class.

- **Analytic and synthetic moral statements**

Kant’s understanding of a truly moral statement rests on the presumption that it must be analytically true. An analytic statement is one which is true by definition, such as the claim that ‘A bachelor is an unmarried man’ or ‘A circle is round’, and thus is beyond contradiction. On the other hand, a synthetic statement is one which can only be proved true or false by reference to external factors. For example, ‘A table has four legs’ may or may not be true depending on which table we are examining.

David Hume had observed that statements were either statements of fact about the world (synthetic) or statements of value or ideas (analytic). Synthetic statements are contingent and knowable *a posteriori*, whilst analytic statements are necessary and knowable *a priori* because human reason alone is all that is necessary to know what is morally good. This idea was used by Kant in *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant argued that moral statements fell into the second category, since only then could they be true by definition and impose a moral obligation upon us. Analytic statements contain no empirical information and so they are not dependent on circumstances which may change therefore we can be sure that their moral value is not open to change. Any categorical imperative must therefore be based on an analytically true moral claim which can coherently be applied to everyone. Thus, the imperative 'Be kind' could be considered analytically true since it needs no further justification or proof and there are no circumstances under which it would be inconsistent to require a moral agent to be kind.

Although synthetic statements are considered usually those which are based on empirical experience, interestingly, Kant believed that moral statements could be *a priori synthetic*, based on knowledge which, without the experience, still grants us knowledge of truths which are not simply tautologies. Hence, to say 'it is good to do our duty' is not a tautology on the lines of 'a circle is round', but Kant believed we can still know it to be truth without experience to test or prove it so.

The Formulae of Right Action

Kant was concerned to find *the* central categorical imperative which would provide the fundamental moral groundwork for all actions and he found this in the **Formula of the Law of Nature** which demands that human beings '*act in such a way that their actions might become a universal law*'. If the rule or maxim governing our actions cannot be universalised and if you cannot will that everyone follow the same rule, then it is not a moral rule. Kant used the example of the institution of promising to illustrate his maxim. If, having promised to repay a loan, I see something I want to buy, but to do so would mean spending the money I should be repaying, I would not be acting on the universalisable principle 'Keep your promises' but would presumably be advocating another principle – 'Keep your promises unless doing so would deprive me of something I want'. This latter principle is clearly not universalisable or rational, or the whole institution of promising would break down.

Kant's **Formula of Kingdom Ends** laid down the principle that every action should be undertaken as if the individual were '*a law making member of a kingdom of ends*.' This should ensure that every individual appreciated how significant the part they had to play was in establishing moral guidelines and rules. The **Formula of the end in itself** required that an act ensure that human beings were valued as ends in themselves and not means to an end, hence, their intrinsic value was recognised, rather than their potential instrumental value (their value as a means to achieving an end).



For reflection:

Kant clearly placed great faith in human beings being able to work rationally to such a conclusion and to be able to act freely according to principles. Do you think that this faith is justified? Are people, as a rule, concerned to protect the intrinsic value of human beings? Do you think that Kant does better in this respect than the Utilitarians?

Finally, the **Formula of autonomy** demanded that a genuine moral maxim be the action of a free moral agent. As we know, it is important not to think that Kant's deontological system means the abandonment of free will and the ability to perform a genuinely free moral action. It is still the choice of an agent whether or not to perform their duty since although a moral agent may recognise their moral duty, they may still choose not to act in accordance with it. The evil man, Kant maintained, did his duty only so long as it corresponded with what he felt was in his own best interests, whilst the morally good person when faced with a conflict between self-interest and obligation, freely chose to do his duty. No other reason for acting morally was necessary, and in response to the question 'Why be moral?' the answer 'Because it is moral' was quite sufficient.

Is Deontology Persuasive?

*There is more to the moral point of view than being willing to universalise one's rules. Kant and his followers fail to see this fact, although they are right in thinking such a willingness is part of it (William K Frankena, **Ethics**, Prentice Hall, 1973).*

Strengths of the Theory

- Motivation is valued over consequences, which are beyond control but a good motive is in itself, worthy of value.
- It is a humanitarian principle in which all humans are considered to be of equal value and worthy of protection.
- Justice is always an absolute, even if the majority does not benefit.
- It recognises the value of moral absolutes that do not change with time or culture.
- It provides objective guidelines for making moral decisions, without the need for lengthy calculation. Kant's formulae of right action can lead to an intuitive understanding of what is right.

Weaknesses of the Theory

- Moral obligations appear arbitrary if they are only down to duty. In reality our decision-making is influenced by many more factors than these, and we may question whether duty is as good a motive as Kant suggested.
- How far can a good will or motive mitigate a disastrous outcome? Are we satisfied with being told 'Do your duty' without understanding why?
- When taken to its logical extreme the principle of universalisability is absurd. Furthermore, we could propose a maxim which could be universalised but which would involve an arguably immoral action, for

example, 'Do not break promises, except to men named John. Thus, anything could technically be universalized, we need some other means of deciding whether it is morally good. There are potentially no limits to what can reasonably be universalised. Although it may seem absurd to argue that 'Commit suicide' should be seen as a categorical imperative, to a chronically depressed person, it may be perfectly reasonable.

- Jeremy Bentham criticised deontology on the grounds that the unchanging principles that deontologists attribute to reason are really a matter of subjective opinion. John Stuart Mill, argued that deontologists generally fail to clarify which principles should take precedence when rights and duties conflict, so that deontology cannot offer complete moral guidance.
- A mature moral theory should allow for exceptions; only when a theory is flexible enough to adapt to circumstances may it be said to be genuinely practical.
- How do you make a decision when two or more moral duties conflict? For example, if you are asked to tell the truth, but doing so would cause harm to an innocent person.



Seminar Topic:

In your groups discuss the varying strengths and weaknesses of deontology and work out an essay plan to the question 'To what extent does deontology fail to offer useful moral guidance?'

5. W. D. Ross and Prima Face Duties

Morality as duty based enjoyed some revival in the twentieth century in the form of *prima facie* duties. The intuitionist W. D. Ross argued that the notion of acting out of motivation was incoherent as we cannot choose why we act, we can only choose how we will act and that the mature moral agent knows intuitively what is good. He claimed:

Morals, like the principles of mathematics, are self-evident, to the mature mind...The moral order expressed in propositions is just as much part of the fundamental nature of the universe as is that spatial or numerical structure expressed in the axioms of geometry or arithmetic.'

Nevertheless, Ross did not believe that the consequences of one's actions are the only way to judge the morality of an action. He held to the Kantian principle that morality is objective, but it is also conditional (it may change depending on the situation), and whether moral principles should be followed depends on which duty is over-riding in a particular situation. In any given moral situation, many things may be important – so many things that it is

impossible to definitively enumerate them. However, among the things which matter are beneficence (helping others); self improvement (developing our talents); justice (impartial, equal treatment of others); fidelity (faithfulness to promises); gratitude (appreciation for what others have done); non-maleficence (avoiding causing harm to others); and reparation (repaying that which is owed to others). In this way, the problem of deciding between conflicting duties could be resolved, because intuition would enable you to make a choice whilst still recognising the abiding moral value of all universalisable duties.

What we actually do will be affected by many factors: we may owe a debt of gratitude to someone, we may have made a promise to one individual, or we may have an unavoidably preferential relationship with another. Ross calls these *prima facie* duties or conditional duties which apply as long as there are no stronger obligations present. Essentially, *prima facie* duties are those duties which intuition tells us over-ride all other competing or conflicting duties. However, we cannot tell in advance what the relevant *prima facie* duty will be; only by appealing to intuition in the given situation will we know what the appropriate duty is and some element of judgment will be necessary before we can decide. *Prima facie* duties are not ranked in order of importance, they are rather an amorphous list of things which, in some way, make a difference. A conflict between *prima facie* duties does not negate one or both of them, but is rather a conflict between two things which *do* matter, and which is resolved, not by discarding one or other, but by making a decision about which matters the most in the particular situation. The only way we can come to any moral knowledge, according to Ross, is through moral experience, since we only learn from experience when certain moral duties matter and when they are less important. The intuition with which we perceive a *prima facie* duty is a grasping of truth. If we have had a decent moral upbringing, we will simply see what moral rule is relevant and how to apply it.



Seminar Topic:

In your groups think of a situation in which the principle of *prima facie* duties may not help at all or at least do little more than expose conflicting duties. For example, in the abortion or euthanasia debate, the conflicting duties may be too important to resolve the issue satisfactorily. Unpack these issues and present a case to feedback to the rest of the class.



Seminar task:

Consider this situation {drawn from *Ethics* by Dwight Furrow (Continuum 2005).

Imagine that I have promised to attend a concert given by a friend, but at the last moment a family member phones me asking me to take them to hospital. I face a situation of conflicting duties: I have made a promise which has entailed an obligation to attend my friend's concert, but I also have a duty to prevent harm to loved ones. How do I decide

which duty takes precedence? Remember to take into consideration that not all may be as simple as it appears in this situation? What factors may I have to take into account before I make a final decision about what is morally right to do? How do I really work out what is significant in each case?

Although Ross may appear to solve the problem of conflicting duties it may be that he does not take sufficiently into account the question of rights. If we cannot tell in advance which duties are most important, then all duties are theoretically of equal value. And it is impossible to claim that in some cases rights decide the issue – a right to life, for example, or right to a fair trial. There may be other *prima facie* duties which Ross has overlooked, such as respect for freedom, care of friends and family, and non-parasitism (the principle that we should not cheat others by free-riding on them).

However, the notion of *prima facie* duties injects some flexibility into Kant's theory. Duties which may have been valid in the 18th century are not necessarily valid today, whilst others have taken their place. The duties which apply to a soldier on the battlefield are different to those which face a teacher in the classroom and a surgeon in the operating theatre, as are the obligations entailed by a parent and their child. It is only if we reject the notion of duties altogether, believing them to be incoherent in an age of individualism, that deontology of any stripe will fail.

Writing task:

- (i) Explain how *prima facie* duties may solve the problem of conflicting duties.
- (ii) To what extent does this approach still leave deontology open to criticism?

Topic Three: The Ethics of War

AIM

At the end of this topic you should be able to:

- Understand the relationship between religion and war
- Understand the causes of conflict
- Explain the nature of a Just War and a Holy War
- Examine the moral issues surrounding a Holy War
- Evaluate the arguments for and against a Just War
- Understand and examine Christian and Islamic viewpoints
- Evaluate arguments for and against arms manufacture and sale
- Examine issues concerning nuclear weapons and pre-emptive strikes
- Understand the nature of Pacifism
- Evaluate issues relating to Pacifism and non-violence

Introduction: religion and the nature of war

War and conflict have played a crucial role in human history and in shaping the destiny of nations – and religion has always been a major factor. This has been a major dilemma for religious believers because, since ancient times, people have expected their God or gods to protect them from their enemies. In the Bible, there are many examples of God intervening to protect his people:

‘That day the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore’ (Exodus 14: 30)

Yet at the same time, the scriptures speak of peace and non-violence. Jesus said:

‘Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword’ (Matthew 26:52)

This is the problem facing religious believers – should they fight in a war, or not? Jesus told his followers not to fight or resist with anger. Instead, Jesus taught about the importance of righteousness and peace and to love enemies.

‘Do not resist one who is evil. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also...’ (Matthew 5:39).

The Causes of War and Civil Conflict

Today it is the task of the state to protect and maintain the security of the nation and its people. Wars and civil conflicts happen all over the world for a number of reasons although there are many common factors. The main factors of war are:

- Selfishness and greed
- Rivalry over land
- Need for resources and wealth
- National pride
- Long standing hatreds and grievances.

In '*Why Nations Go to War*' John Stoessinger said that war comes about because both sides believe that they have the moral right on their side and both sides tend to make an overly-optimistic assessment of the outcome and misunderstand the other side's point of view. There are several different theories about the main causes of war and civil conflict.

- **Economic Theory**– wars begin as disputes over territory and the natural resources needed for wealth and security: US President Woodrow Wilson said in 1919 '*The seed of war in the modern world is industrial and commercial rivalry.*'
- **Marxist Theory** – wars are caused by competition for resources and markets
- **Behaviour Theory** – human beings are inherently violent and transfer their aggression into hatred against their enemies
- **Leadership Theory** – wars are started not by nations, but by individual leaders such as Hitler and Napoleon who seek conflict to maintain their power and popularity
- **Malthusian Theory** – wars are caused by population expansion and the need for more resources, especially water. Pope Urban II in 1095 before the First Crusade announced: '*For the land which you now inhabit is too narrow for your large population; it scarcely furnishes enough food. Hence it is that you murder and devour one another, that you wage wars and many among you perish.*'
- **'Youth Bulge' Theory** – where nations have very large numbers of unemployed and poorly educated young males who seek to burn off their aggression in conflict
- **Grievances Theory** – wars are caused by long-standing religious or ethnic hatreds between nations or races.



For reflection

Can you think of actual wars that fit these theories?

The 'Just War'

For believers, the teachings of Jesus concerning peace have led to very difficult ethical and moral dilemmas because it is not clear on whether or not a religious believer should fight in a war. The first Christians followed the principles of non-retaliation and pacifism. This was fine in times of peace, but when conflict loomed, the problems arose. It came to a head one hundred years after Christianity had become the official religion of Rome. The Emperor Constantine, in need of help to fight his enemies, was dismayed by the attitude of Christians in the Empire and believed that the reluctance of Christians to fight was weakening the armed forces of Rome. The Christian Church had to make a decision.



For reflection:

Can any war ever be 'just'?

Can war ever make things right?

The Church's response came from St Augustine, who designed the Christian form of the 'Just War' theory and, through the ages this has been further developed by St Thomas Aquinas and the leadership of the Christian Church until, today, there are principles concerning whether or not a Christian should fight in a war - seven concerning the beginning of war (*jus ad bellum*) and two concerning the conduct of war itself (*jus in bello*). It is stated that, although life is sacred, it may, at times, be necessary to kill in order to protect or defend the lives of others. The principles are:

Resort to war: jus ad bellum

- War must be fought for a **just cause** — to save life or protect human rights; to secure justice, remedy injustice; it must be defensive, not aggressive.
- War must be declared by a **competent authority**. In most cases, the government would be the legitimate authority to declare war.
- There must be **comparison of justice** on both sides. This is, of course, difficult to achieve, since both sides will inevitably maintain that they are fighting a just cause.
- There must be **right intention**, which must be as just as its cause, i.e. not undertaken in a spirit of hatred or revenge.
- It must be a **last resort**, after all negotiation, arbitration and non-military sanctions have failed.
- There should be a **reasonable likelihood of success**, so that its outcome results in a better state of affairs.
- There should be a **reasonable proportion** between the injustice being fought and the suffering likely to be inflicted by war. The cause of justice must not be upheld by unjust means, which would include inflicting suffering on those the war was intending to protect.

Conduct in war: jus in bello

- **Proportionality** must be exercised, i.e. the use of weapons must be proportional to the threat and only minimum force should be used.
- Warfare must be **discriminate** — that is, civilians must be protected as far as possible, and should not be direct targets. The intentional killing of civilians is prohibited. N.B. The use of nuclear weapons renders discrimination impossible.

The Just War Theory allows a nation the right to use force in self-defence. Such force must be reasonable and proportionate and should not be used for aggressive purposes. However, the Just War Theory has come under much criticism, particularly from those who think that it is an impractical approach to warfare in the modern age.



Seminar Topic:

Are the criteria for a Just War the right/ best ones?

Are there other criteria which could have been used?

Criticisms of the Just War Theory

Many ethicists today are critical of the practical value of the Just War Theory – in particular, how it is to be applied and who will ensure that it is as it does not

seem appropriate in all circumstances. Modern warfare has changed the situation considerably and critics argue that the Just War Theory is no longer applicable.

Practical arguments against the Just War Theory

- Modern weapons are capable of destroying the whole world, and attempts to attack only military targets are open to human error.
- Many nations, including unstable ones, have access to nuclear weapons.
- The war against terrorism is not one nation against another, but one cause against another.
- Who, in this case, is the legitimate authority?
- The short and long-term effects of a nuclear war are incalculable.
- The theory can be applied to any war to make it appear to be just and applicable to both sides, especially when both claim that their cause is right and just.

Moral Arguments against the Just War Theory

- All war is unjust
- Morality must always oppose violence
- Just War makes some violence acceptable
- War disrupts the norms of society, so morality is no use in war
- If the cause is just, then no restrictions should be put upon it
- Terrorists don't abide by Just War principles
- By the principle of the sanctity of life, all deliberate acts of killing, including those in war, are wrong



Seminar Topic

Can there be a Just War against terrorism?

In recent years, there has been some change in public opinion in the West. Nina Rosenstand in *'The Moral of the Story'* (2000) observed that, in the past, to die for one's king and country was seen as a heroic sacrifice. However, today, war is no longer seen in quite this way. Heroism, honour and courage are still highly valued, but war is no longer seen as a glorious thing. Rosenstand argues:

'...we can still talk about the moral conduct of the soldier... Even in stories with an anti-war message, the honour, decency and heroism of the characters are emphasised by being contrasted with the meaninglessness of war.'



For reflection

Does heroism and courage in war have any real importance today?

The 'Holy War'

A religious or Holy War is one caused by, or justified by, religious differences. It can involve one country with an established religion against another with a different religion or by a religiously-motivated group attempting to spread its faith by violence or the suppression of another group because of its religious practices.

The link between religion and bloodshed has become part of the cultural and spiritual identity of religious faith. Most religions have a tradition of people fighting and dying for the faith as religious martyrs in the belief that this is what God wants his followers to do.

A Holy War has religion as its driving force. There are three elements:

- The achievement of a religious goal
- Authorized by a religious leader
- A spiritual reward for those who take part

It is generally felt that there are five causes for a Holy War:

- To spread the faith
- To restore the faith in countries that once belonged to it
- To rescue believers from unbelieving countries
- To recover and purify sacred places that had been captured by non-believers
- To get revenge against those who had committed blasphemies against the faith or believers

The legitimate authority for declaring a Holy War is not the government, but the Church or the religious leadership of the faith and those who fight in a Holy War are said to gain a spiritual reward from God.



For reflection:

Are these causes a good justification for a holy war?

Perhaps the most famous of the Holy Wars were the Crusades, where Christian armies went to the Holy Land to recover the Christian sacred places from the Muslims. It was justified as a war to right wrongs done against Christianity. The spirit of Holy War was shown by Pope Urban II in 1095 who, absolving the soldiers of all their sins, said at the start of the First Crusade:

'Let this be your war-cry because this word is given to you by God. When an armed attack is made upon the enemy, let this one cry be raised by all the soldiers of God; it is the will of God!...whoever shall determine upon this holy pilgrimage and shall make his vow to God to that effect and shall offer himself to God as a living sacrifice, shall wear the sign of the cross of the Lord on his forehead.'

The First Crusaders captured Jerusalem and slaughtered all the non-Christian citizens.

Problems of the Holy War

Holy Wars offer a confusing message about God and violence. On the one hand, the scriptures teach of the need for peace and compassion, yet on the other hand, they advocate war and violence. In *'Cultures of Peace: The Hidden Side of History'*, Elise Boulding wrote:

'...sacred texts are flooded with images of a vengeful and violent god. The warrior-god has dominated the stories of our faith communities so that the other story of human caring and compassion and reconciliation is often difficult to hear.'

Today, religion and war are not, perhaps, as closely linked as they seem. A recent study at Bradford University concluded that there have been very few *'genuinely religious wars'* in the last 100 years, even though many who have fought claim to have done so because of their religious faith. John Stott (1999) observed the following:

'We admire the loyalty, self-sacrifice and courage of serving soldiers. Yet we must not glamorize or glorify war in itself... in some circumstances it may be defended as the lesser of two evils, but it could never be regarded by the Christian mind as more than a painful necessity in a fallen world.'

Similarly, in *'Violence in God's Name'*, Oliver McTernan challenged people of all faiths to re-examine their fundamental beliefs:

'Until each faith group is prepared to promote actively a respect for the gift of life above all other beliefs, dogmas and interests, religion will always have the power to be an exclusive, divisive and destructive force in the world'.

The Bible and 'Holy War'

The Bible teaches that the real Holy War is not against other people or faiths. Jesus said that the real war was a spiritual one between the people of God and the forces of evil. St. Paul wrote:

"...take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" Ephesians 5:16-17

According to the Bible, this Holy War will culminate in the great final, cosmic, spiritual battle at the end of time and will be won by the Messiah and his heavenly armies. The outcome of this battle is already determined:

'And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations which are at the four corners of the earth... And they marched up over the broad earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever'. Revelation 20:7–10



For reflection:

How does the Biblical notion of a Holy War differ from the notion used by the Crusaders?

Islam and the 'Holy War'

For Muslims, the true Holy War is called *jihad* which means 'striving'. Like Christianity, the 'inner Jihad' is concerned with a personal spiritual and psychological battle within the individual to control himself or herself, especially when trying to overcome the forces of evil which prevent them from being truly close to Allah. Jihad is a sincere striving for spiritual good. One who practices the inner Jihad will gain great benefit in the after life. The Qur'an says:

'Those who believe, who strive in the cause of God with their wealth and their persons, are the ones who are successful'.

However, there is also the outer Jihad, which reflects the more warlike aspects in Islam. The Qur'an teaches that, although war is generally wrong, there are certain circumstances in which Islam tolerates the practice of fighting a Holy War in the name of Islam for the following reasons:

- to deter an aggressor
- to fight oppression
- for self-defence
- to establish justice and freedom to practice religion

As with the Christian notion of the Just War, the outer Jihad has strict rules:

- It must not be fought to gain territory
- It must be launched by a religious leader
- It must be fought to bring about peace
- It must be a last resort
- Innocent civilians must not be targeted
- Enemies must be treated with justice
- Chemical warfare is forbidden



Seminar Topic:

What are the main similarities and differences between the Christian and Islamic versions of the Holy War?

The notion of Islamic 'Holy War' has had a great deal of attention in the Western media following the attacks on the World Trade Centre and other operations by groups affiliated to al-Qaeda. Within Islam, much uncertainty exists about the nature of Holy War and there are texts which seem to support the use of violence and war, as Karen Armstrong noted in '*When God Goes to War*' (*The Guardian* 29 Dec 2003):

'The scriptures all bear scars of their violent begetting, so it is easy for extremists to find texts that give a seal of divine approval to hatred.'

Caner and Caner, in *Unveiling Islam* (Kragel Publications, 2002) claimed that recent events such as the attack on the World Trade Centre on 9/11 were '*the first manifestations*' of a Holy War declared on the USA by five caliphates on 23 February 1998 who believed that God told them to:

'...kill all the Americans and their allies.'

They suggest that it is wrong to interpret Jihad as an intellectual struggle and that its aim is the destruction of the non-Muslims:

'If anyone desires a religion other than Islam it will never be accepted of him'
(Surah 3:85)

It is not, perhaps, surprising therefore, to read the prayer of Muhammad Atta shortly before flying an aircraft into the World Trade Centre on September 11th 2001:

'Oh God, open all doors for me....God I lay myself in your hands. I ask with the light of your faith that has lit the whole world and lightened all darkness on this earth, to guide me...'

It may be that, if this is indeed a Holy War, that the real cause may not be religion at all, but poverty, oppression and inequality. In some parts of the Middle East and elsewhere, people have begun to regard the rich countries of the West as greedy, selfish and oppressive. This has not been helped by the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan and the alleged abuse of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay. This produces fertile ground for religious extremism and demands for Holy War. Osama Bin Laden said:

'Here is America struck by God Almighty in one of its vital organs so that its greatest buildings are destroyed...I swear by Almighty God... that neither the United States or he who lives in the United States will enjoy security before... all the infidel armies leave the land of Muhammad.'

This view of war has produced religious suicide bombers who believe that, by blowing themselves up and killing the enemies of their faith, they are guaranteed everlasting life in Paradise. Seen this way, religion does not only justify violence, God seems to order it. It was even seen in this way by President Bush who declared:

'God told me to strike at al-Qaeda and I struck them, and then he instructed me to strike at Saddam, which I did.'



Seminar Topic:

Is the conflict between the West and Al-Qaeda:

- (a) a Holy War
- (b) a Just War
- (c) neither?

Writing task:

Explain the differences between a Holy War and a Just War.



Seminar Topic:

To what extent are the concepts of Just War applicable to modern warfare and conflict today?

Does Holy War have any valid place in today's world?

The Ethics of Arms-Manufacture and Selling

The manufacture and selling of arms raises serious ethical and moral issues because to make and sell arms for a war can seem just as bad as actually using them. This raises many questions:

- Is there a difference between giving or selling someone a gun and using it yourself?
- If you make and sell a gun to someone whom you know is going to use it to shoot and kill someone, then are you not just as guilty?
- Is the manufacture and sale of arms to ruthless dictators and oppressive regimes acceptable?
- Should arms only be made and sold to friendly and democratic states?
- Is the making and selling of arms about profiteering from war and bloodshed?
- Is this the price countries have to pay to be free from foreign tyranny?
- Would money spent on weapons be better-used to feed the hungry?
- How can arms manufacture and sale be controlled?
- Is it right for countries to be allowed to build up a supply of weapons without any checks or restrictions?

The Nobel Peace Prize Winner and President of Costa Rica, Oscar Arias Sanchez, remarked:

'When a country decides to invest in arms, rather than education, housing, the environment and health issues for its people, it is depriving a whole generation of its right to prosperity and happiness. We have one firearm for every ten inhabitants of this planet and yet we have not bothered to end hunger when such a feat is well within our reach.'

Writing task:

- (a) Examine and evaluate the arguments for and against arms manufacture.
- (b) 'There is no moral difference between (a) making weapons and (b) selling weapons' – Evaluate this view.



Research Topic:

With reference to a range of recent wars (e.g. World War II, the Gulf War etc.), examine and consider the following:

- Did they fulfil the requirements of the Just War or Holy War?
- Who were the protagonists? Was there any religious significance?
- Were civilians involved? What was their attitude?
- How did outsiders view the war?
- What were some of the outcomes of the war?

The Ethics of Nuclear Weapons

Nuclear weapons and other Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), such as chemical and biological weapons, have the potential to devastate huge areas, kill millions and end all life on the planet. There are many ethical arguments both in favour and against the possession of such weapons.

In support of nuclear weapons and WMD

- They act as the ultimate deterrent and that an aggressor country will not attack a country which has nuclear weapons or WMD for fear of being destroyed themselves.
- Since the end of the Second World War, the existence of such weapons has kept the peace, and, therefore the nuclear deterrent works.

Opposed to nuclear weapons and WMD:

- They exceed all the terms of a Just War
- They can cause the loss of many innocent lives
- They are hugely expensive
- They can cause great destruction in the hands of terrorists or aggressive states.

Pax Christi, the worldwide Christian Peace Organization said:

'The possession and threatened use of such weapons is an affront to life and a gross misuse of power and status in a fragile world. Nuclear weapons cannot and will not bring us security, rather the opposite, they are likely to cause animosity and resentment.'

Pope Benedict XVI has called for nuclear disarmament:

'In a nuclear war there would be no victors, only victims...those countries in possession of nuclear weapons should strive for a progressive and concerted nuclear disarmament.'

The Second Vatican Council declared:

'Any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities or of extensive areas along with their population is a crime against God and man himself.'

The Church of England's report, *The Church and the Bomb* observed:

'Such weapons cannot be used without harming non-combatants and could never be proportionate to the just cause and the aim of war.'



Seminar Topic

Is there a moral difference between using nuclear weapons and using WMD?



For Research

Find out what the different WMD there are.

Why was the issue of WMD so crucial before the Second Gulf War?

The ethics of pre-emptive strikes

A pre-emptive strike is military action taken by a country in response to a threat from another country, the purpose of which is to stop that threatening country from carrying out its plan.

A good example was the Six Day War in 1967, where Israel launched a pre-emptive strike against Egypt. Before the strike, Egypt had:

- Announced a policy of hostility against Israel
- Put its military forces on maximum alert
- Strengthened its forces on the Israeli border
- Formed military alliances with Israel's enemies

In the light of this, Israel launched a pre-emptive strike.

Those who support the notion of a pre-emptive strike say that it is valid because:

- It is right to act in response to a threat before it is too late
- To do otherwise might mean that your country is invaded and the people killed



For reflection:

What other examples of pre-emptive strikes can you think of?

Those opposed to a pre-emptive strike argue that it is against Just War Theory because:

- It is carried out before the other side attacks, therefore the side carrying out the strike is the aggressor
- It may be carried out before a legitimate declaration of war

Writing Task

- (a) Explain the arguments for and against the possession of nuclear weapons.
- (b) 'The right to self-defence justifies using a pre-emptive strike' – Evaluate this view

Pacifism

In recent years, the Pacifist movement has grown in strength and popularity in the West. It stems from the words of Christ, who urged his followers to treat their enemies not with hatred, but with kindness:

'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you' (Matthew 5:44)

In a similar way, Christ taught his followers (Matthew 5:38–48):

- not to resist evil people
- to turn the other cheek,
- to pray for their persecutors,

The principles of Pacifism were advocated by Conrad Grebel, a leader of the Swiss Brethren, who, in 1524, observed:

'True Christians use neither worldly sword nor engage in war, since among them taking human life has ceased entirely... The Gospel and those who accept it are not to be protected with the sword, neither should they thus protect themselves.'

Pacifism came to prominence in the First World War where those who refused to fight because they were pacifists were known as 'conscientious objectors' and many took on non-fighting roles in the armed forces, for example as doctors, medical personnel and catering. Those who refused to fight were put into prison.

Today pacifism is not exclusively Christian and pacifists support the principle of the sanctity of life, claiming that all deliberate acts of killing in conflict are wrong. Pacifists believe that the government has no right to order people to fight.

Yet although pacifists believe that war is unjustifiable and that conflicts should be settled in a peaceful way, nevertheless they do not all agree on the most effective type of pacifism needed and there are several different versions:

- **Absolute or total pacifism** – such pacifists take the view that there should be no use of military force at all – whether or not the cause is just. The value of human life is so high that nothing can justify the killing of human beings.
- **Relative, selective, or conditional** – such pacifists are against war and violence but believe that there may be some circumstances where war might be less bad than the alternative. This is often decided on Utilitarian principles – that a bad consequence (war) might be outweighed by a good outcome.
- **Selective/ nuclear pacifism** – such pacifists accept war and violence to some degree but oppose nuclear war or the use of Weapons of Mass Destruction on the grounds that such wars are unwinnable.

Pacifism presents a dilemma for Christians – should they fight evil or not? John Stott in '*Issues Facing Christians Today*' highlighted the moral conflict:

'The quest for peace is much more costly than appeasement. We admire the loyalty, self-sacrifice and courage of serving soldiers. Yet we must not glamorize or glorify war in itself... in some circumstances it may be defended as the lesser of two evils, but it could never be regarded by the Christian mind as more than a painful necessity in a fallen world.' **John Stott: Issues Facing Christians Today** (1999)



Seminar Topic:

Should all Christians be pacifists?
Is pacifism an excuse for cowardice?

A special type of Pacifism – Non-Violence

Non-violence is a means of taking positive action to resist oppression and bring about change. Most famously used by Gandhi, the aim of non-violence is to win over the hearts and minds of opponents and persuade them to settle disputes peacefully. Techniques of non-violent protest include:

- Peaceful demonstrations
- Holding vigils
- Fasting and hunger strikes
- Blockades
- Peaceful disobedience

'It is a weapon of the strong, it admits no violence under any circumstances whatsoever; and it always insists upon truth.' - Gandhi

Criticism of Pacifism

- Pacifists are sometimes guilty of accepting tyranny and oppression
- Pacifists ought to fight against evil
- Pacifism cannot be a national policy because it leaves the country open to invasion by an aggressor
- Governments have a duty to protect its people
- Pacifism has no place in the face of extreme evil



Seminar Topic:

Is Pacifism ever morally justified in time of war?

Writing Task:

- (a) Examine the basis and main features of Pacifism.
- (b) Consider critically the view that pacifism is an unrealistic response to situations of conflict today.

Topic Four: Medical and Genetic Ethics

AIM

At the end of this topic you should be able to:

- explain and evaluate problems raised by medical dilemmas including abortion, the welfare of very premature babies and euthanasia
- explain and evaluate issues raised by genetic manipulations including cloning and stem cell research
- explain and evaluate the views of Peter Singer on some of these issues
- explain and evaluate Christian perspectives on these issues

1. The ethical problems of medicine

Medical ethics is an area of practical or applied ethics of particular importance in the modern world. Ethical questions have arisen in relation to medical practice and procedure since the beginnings of formalised medicine and as the ancient, but still highly relevant, Hippocratic Oath makes clear, medical professionals have a major responsibility to care for patients in an ethically appropriate manner. Medical practice has changed out of all proportion from its early days, and every change and development has been open to moral challenges and disputes. Because religious beliefs about moral issues are often slower to develop and change than medical advances, which are ever evolutionary and forward moving, inevitably this leads to conflict over what may be right or wrong, advantageous or dangerous, and it is often hard for religious believers to reach a decision as to what medical practices can be justified. Over recent decades advancements in medical practice have been supported by new legislation, but simply making new medical technologies legal is not always enough to satisfy ethicists and religious moralists. For instance, when abortion was legalised in 1967, it did not change the moral status of abortion, but simply made it legal for a woman to terminate a pregnancy under certain conditions. The moral debate has nevertheless continued ever since.

All advances in medicine lead to a host of new decisions which medical professionals and ethicists have to face. Modern medicine makes it possible for very premature babies to develop into healthy infants and at the same time to artificially keep 'alive' patients that are dead by all current legal and medical criteria in order to preserve their organs for transplantation. Whilst the right to life may be a well known and well worn concept, modern ethicists and even upper-end 'celebrities' such as Terry Pratchett and Stephen Fry are currently concerned with establishing the right to die as equally important. To many people the concept is absurd and dangerous, but to others it is equally absurd to deny it.

The advance of genetic technologies has also brought a host of new issues to consider: stem cell research has begun to yield important therapeutic benefits, but the question continues to rage as to whether embryonic or adult stem cells are more valuable, an important issue to resolve since there are considerably more ethical problems raised by embryonic stem cells than adult ones. Genetic engineering has made it possible to produce the first saviour siblings and to ensure that children can be born without the predisposition towards dangerous inherited diseases. But these advances again are not without their challenges and even potential threats, as the 1997 film, *Gattaca*, makes clear.

For religious believers, the moral problem raised by many issues in medical ethics is whether, when it comes to advancement in the field of medical technology decisions should be based on religious principles, or whether these are irrelevant. Medical technology is constantly advancing and new treatments are being developed on almost a daily basis. Nevertheless, new treatments have to be regulated and kept in check, as does the experimentation which takes place in the laboratory as these treatments are developed. The appeal to religious teaching may well be one way in which these developments are monitored, as could be the appeal to humanitarianism, reason and experience. Nevertheless, in many cases religious believers are likely to hold that religious teaching should be of primary importance in the decision making process. On the other hand, non-believers, and even more liberal religious thinkers, will be aware of the danger of putting principles before people in an area where life and death decisions are made on a daily basis and opportunities to do good may be missed if medical hands are tied by observance of religious beliefs.



For reflection:

What is your initial feeling about this? Do you think that religious beliefs should influence advances in medicine? Write down your views as they are at this moment – don't be tempted to edit them or to think too hard about opposing views to your own. Identify one area in medical ethics which particularly concerns you and why. Make a note of three questions about that area that you hope your study of medical ethics may help you to answer.

2. Issues in medical ethics

Issues in medical ethics frequently revolve around two important concepts: the perceived sanctity of life, and the question of personhood.

The principle of the *sanctity of life* is often expressed as a religious principle, derived from the teaching of Genesis 2:7: '*Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.*' Psalm 139:13ff also supports the view that God is responsible for the existence of all human life even from conception: '*For thou didst form my inward parts, thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.*' The prophet Jeremiah was told by God: '*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were*

born I consecrated you' (Jeremiah 1: 5), and this verse is also often used to defend the life from conception position. The New Testament continues to support the principle; for example in Acts 17:25, Paul declares: *'He himself gives to all men life and breath and everything.'* Based on these teachings, *if* life is sacred (set apart for God's purposes) and created by him, then by definition he must control its end as well as its beginning. Once God has set a life in motion, he can only end it. Thus, an illness that ends in natural death represents a complete life, brought to an end by God within his own timing and purpose, whilst euthanasia represents a challenge to God's divine will.

Nevertheless, it is possible to hold to a belief in the sanctity of life principle without reference to religious principles, since it works on the premise that life is of intrinsic value, a view that most human beings are likely to uphold. The principle maintains that outside certain circumstances innocent human beings have the right not to be deliberately killed, nor should they be assisted to end their life. Life is valuable and whilst it is not necessary to preserve it at all costs, any loss of life must be taken seriously, and should never be expedited to save money, or to avoid inconvenience to others. Kant's categorical imperative and the formula of the end in itself offers guidance here, encouraging medical practitioners to think of their patients as valuable individual human beings and not as commodities or as providing the opportunity to further medical technology.

Jonathan Glover in his book **Causing Death and Saving Lives** offers an example of the way in which the principle of the sanctity of life may be understood in a non-religious context. He argues that *"many of the possible reasons for not killing someone appeal to side-effects"* and goes on to suggest that *"when a man dies or is killed, his parents, wife, children or friends may be made sad...the community loses whatever good contribution the man might otherwise have made to it...an act of killing may help weaken the general reluctance to take life or else be thought to do so"*. The principle of the sanctity of life must therefore be maintained and upheld as taking someone's life *"may do a bit to undermine everyone's sense of security"*



For reflection:

Does this make sense to you, or does the term 'sanctity of life' have such overwhelming religious implications that it cannot be used in a non-religious context? If so, can we speak of the intrinsic value of human life from a humanist or otherwise non religious perspective? What is it that gives life value if it has religious significance? What authority do biblical verses have when taken out of their context? Can they be applied to situations which are far removed from their time of writing?

Life is not the same as *personhood*, for life can belong to any living being — a vegetable has life, as does a fish, an insect or any non-human mammal. Personhood, however, belongs to human beings, and represents a part of them that is separate and distinct from biological life. It is the concept of personhood which leads us to make important legislation about human beings

and to place special value on them even if we have no religious motivation for doing so.

Mary Anne Warren argues that a person is characterised by having:

- consciousness and the ability to feel pain
- a developed capacity for reasoning
- self-motivated activity
- capacity to communicate a variety of messages
- self-awareness

These criteria are not without controversy, however, since new born babies and some fully developed adults do not possess all these criteria. However, all healthy foetuses can be said to have the *potential* to fulfil these characteristics and so a foetus is a potential person and as such should be granted the respect due to persons. However, it will not necessarily be appropriate to grant to it all the *rights* that it will have when it becomes an actual, fully developed, person.

The concept of personhood can also therefore be linked to the fact that we have human rights which cannot be granted to other species - freedom of speech, for example. Because we interact with other human beings in a meaningful way, we consider issues about life and death as they relate to human beings very differently from how they relate to non-human animals. Not all agree that this is a fair distinction, of course, but broadly speaking, the issues raised by euthanizing a terminally ill dog are quite different from euthanizing a terminally ill human being.



Seminar Topic

In small groups discuss what you think makes you a person, bearing in mind that this will not necessarily be the same for all of you – the differing answers will make this task all the more interesting. Then consider how you would feel if one or more of these elements were taken away from you. Would you want medical professionals to continue aggressive life saving treatment? Why or why not? Be ready to feedback your responses to the rest of the class.

3. Abortion

An **abortion** is the termination of the life of a foetus in the womb. It may be called a *surgical abortion* or *therapeutic abortion*, to clarify that it is carried out medically, whilst a spontaneous or natural abortion is called a miscarriage. Obviously, there are no ethical problems posed by miscarriage, whilst abortion, despite having been legal in the UK for over 40 years, continues to stimulate debate and controversy.

Abortion is one of the hottest debated moral, political and religious dilemmas in the developed world and is seen to be crucial in winning or losing support in US presidential elections. The issue revolves around whether the foetus (sometimes referred to more emotively as the unborn child) is a human being, or a person.

Those who claim that it is may argue in this way:

- *'It is wrong to take human life.'*
- *'A foetus is human life.'*
- *'Abortion is therefore wrong.'*

Those who claim it is not a person may argue:

- *'It is wrong to take human life.'*
- *'A foetus is a potential human life but not an actual human life.'*
- *'Abortion is therefore not wrong.'*

Clearly, therefore, there is division over when human life begins. Five possible occasions may be identified which are all influenced by medical, social, ethical and religious beliefs and opinions:

1. At the moment of fertilisation?
2. At the moment when the fertilised egg is implanted into the wall of the womb?
3. At the moment when the foetus moves within the womb (the quickening)?
4. At the point when the foetus could, in principle, be capable of being born alive and exist independent of the mother? This is called viability.
5. At birth?

Abortion was illegal in the UK until 1967, so women who wanted an abortion had to have an illegal termination, often in dangerous conditions, carried out by unqualified staff, at the risk to her own life and health. This led to great controversy as supporters of legal abortions claimed that women who wanted them would always get them anyway, so legalising abortion would at least prevent them from facing further suffering.

As a result, abortions were legalised under the **Abortion Act 1967** (amended 1990), which allows abortion up to the 24th week of pregnancy, as long as two doctors agree that at least one of the following conditions applies:

- a. The mother's life is at risk.
- b. The mother's physical or mental health is at risk.
- c. The child might be born severely handicapped.
- d. There is a risk to the health of her other children.

Later abortions are permitted for exceptional reasons only. There are over 200,000 legal abortions in the UK every year and most are carried out within the first twelve weeks of pregnancy. An increasing number are carried out on

teenage girls, including over 1000 under 15 year olds. The UK has the highest abortion figures in Europe.

The abortion law is likely to face changes in the near future, as pro-choice advocates (those who argue that the mother's right to choose to continue with her pregnancy is the most important issue) face opposition from pro-life supporters (those who oppose abortion largely on the grounds that the right to life is the most important factor). Many pro-life advocates believe that the 24 week limit is far too late, and that with developments in neo-natal care, very premature babies have a much greater chance of survival than used to be the case. A baby born at 24 weeks is no longer such a survival risk, so it seems wrong to be aborting foetuses at this late stage. It is not unlikely that a reduction to 18 weeks could be legalised at some time in the future. This issue overlaps with concerns about the care of premature babies and how far the law is consistent in allowing abortions up to 24 weeks, whilst requiring medical professionals to carrying out life saving treatment on critically ill or impaired premature newborns, whether or not this is consistent with their parents' wishes.



For reflection:

Do you think the law alone can legitimately define the rightness or wrongness of abortion? What anomalies do you think there are in the law as it stands at the moment? Should we be concerned that the UK is to be seen to be the 'European abortion capital'? Why are medical professionals concerned about this, and not just religious believers?

• Arguments in favour of abortion

1. *The Woman's Right to Choose*

Supporters of the woman's right to choose whether to abort claim that the decision affects five important areas of her life which only she should be able to control:

- her future
- her relationships
- whether to have a child
- what happens to her body
- what happens to her life

In some cases there may also be an argument from compassion if having the child would cause great hardship. Abortion gives women the chance to make choices about her fertility, taking into account all the factors that will affect her, her child, and, possibly her partner or existing children. In all cases, the pro-choice supporter will argue that the rights of the mother are greater than those of the foetus since the foetus is not able to survive outside the mother's womb. The mother has an independent, existing life whilst the life of the foetus is only potential.

2. *The Quality of Life Argument*

This argument takes into account the actual life the foetus is likely to have outside the womb. If they are likely to suffer great pain and hardship, then the principle of the sanctity of life may take second place to the quality of life the child will have.

3. *Population Growth*

Some politicians have argued that abortion acts as a form of population control, particularly in traditionally Roman Catholic countries such as Brazil, where there is already great poverty and overcrowding. Some countries, such as China, place financial penalties on families with more than one child, and in such cases abortion is considered not only acceptable, but an obligation.

• **Arguments against abortion**

Pro-life or anti-abortionist groups, such as LIFE and The Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child claim that the rights of the foetus as a human being take precedence. It is therefore as wrong to kill a handicapped foetus as it would be to kill a handicapped 5 year old, and the suggestion that some babies are better off not being born, or that they would interfere in the mother's other plans is callous and inhumane. In the pro-life debate, the child in the womb is generally referred to as the 'foetus' rather than the 'baby.' Anti-abortionists say that doctors use this emotive language – 'terminating the foetus' doesn't sound quite as alarming as 'killing the baby.'

Pro-life supporters argue that the foetus has a right:

- to fulfil its potential
- for its life to be valued.
- not to be killed
- to be fairly represented by an unbiased third party (i.e. not the mother or father)

Pro-life groups may also express grave concern over the methods used for abortion. The 'abortion pill' which requires no surgical procedure has made early abortion easier to obtain and to carry out, and increases the likelihood of abortion being seen as a form of contraception. Even for those who do not believe that life begins at conception, this could be seen as encouraging a very irresponsible approach to sexual relationships and as increasingly undermining of the value of life.

Within **Christianity**, most Roman Catholics and Evangelical Protestant groups are opposed to abortion. They may offer a range of arguments including:

- every human being has the right to life
- abortion is murder, which is expressly forbidden in the Bible
- the sanctity of life – life is a sacred gift from God and only he can end a pregnancy
- the unborn child is created in the image of God
- God has a plan for every human life: *'For you created my innermost being: you knit me together in my mother's womb'* (Psalm 139:13)
- life begins at the moment of conception

Church views

- *'Abortion is a horrible crime...the law must provide appropriate sanctions for every deliberate violation of the child's rights'* (Catechism of the Catholic Church).
- *'We also believe that to withdraw compassion in circumstances of extreme distress or need is a very great evil. In an imperfect world the 'right' choice is sometimes the lesser of two evils'* (Church of England)
- *'In an imperfect world there will be circumstances where termination of a pregnancy may be the lesser of two evils.'* (Methodist Church)
- In 2004 the Catholic Bishops' conference of England and Wales stated "Though it [abortion] is performed with all the appearances of medical care, and surrounded by euphemisms, termination of pregnancy is the termination of a human life. Taking the life of a child in the womb is as unjust to the unborn child as taking the life of a new born baby is to the infant...In the words of the Second Vatican Council, both abortion and infanticide are 'abominable crimes.'"

In developing their opinions, Christians may take into account:

- Jesus taught his followers to act with a spirit of love and compassion. Sticking to a rigid rule against abortion in all circumstances may be unloving to both mother and child. Joseph Fletcher's principles of Situation Ethics offer a way for Christians to operate within the spirit of love whilst not being bound by absolute rules. Agape love – as exemplified by Jesus – provides guidance in moral issues which resist the application of absolute laws and make it possible to make difficult choices in the interests of love.

Fletcher drew on many real life case studies to illustrate the principles of Situation Ethics, including the case of a mentally handicapped patient made pregnant by a member of staff at the residential institution where she lived. Although abortion was illegal at the time, her father believed she should be permitted an abortion as the more loving course of action. Fletcher was a strong advocate of 'planned

parenthood' and spoke out on a range of controversial medical issues. Interestingly, Fletcher was an advocate of abortion on demand and although he was an Episcopalian minister, he later described himself as an atheist.

- The sanctity of life is broken in some cases which are supported by religion – for example, in times of war.
- It is by no means certain that life begins at conception. This is an intuitive and subjective matter
- Medical technology has advanced so that handicapped fetuses can be identified quickly, so quicker, less drastic abortions can take place with fewer side effects to the mother.



Seminar Task:

In December 2010 the following case was reported:

A Christian employed by a London mental health trust was brought before a disciplinary panel for giving two colleagues a pro-life leaflet about abortion. The psychological well-being practitioner said she gave the literature to colleagues to warn them about the 'physical and psychological damage' of having a termination, claiming that the NHS did not offer patients enough information about the risks of having an abortion. She was suspended from her job, but she claimed that she was bullied by trust bosses and treated like a criminal because of her beliefs. She said that her case related to an informal chat with colleagues about her views and that she had not tried to influence any patients. However, under NHS rules she was charged with 'distributing materials some people may find offensive.' She is being defended by the Christian Legal Centre.

What do you think this case is all about? Is the NHS right to make a stand about the woman's actions or are they blowing things out of proportion? Do you think it is likely that anyone would find pro-life literature 'offensive'? Should it make any difference if this employee had given this literature to patients rather than employees?

Peter Singer – 'Unlocking the abortion deadlock'

Peter Singer, the Australian ethicist, has emerged as a controversial figure in the field of bio-ethics, expressed clearly in his book *Rethinking Life and Death* written as long ago as 1994.

Singer works on the assumption that attitudes to abortion hang on the question of whether the foetus is a new human life. However, he observes, human development is a gradual process and it is not easy to identify any particular moment when human life begins. Typically, birth is defined as the moment of no return in terms of making this distinction, yet, Singer argues, 'Why should the location of the foetus/infant, inside or outside of the womb, be

so significant that it marks the beginning of a new human life?’

Because this question is almost impossible to answer satisfactorily, defenders of abortion appeal to viability – the stage at which the foetus could survive outside the womb. Although UK law works on the basis of 24 weeks, there is nothing fixed about this in medical terms, since viability depends on medical expertise and equipment available, even for a fully developed newborn.

Singer suggests that another bench mark may be ‘brain life’ criteria (something of the opposite of brain death). This could protect the foetus from the tenth week of conception when there is ‘neuro-neuronal integration in the cortical plate zone.’ Singer suggests that the idea of human life stretching from the beginning of brain life to brain death is ‘appealing’, but it depends on accepting brain death as really marking the end of life, and this is, surprisingly perhaps, an ethical decision rather than a medical one. The same problems of defining when brain life began would apply as they do to brain death.

Singer appeals to the thinking of Rev Dr Norman Ford (Catholic Theological College, Melbourne) and suggests that Ford may have ‘got it right’ by identifying fourteen days after conception, once the possibility has passed of the embryo dividing into twins. However, Singer observes, whilst this may well identify an individual who is alive and human, it does not tell us anything about the ethical significance of the existence of such a human being or the justifiability of abortion after this time.

Thus, Singer argues, we have to return to the central question of why is it wrong to take a human life, and that the abortion deadlock can only ever be resolved once we have a satisfactory answer to the question ‘what is so special about the fact that a life is human?’



For reflection:

Do you think that Singer has reached a helpful conclusion here? If we can establish what is so special about human life, will it help resolve the abortion debate? Does anyone really disagree that human life is special anyway, does it need further clarification?

4. The welfare of very premature babies.

With the advancement of medical technology premature babies which would once have died now have a much greater chance of survival. However, in many cases, very premature babies suffer from critical medical problems and the key questions focus on how far medical professionals should go to preserve the life of an infant who may have a very short life expectancy and who may be undergoing considerable suffering. In other cases, the baby may not be suffering unduly because they are so severely brain damaged or even anencephalic (literally ‘no brain’).

In the UK, the case of Charlotte Wyatt raised considerable public and media

interest, when a judge supported a hospital's advice not to continue resuscitating her. Charlotte had multiple internal organ damage, was blind, and unable to communicate, and was said to be suffering great pain. Her parents wanted to wait to see if God would intervene miraculously, but the hospital felt the baby's best interests were not being served by resuscitating her. Charlotte's parents fought consistently to keep her alive and succeeded until she was fit to leave hospital when she was three years old. Ironically her parents did not take her home themselves, and Charlotte was fostered. Her parents subsequently split up and some news reports suggested that Charlotte's mother was not able to cope with visiting her daughter



For reflection:

Look at the following website which includes several accounts of legal battles concerning the treatment, or withdrawal of treatment, of newborns – not just Charlotte Wyatt. Once you have looked at three or four articles, write down your views about the issues raised. What do you think are the key issues which should be considered in cases such as these?

[://explore.dailymail.co.uk/people/wyatt](https://explore.dailymail.co.uk/people/wyatt)

In 1997 the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health in Britain published guidelines on withholding or withdrawing life-sustaining treatment in children. They proposed five cases in which this might be considered:

- brain stem death
- PVS (or cortical brain death)
- severe disease where treatment only delays death
- where survival would leave the child with severe impairment and unable to make future choices
- where further treatment is more than the child or family can bear.

However, those who hold an extreme sanctity of life position would argue that continuing treatment, however aggressive and even under such circumstances, is appropriate in the treatment of children. On the other hand, D. Gareth Jones observes:

In my view, the use of treatment under such circumstances is akin to worshipping "life"... The hallmark of a Christian approach is love for one's neighbour, which translates into the care and protection of the dying infant; there is no room for exploitation, even with the best of intentions. (Valuing People, 1999)

Peter Singer – ‘Uncertain Beginnings’

Peter Singer cites the case of Peggy and Robert Stinson, who twenty-four weeks through a very difficult pregnancy were trying to make up their minds over a late (but legal) abortion. Matters overtook them, however, and baby Andrew was born alive, but so premature that his survival was doubtful. The Stinsons asked that no heroic measures be taken to save Andrew’s life, but his doctors threatened to take them to court if they did not consent to the procedures they advised. He was placed on a respirator and continued to be treated even after it was clear that even if he survived he would be brain-damaged. In her diary, Peggy pondered the strange moral dichotomy: *‘A woman can terminate a perfectly healthy pregnancy by abortion at 24 weeks, and that is legal. Nature can terminate a problem pregnancy at 24 weeks and the baby must be saved at all costs; anything else is illegal and immoral.’* Singer asks, *‘what coherent ethic can accommodate our different practices regarding the born and the unborn?’*

In 1983 the Regan administration (in the US) ordered that all providers of health care should be notified that it was illegal to discriminate against handicapped infants in feeding or care. A ‘Handicapped Infant Hotline’ was set up so that colleagues could inform on fellow professionals who appeared not to be following this ruling. Most health care professionals nevertheless thought the ruling was unworkable. In one case it led to \$400,000 being spent on the care of a baby who doctors thought had ‘zero chance for a normal life expectancy’, whilst a New Mexico doctor spend an hour attempting to resuscitate a baby with multiple abnormalities simply because he was afraid of being turned in by his colleagues if he failed to do so. It was not long before Judge Gerhard Gesell stuck down the guidelines on the grounds that there had not been any consultation with those affected by them, but the controversy revealed the different ways in which a ‘quality of life ethics’ may be applied. Significantly, the statement included the claim that *‘the law does not require the imposition of futile therapies which merely temporarily prolong the process of dying of an infant ... born with anencephaly or intra-cranial bleeding.’* By 1984, the rules had been clarified further, so that only ‘medically beneficial’ treatment need be given.



Seminar task

In your small groups work out how you think Christians might respond to these rulings. Is there an obligation on the Christian to strive to keep any baby alive, irrespective of its health? Is the issue helped or hindered by a consideration of what constitutes life or death here?

Study the case of Samuel Linares –

[://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_go2103/is_n4_v19/ai_n28584074/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_go2103/is_n4_v19/ai_n28584074/) -

and discuss whether you agree or disagree with the judge’s ruling.

In 1981 Dr Leonard Arthur was tried for the murder of John Pearson, a Down’s Syndrome newborn, whose parents had clearly indicated that they did not want the child to survive. Dr Arthur agreed to ‘nursing care only’ and additionally prescribed a high dose of DF 118, a powerful painkiller. John

Pearson was given water only, and died on the morning of his fourth day. The pro-life organisation, Life, reported the death to the police, after a member of the hospital staff described John's treatment to them, and as a result Arthur was charged with murder. Nevertheless, Dr Arthur was acquitted after only two hours of jury deliberation amid scenes of jubilation. *The Times* headline claimed, 'Women cry "Thank God" as Dr Arthur is cleared.' The verdict was very disappointing to Life, not least because it was clear that it was popular with the public and a subsequent opinion poll recorded that only 7 percent of the public thought that a guilt verdict was appropriate in such cases, with 86 percent fully accepting that his actions were 'normal medical practice.'

Peter Singer observes that cases such as Dr Arthur's have been important in identifying both the practice of medical infanticide and the public's acceptance of it. He suggests that there is more acknowledgement now of Lord Justice Taylor's approach: 'To judge the quality of life the child would have to endure if given treatment' (*Rethinking Life and Death* 1994). Ultimately, in both the US and the UK, where the choice is between a sanctity of life ethic and a quality of life ethic, the latter has come to prevail.

Writing task:

(i) Explain the problems which face medical professionals dealing with the care of very premature and critically ill infants.

(ii) 'Life is sacred whatever its quality.' Discuss the implications of this statement.

5. Stem Cell Research

One contentious area of developing medical technology is stem cell research (SCR). Stem cells are regarded as the building blocks or master cells of the blood and immune system. Stem cells may be used from unused embryos which had been created for the purpose of IVF, but they can also be used from the umbilical cord and, to some extent, they can be extracted from an adult. Recent work in cloning cells have led important work using stem cells to produce healthy genes that can be used to replace defective or unhealthy ones. Stem cells can be coaxed into developing most of the cells within the human body, including heart, blood, and brain cells. Embryonic stem cells are those cells yet to become specialised and so retain the potential to become any cell in the human body. Potentially, these cells could be used to grow human organs, or could be used to renew damaged cells in, say, the brain or the spinal cord. Adult stem cells are found in the bone marrow and have already successfully been used in bone marrow transplants - and usually only differentiate into blood cells, although research is ongoing to explore the possibility that they too could be used to replicate any human cell.

Stem cell research could prove decisive in the development of cures for currently incurable illnesses such as Alzheimer's Disease, but an obvious fear is that it could lead ultimately to the cloning not just of human cells, but of a cloned individual - reproductive cloning, as opposed to therapeutic cloning - particularly since work in cloning of animals and animal body parts is already

advanced. In December 2004 the first fully cloned kitten was developed at the cost of \$50,000 from the DNA of her owner's previous cat who had died the year before. If people are concerned about the moral implications of this, how much more will they be concerned about the cloning of human beings?

However, it is embryonic stem cell research which presents the greatest controversy. This is largely because they are invariably obtained from an embryo created in the laboratory, an embryo which is subsequently destroyed once the cells have been obtained. This presents a serious problem for those religious believers who hold that human life is sacred, even if that life is potential rather than actual. Some biblical verses suggest that pre-natal life displays the characteristics of the fully developed human who will be born into the world. It is epitomised in the story of Jacob and Esau where their struggle in the womb mirrored their struggle in later life (Genesis 25:22-23), and when the unborn John the Baptist leaps in his mother's womb when she meets with her kinswoman, Mary, the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:44). Conservative Christians will invariably argue that God's creative ordinance, that humans 'Be fruitful and multiply' (Genesis 1:28) dictates that the embryo – even the fertilised egg – is given every opportunity to develop, even if they are created in a laboratory rather than as the result of natural conception.

- **Support for Stem Cell Research**

How far, in reality, might such views have an impact on developing medical technology? Former US President George Bush banned federal funding for SCR in 2001 based on thinking of this kind, whilst natural moral law teaching, favoured by the Roman Catholic Church, urges against techniques which undermine the intrinsic value of life and the need to preserve it. However, it is significant perhaps, that on 9th March 2009 President Obama announced, '*As a man of faith I believe we are called to care for each other and work to ease human suffering. I believe we have the capacity to do so and the humanity and conscience to do so responsibly*' (<http://episcopalian.wordpress.com/>). Obama did not give SCR entirely free range however, calling for clear guidelines and regulations to be set up within four months, otherwise the ban would be reinstated. Describing himself as 'a man of faith' Obama was identifying with those Christians who are not, in principle, opposed to Stem Cell Research, believing that the intelligence and opportunity God gives as a gift to develop medical technology for the benefit of his creatures, is a positive one, as long as it is used responsibly.

This view is espoused by the Episcopalian Church which maintains that '*God empowers us to bring potential healing to those suffering from disease*' (http://www.episcopalchurch.org/3577_62380_ENG_HTM.htm). This view is compatible with that of the Irenaean theodicy in so far as humanity can close the epistemic distance between God and humanity, by utilising those skills and abilities by which humans can grow in power, freedom and knowledge. If God does determine any aspect of human life, then it is conceivable that he may have determined that humans develop the potential of SCR and even that some embryos may be destroyed to achieve the healing of many other people – a divine utilitarian position, perhaps? Furthermore, some religious believers hold that at just fourteen days old, the limit at which an embryo may

be used for experimentation, the embryo has no soul. This view is held by many Muslims, although there is no official Islamic position on SCR. Nonetheless, if God can call the prophet Jeremiah to his purpose before he is born, then it is possible to argue that even the pre-embryo may be defined as a person, whose future is known, even determined, by God.

- **Secular opposition**

There are, of course, several secular ethical reasons that may be offered against embryonic SCR. Firstly, it may be held that the embryo does have human life, even if that view is held for humanitarian, rather than religious reasons. Furthermore, embryonic SCR has been pursued since the 1960s, but as yet there have been few advancements and no cures achieved as a result of this experimentation (which was, it must be acknowledged, hindered by the ban on federal funding). Is this continued failure to achieve a cure an indication that it is a doomed therapy and funding would better spent on developing other technologies such as cancer treatment or even adult SCR?

Furthermore, it should be considered that some people would resist the use of organs produced in laboratory. The public can be very wary of some scientific breakthroughs, particularly when the facts are not completely known. Not all side effects of SCR have been discovered, and patients who would possibly benefit from SCR may invest so much hope of a cure during their lifetime that they are effectively unable to find any meaning in coming to terms with their illness or disability.

- **Alive but not a life**

Nevertheless, support for SCR from non-religious believers is still strong. Many believe that at fourteen days old or less, the embryo is no bigger than a pin prick, and although it may be alive, it does not have life; it may have potential life but not actual life. The brain and nervous system do not develop until around 21 days, so the fourteen day limit is more than sufficient and it is almost needless to say that the embryo at this stage does not have the capacity for self motivation and self-awareness. Peter Singer argues that we should not revere life for the sake of it, since if so, a skin cell, which is clearly not dead, must be considered to have human life – an absurd conclusion, akin to saying that every sperm and egg has human life and should be protected. Since fifty percent of fertilised eggs fail to implant, it is clear that not all fertilised eggs are destined to develop into what we would be happy to recognise as human life. The use of IVF inevitably leads to the destruction of fertilised eggs and even embryos, so surely it is fair to permit the use of embryos for the greater purpose of developing cures.

Ultimately, whilst religious considerations are important, arguably they cannot be the only consideration when it comes to the advancement of medical technology. The sheer number of religious believers in the world demands that religious beliefs are not disregarded, but secular, humanitarian views must also be taken at least equally into account. It is not possible to treat all

considerations equally, and medical technology appears to be working on the basis that it is better to pursue SCR and, once its effects and benefits are fully known, let religious believers make their own judgement as whether to accept it for themselves.

- **Recent advances**

Recent advances in stem cell research may lead to further calls for research to continue. For example, an American HIV sufferer known only as 'the Berlin patient' was found to be free of the disease three years after receiving a stem cell transplant as part of treatment for acute myeloid leukaemia. It emerged that the donor was HIV immune, as is the case in about 1 in 100 Caucasians. Despite this unexpected outcome, doctors were still urging caution since the procedure – a bone marrow transplant – is in itself potentially lethal.

Researchers have also recently discovered that leukaemia patients with more genes associated with cancer stem cells have a significantly poorer chance of recovering. A Stanford University study found that 'some cancers spring from and are replenished by a small, hardy population of self-renewing cells', which could explain why they resist treatment or cause patients to relapse.

Scientists at the University of Rochester have created a way to isolate neural stem cells that give rise to all the cell types of the brain from human brain tissue which marks an important step toward developing new treatments for conditions of the nervous system, such as Parkinson's and Huntington's diseases and spinal cord injury.

Ground-breaking treatment in China, at the cost of £50,000 has enabled a four year old British girl to see for the first time. Her family heard about the stem cell treatment which involves injecting the spinal canal with cells taken from umbilical cords of healthy babies. The cells are then used to rebuild optic nerves. These controversial procedures are not available in the UK and are only done in a few places around the world.

- **Cord blood banking**

Cord blood banks store umbilical cord blood for further use and both private and public banks have emerged since the 1990s as a response to increased awareness of the potential for cord blood transplants as a treatment for diseases of the blood and immune system. Private banks, which charge a fee, store blood for the benefit of the donor alone, whilst public banks which do not incur a cost encourage a high degree of altruism, since the blood stored may be given to anyone, and the donor cannot reserve it for their own use. Cord blood has particular benefits since a person's own cord blood stem cells can be safely infused back into them without being rejected by the body's immune system and have unique characteristics compared to other sources of stem cells. Although the technique is relatively new, there is already a high demand for it, and the ethical problems posed by cord blood usage are far fewer than those posed by embryonic stem cells.



For research and reflection:

Look at the following videos on YouTube which follow the cord blood treatment of Maia Freidlander in 2008. Write a short piece – say 500 words – on the issues, both positive and negative, which you think arise from this case study.

<://www.youtube.com/watch?v=>

<://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NK4JfyP3KwY&feature=>



For research and reflection:

Use the Internet to find out about these and other breakthroughs using stem cells. Do they lead you to the conclusion that stem cell research should continue? Think through at least three arguments for and against the view that research is a good thing and should continue to be developed. Are you influenced by the cost of some of these treatments? Do you think they should be available on the NHS? Find out more about Cord Blood treatments. Do you think this is a good solution to some of the controversies raised by embryonic stem cell research?

6. Genetic Engineering

Genetic engineering is a rapidly growing technology which essentially involves changing the gene structure, primarily to cure genetically inherited diseases by modifying affected genes. Although this can be enormously beneficial, there are important moral issues to consider. One of these is that whilst genetic engineering can be used to eliminate obviously undesirable diseases it could also, in theory, be used to enhance desirable characteristics: intelligence, physical attractiveness, or gender, for example. Its use could also extend to eliminating traits that parents or geneticists considered to be undesirable: baldness, addictions, or short sightedness for example. This is highly subjective, and is thought to have quite frightening implications for the future, although from a Utilitarian perspective it may seem practical and even desirable.

For some Christians, this is against the spirit of Psalm 139:13ff, which maintains that God determines every feature and characteristic of an individual even before conception. Whilst negative characteristics can be screened out (conceivably a good use of God-given technology), characteristics perceived as positive (i.e. attractive physical features) might be substituted. In either case, it may be argued that human beings are meddling in matters that only belong to God.

One of the major problems raised by genetic engineering is that it also depends on embryo research and, more recently, on stem cell research, discussed previously. Another moral problem raised by genetic engineering is the question of how far do humans have the right to replace defective genes

(*negative eugenics*) or to impose subjective ideas about what are considered desirable and undesirable genes. Who decides what is defective or not? Is a possible 'homosexuality gene' a defective gene? Is it wholly good that genetic treatment can lead to the elimination, in part at least, of genetic diseases such as Huntington's, cystic fibrosis, and certain forms of cancer?

Positive eugenics – using genetic manipulation to improve attributes such as intelligence and personality also raises fears about its potential to change human nature, and ultimately, the whole community. Furthermore, some argue in the rather overworked phrase, what right do humans have to 'play God'? The information that can be provided by genetic screening, not only in embryos but in adults too, can be used to control the lives of individuals in many ways. Some of these may be good – they provide individuals with vital information about their genetic makeup which can guide them in making choices concerning healthcare. However, if employers are able to obtain genetic information about employees, the potential for discrimination and stigmatisation is considerable.

Despite the vast amount of research that has taken place into genetic engineering, it is still a developing science, and we can only guess at what the long term consequences may be, and clearly not all of them are good. Furthermore, if anything went wrong with the technology it could not be corrected. The prospect of human beings who are the product of defective methods of genetic engineering is a frightening one indeed, whilst germ line therapy could have disastrous effects on the human gene pool if it went wrong.

- **Recent advances: Saviour Siblings**

Much attention has been paid by the media to the issue of **saviour siblings**, conceived, usually through IVF, with the primary purpose of providing life saving treatment to an existing critically ill sibling. Fertilized zygotes are tested for genetic compatibility and only zygotes that are compatible with the existing child are implanted. Inevitably, this raises important ethical issues with reference particularly to Kant's formula of the end in itself. How far are saviour siblings ends in themselves or are they a means to an end? Clearly they do have instrumental purpose, but it is important for ethicists to be sure that their intrinsic value and their individual rights as human beings are still protected.

On 21 December, 2010, *The Guardian* reported that a nine year old girl had been the first child in the UK to benefit from a bone marrow transplant from her baby brother who had been selected at embryo stage as the perfect donor. The family is the first in Britain to have all the necessary fertility treatment, genetic tests and tissue matching done without having to go abroad to avoid legal hurdles which have existed in the UK over saviour siblings. Doctors collected umbilical cord blood, which contains stem cells, from the boy at his birth, and then bone marrow when he was one year old. The full procedure cost £10,000 and was paid by the NHS. Simon Fishel, managing director of the Care fertility clinic in Nottingham, said: '*We are delighted at the outcome for this family. This is absolutely positive life-giving*

medicine ... Many specialists do not know that this procedure is available in Britain – patients are told to have more children and that with luck one might be a suitable donor, or they are told they have to go abroad.’ In 2003, when this procedure was still outlawed in the UK, Michelle and Jayson Whitaker, from Derbyshire, went to Chicago to have a saviour sibling for their son who also had dangerous anaemia.

HOW MEGAN GOT A SECOND CHANCE

TO produce a saviour sibling, Megan’s parents had to undergo IVF. They applied to the NHS for £6,000 funding and were successful.

Six embryos were created at the CARE Fertility Centre in Nottingham. They were tested for disease and suitable tissue type in a process known as Pre-Implantation Genetic Diagnosis – the first time this procedure has been used in a UK laboratory.

Just two embryos met the criteria. These were transferred to Mrs Matthews’s womb in October

2008, and one implanted successfully. When Max was born on July 22 last year, blood from his placenta and umbilical cord was taken and stored.

When he was a year old, bone marrow was also taken from his hip because doctors didn’t have enough stem cells to carry out Megan’s transplant.

Following chemotherapy and radiotherapy to destroy her unhealthy bone marrow, Megan received the new stem cells from Max during an hour-long operation in July this year.



Research task:

Read more: [://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-1340611/Saviour-sibling-brings-hope-family-makes-medical-history.html#](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-1340611/Saviour-sibling-brings-hope-family-makes-medical-history.html#)

Case Study: Gattaca

One of the best ways of understanding the implications of genetic engineering are developed very accessibly in the 1997 film **Gattaca**, directed by Andrew Nichol, and starring Ethan Hawke and Jude Law. The film opens with a Biblical verse running across the screen: ‘*Consider God’s handiwork. Who can straighten what he has made crooked?*’ (Ecclesiastes 7:13). Whilst it is a futuristic film, it is set in a ‘*not too distant future*’, in which responsible parents do not leave it to God to determine the future of their offspring. Instead, prospective parents leave it to their local geneticist to engineer a ‘perfect’ embryo: ‘*Ten fingers and ten toes – that’s all that used to matter. Not now.*’ The hero of the film, Vincent, was not genetically engineered. He was a ‘faith birth’ or ‘God birth’, and as such, he is destined to be an ‘*in-valid*’ with a life expectancy of a mere 30 years, suffering from myopia and a heart defect. This genetic CV determines every choice he has to make and those with imperfect profiles are destined to a life of the genetically determined underclass, drifting from one menial job to another: ‘*My real résumé was in my cells... We now have discrimination down to a science.*’

His younger brother, Anton, however, is genetically engineered to have *'hazel eyes, dark hair and fair skin'* and the geneticist reassures his parents that he has *'eliminated any potentially prejudicial conditions – myopia, baldness, alcoholism...'* When his parents ask whether they should perhaps leave some things to chance, the geneticist advises, *'You want to give your child the best possible start. Believe me; we have enough imperfections built in already. Your child doesn't need any additional burdens.'*

Whilst Anton is favoured by his parents Vincent is brought up to expect very little and his burning ambition to go into space is thwarted at every turn. Working outside the law, he courageously challenges the system and via a black market broker of DNA, he enters into a partnership with Jerome Morrow, a former swimming star with *'an IQ off the register...the heart of an ox...'* Jerome, however, is in a wheelchair, paralysed by a road accident, bitter and alcoholic. Jerome's fate reveals the real life tragedies behind the system: *'For the genetically superior, success is easier to obtain, but it is by no means guaranteed. There is no gene for fate, and when the elite fall on hard times, their genetic identity becomes a valuable commodity for the unscrupulous.'*

Taking on Jerome's identity, using his blood, skin, urine and skin samples to pass the stringent identity tests, Vincent enters the space agency, Gattaca, and eventually achieves his ambition to be part of a space mission to Titan. Sadly, Jerome commits suicide. He has fulfilled his usefulness in providing Vincent with the means to enter Gattaca, but he has never been able to deal with the *'burden of perfection.'* We learn that he had never come to terms with winning only a silver swimming medal, and that his disability was the result of a suicide attempt, not a random car accident. The message of the film is clear: what happens when man takes God's authority to determine life, death and human destiny? Interestingly, both Vincent and Jerome emerge as victims of the system, their future determined by limiting and controlling assumptions about what they should or shouldn't be able to achieve. Neither is free, both are determined by their genetic profile.



Seminar Task:

If you have watched *Gattaca* as a class or at home, discuss what you think are the most important issues raised by the film, and how the view of society is presented in the film. Is it overly biased? Is it realistic? Try to watch *The Island*. This is about a society in which wealthy people can have clones created to provide organs or other life saving treatment. The implications of this become rapidly clear when one clone begins to learn more about the facility than its managers want revealed. Once you have seen this film, discuss as a class or small group whether the film, like *Gattaca*, offers a realistic or a fear-driven picture of such a society. Which film do you find more disturbing, if either?

➤ **Christian views on Genetic Engineering**

Motivation is the important factor here. It may be argued that the positive use of genetic technologies is a legitimate part of fulfilling God's command to be stewards of creation, but what may be at fault are the motives of those who make use of that technology. Careful supervision and legislation of the work of genetic scientists might be seen to be the key to ensuring that their work glorifies God rather than replaces Him.

The most conservative Christian view is opposed to all forms of genetic engineering on the grounds that it usurps God's authority to create life. Furthermore, genetic engineering attempts to perfect human make up, and this is impossible in this world. The earth is not intended to be perfect, since only heaven is perfect. Both positive and negative eugenics depend on making judgments about what is considered good or bad and this is worrying for Christians, since such judgments are subjective and subject to human prejudices and biases. Ultimately too, a human being who was the product of genetic engineering, even cloning, would have little value in themselves (what is called their *intrinsic* value) but would be valuable only for what they could do (their *instrumental* value) – the purpose for which they had been genetically engineered.

This last point is of concern to more liberal Christians also, but they are more supportive of the principles of genetic engineering on the grounds that Jesus' work in healing people suggests that Christians should do all they can to heal and improve the health of human beings. A classic appeal to Situation Ethics can be made here; since the spirit of agape surely calls for humans to do all they can to improve the quality of life for future generations. Creating cells is not an ethical problem, and even research on embryos less than 14 days old is acceptable. However, for Roman Catholics and some Evangelical Christians, genetic engineering is only acceptable if it does not involve embryo research which violates the sanctity of life principle. Thus adult stem cell research, used in the interests of glorifying God and participating in his creative work, may be acceptable, although a careful eye must always be on the possible negative consequences of any genetic technology.

• **Judaism and genetic engineering**

Jewish experts have thought particularly hard about genetic engineering partly because the genetic disease, Tay Sachs, affects some Jewish people, and partly because Jewish law has examined medical issues in great depth throughout history. It is also a painful subject for the Jewish community because unjust genetic and eugenic arguments were used to justify the Holocaust in which over six million Jews were murdered.

Tay Sachs disease is a fatal genetic disorder in children that causes progressive destruction of the central nervous system. This disease is controlled by a pair of genes on chromosome 15. If both genes are inactive the person has the disease and dies very young. If one gene is active the person is perfectly healthy - but they are a carrier of the disease. If they marry another person who is a carrier there is 25% chance that any child they have

will have the disease and a 50% chance that any child they have will be a carrier. Jewish people with an Ashkenazi background are much more likely to be Tay Sachs carriers than the rest of the population.

Premarital screening has been widely done to find people carrying the gene for Tay Sachs disease. In the USA over 70,000 people have been screened for the Tay Sachs gene, and over 100 couples have been discouraged from getting married as a result. In Israel, screening for carriers has cut the number of Tay Sachs children born to newlywed ultra-orthodox Ashkenazi Jews to zero.

Some Jewish authorities are unsure whether it is right for a couple who are both carriers to marry and not have children. They say that Jews have an obligation in a marriage to have children, since in Genesis 1:28 God commands 'Be fruitful and multiply', and that the possibility of having an abnormal child does not remove this obligation.

7. Euthanasia

Euthanasia is the intentional killing by act or omission, of one whose life is deemed, either by themselves, or others, as no longer worth living. The term 'euthanasia' is based on the Greek terms *eu-thanatos* and defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as referring to a 'good' or 'happy' death. In our context it is used to refer to the deliberate bringing about of a 'good' death, often described as 'mercy killing.' It is seen to be a key issue in modern medical ethics, although the practice of euthanasia and infanticide was common in the ancient world and in primitive cultures. In recent years sympathy towards euthanasia has risen, especially in the Netherlands and Switzerland.

Most debates about euthanasia revolve around **Voluntary Euthanasia**, 'mercy killing' carried out at the expressed wish of the patient, but there are three other types of euthanasia.

Active Euthanasia: The result of positive action (e.g. lethal injection) on the part of a carer, usually a medical professional. Only switching off a life support machine where the patient is deemed to be brain dead or in a persistent vegetative state is permissible in the UK.



Research task:

Use the Internet to research the cases of Nancy Cruzan, Karen Ann Quinlan and Terri Schiavo. Make notes of the key features of these cases and the religious issues raised by them. Use your notes in the next essay you write on this topic.

Passive Euthanasia is the omission or termination of treatment that is prolonging the patient's life. This is already carried out in the case of severely disabled newborns and may also apply to withdrawal of life support from a comatose patient. Patients may also legitimately give instructions not to be resuscitated in the case of a heart attack or other immediate threat to their life. These may include Living Wills or Advance Directives, whereby a patient indicates that should they become severely injured or handicapped, they be allowed to die rather than receiving intensive medical treatment. Advance decisions to refuse treatment are covered by the Mental Capacity Act 2005 and by law; a valid advance decision refusing life-saving treatment means the individual cannot be treated. If a doctor provided treatment nonetheless, legal action might be taken against them. However, a doctor might decide against following an advance directive if the individual had done something to contradict the decision or they think that new circumstances would have affected your decision – for instance a new treatment which wasn't available when the directive was made. If the directive is unclear or ambiguous the doctor may also decide not to act upon it.

In April 1989, Tony Bland, aged 22, suffered severe brain damage when he was crushed in an overcrowded stand at Hillsborough football stadium. He was diagnosed as being in a 'persistent vegetative state' and kept alive by life-support machines and fed through a tube. Both the doctors and Tony's parents believed that he had no quality of life and applied to the courts for permission to turn off the life-support machine and end the treatment so that Tony could die. The Court finally agreed, arguing that *'To his parents, Tony Bland is dead. His spirit has left him and all that remains is the shell of his body.'* It was in Tony's 'best interests' for treatment to be withdrawn.' However, withdrawing treatment would not mean that Tony would die straight away – and the law forbids the use of drugs to kill someone. Nevertheless, treatment was stopped on 22 February 1993 and Tony no longer received food. He finally died on 3rd March from kidney failure.

Peter Singer observes that in Tony Bland's case he was not 'brain dead' but rather in a persistent vegetative state so that he would never regain consciousness. He did not need respiration, but he did need to be fed by a tube and he was unaware of any external stimuli. Although it was already accepted medical practice to withdraw feeding in such cases, Bland's doctor, Dr J.G. Howe, appealed to the court for permission to withdraw feeding, since the coroner had been enquiring into the deaths of Hillsborough victims and he did not want to risk a criminal charge. The Official Solicitor, appointed to protect Bland's interests, did appeal against the ruling, but the House of Lords confirmed the judgment.

Involuntary Euthanasia is carried out without the expressed permission of the patient, which may or may not be because they are not capable of expressing a view.

Assisted Suicide is the provision of means and/or opportunity whereby a patient may terminate their life. In many ways this is indistinguishable from voluntary euthanasia. Today this is the phrase which is perhaps the most well documented form of euthanasia, despite the fact that in the UK, the Suicide Act of 1961 makes it a criminal offence to assist someone to commit suicide which carries a maximum jail sentence of 14 years. The news media has covered several recent cases where family members or other loved ones have assisted terminally ill patients to die, and there appears to be increasing pressure on the law not to prosecute them. Some of these cases have involved travelling to Switzerland to Dignitas, a fully legal medical facility, which enables those with terminal illnesses to undergo assisted suicide. The person who wishes to die has to meet the doctors first and they must consent to the assisted suicide procedure. Assisted suicides are carried out by lethal injection or drink and the person dies peacefully. The cost is just over £3,000. About 100 people from the UK have died in the clinic. People who go abroad in order to undergo assisted suicide procedures are sometimes called 'death tourists' and there is now considerable pressure for assisted suicide to be legalised, under proper controls, in the UK, so that dying patients are not forced to undertake a gruelling journey to Switzerland in the last days of their life. It is also suggested that public opinion is increasingly in favour of assisted suicide and the support of charismatic public figures such as Terry Pratchett have made it seem even attractive.

The campaign to legalise Assisted Suicide is part of what is usually called the right to die movement. The issues this raises are different from those such as Bland or Cruzan, since in these cases the patients could not express their preference or make a choice. Assisted suicide cases are usually the outcome of the patient's express wish to die based on the belief that they are morally entitled to exercise that right.

One of the most controversial recent cases is that of Daniel James. Daniel James, aged 23, suffered a serious accident whilst playing rugby and was paralysed. He was in constant pain, could not move and needed 24 hour care. Daniel hated this and tried on three occasions to commit suicide, but was unable to do so. Finally, he asked his parents to take him to the Dignitas Clinic in Switzerland, where he would be able to die. They reluctantly agreed and in October 2008 he was assisted by an unnamed volunteer at the clinic to drink a lethal solution of barbiturates and died peacefully.

Many people criticized Daniel's parents for letting him die when he was so young and in his right mind. His mother said that they respected Daniel's decision to die and that the choice was always his to make. It was a decision made out of love and compassion, saying, '*What right does any human being have to tell any other that they have to lead such a life, filled with terror, discomfort and indignity?*' Although Daniel's parents acted against UK law, the director of public prosecutions decided that prosecuting them would not be in the public interest.

Public attention had already been drawn to the right to die campaign by Diane Pretty. In May 2002, Diane Pretty, aged 43, was terminally ill, suffering from

motor neurone disease. She did not want to die of suffocation, as sufferers of this disease often do, so she asked the court if they would allow her husband to assist her to commit suicide. She told the court that it was her human right to be allowed to choose how and when she could die. The court refused to allow her husband to assist her suicide. Diane said sadly: *'The law has taken all my rights away.'* Diane Pretty died a few days later. Her husband said: *'Diane had to go through the one thing she had foreseen and was afraid of – and there was nothing I could do to help,'*



Research task:

Use the Internet to research the cases of MS sufferer Debbie Purdy who applied to the Law Lord to clarify whether her husband would be prosecuted if he assisted her to die.

- **Arguments in favour of euthanasia**

Those who support euthanasia may offer the following reasons:

- It allows the patient a gentle, pain-free death.
- It permits them to die with dignity, rather than suffer a slow death after facing increasing mental and physical deterioration
- It saves on hospital and medical expenses and frees beds for non-terminal patients.
- It relieves the emotional and financial burden on families

The level of medical care which can now be offered to terminally and chronically sick patients has now become, in itself, a problem. Medical technology can now keep people alive for much longer but their quality of life may be poor, and they may do little but drift in and out of consciousness. Huge doses of painkillers may be needed that, ultimately may kill them anyway. Sometimes this is deliberately done - such treatment is an example of double effect whereby the primary purpose of the pain killers is to relieve pain, but the secondary effect achieved (i.e. not deliberately, but inevitably) is that the patient dies of an overdose.

Those who support the legalisation of euthanasia argue that if humans did not fear death so much, and try to avoid it so vigorously, then they may be more able to see euthanasia as something positive and humane, not something to be afraid of.

Even though human death is an evil to be fought against, and a reality which can never be sought intentionally, it may also at times be accepted, even welcomed, as a sign of God's mercy.' John Wyatt: **Matters of Life and Death** (1998)



Seminar task:

[://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2010/feb/01/terry-pratchett-euthanasia-](http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2010/feb/01/terry-pratchett-euthanasia-)

In your small groups bring up this article on the Internet and having read it discuss the issues that Terry Pratchett raises. Do you think he is right to claim that 'the time is really coming for legally assisted death?' Pratchett has made clear that he has no religious beliefs. Does this make it easier for him to support the right to die campaign? Why or why not?

- **Arguments against euthanasia**

Arguments against euthanasia focus on the problem of the so-called slippery slope – the fear that once even voluntary euthanasia under strictly controlled conditions were legalised, then it would be impossible to control it happening under other conditions too. This would increasingly diminish the motivation for medical research, undermine the value of life further and put enormous pressure on the sick and dying. Patients in a persistent vegetative state have been known to recover and not all illnesses diagnosed as terminal always end in death. However, if euthanasia was easily available, a decision to die could be taken far too quickly. It also not necessarily the case that terminal patients have to suffer a painful, undignified death. The hospice movement aims to care for the terminally sick, placing the emphasis on palliative care (pain relief) and they work to help doctors and the general public to understand that there are alternatives to euthanasia. However, at present, hospice care is expensive and limited and it is claimed that not enough medical professionals are interested in palliative care to make it a priority. It is not as obviously glamorous as many other health care specialities.

"We are now always able to control pain in terminal cancer in the patients sent to us...euthanasia as advocated is wrong...it should be unnecessary and is an admission of defeat" (Christian Hospice Movement).

- **Religious Viewpoints**

Like abortion, euthanasia involves the issue of the sanctity of life, which provides the strongest grounds against its legalisation. Some denominations agree that doctors should have the right to switch off life support machines with the consent of the patient's family, but the Roman Catholic Church and most Evangelical Protestants teach that it is wrong to take any action to kill a patient or to fail to take action which would help them to survive, even if the action, or omission of action is intended to relieve suffering: *'An act or omission which causes death in order to eliminate suffering constitutes a murder greatly contrary to the dignity of the human person and to the respect due to the living God, his Creator'* (Catechism of the Catholic Church).

Joni Eareckson Tada, a Christian quadriplegic who campaigns for the rights of

Joni Eareckson Tada, a Christian quadriplegic who campaigns for the rights of the disabled wrote a powerful book called **When is it right to die?** (1992). In it, she writes: *'I once cornered Dr J L Packer, a prominent evangelical theologian, and asked him this question: "What would you suggest to a severely handicapped man with cerebral palsy who was totally bedridden, non-verbal, and relegated to a back bedroom in a nursing home? No one visits him and no nurse takes time to benefit from his good attitude. What can that handicapped man do?" ... Dr Packer replied, "A man like that can worship and glorify God.'*



For reflection:

What do you think about Tada's claim? Do you find it inspiring or alarming? Consider carefully your view and think about what influences your response to Tada's claim. Write out a few sentences based on this reflection which you can use in an essay

In Theravada Buddhism a lay person undertakes to 'abstain from destroying living beings' whilst for Buddhist monks, the rule is more specific, and makes clear that taking of life or encouraging any one to take their life separates them from the Buddhist community.

The official Roman Catholic position was issued as early as 1980 in the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, condemning euthanasia as a 'crime against life and God'. Protestants adopt a wider range of positions, and as the assisted suicide lobby has become increasingly vocal some liberal Protestants, in the spirit of Joseph Fletcher have offered some religious arguments in its favour, such as those inspired by situation ethics.

Hindus recognise that death is inevitable and sometimes unexpected and for the Hindu, helping to end a painful life could be understood as a good deed, but it still disturbs the cycle of death and rebirth and those involved in euthanasia will take on the karma of the patient. On the other hand, the same argument is used to lead to the conclusion that to keep a person artificially alive on life support machines is also disruptive.

Islam forbids all forms of suicide and a Muslim is forbidden to plan the timing of their death in advance. However, a Muslim may be permitted to refuse treatment in the case of a terminal illness.