Preparing for Post 16 Philosophy and Ethics

Dear 11 Students,

During these ever changing and difficult times you have continued to impress your teachers with your dedication to learning. You should be proud of all you have achieved these past few years.
Most of you will have a good idea about what you intend to study next year and therefore subject leaders for all of the A-Levels we teach at Park High have devised some preparation work that you can work on during the next few weeks.

Philosophy, Ethics and Religion:

In year 12 you will study a range of Philosophy and Ethics units. These include a study and application of different ethical theories such as natural law, utilitarianism. Philosophy units include Plato and Aristotle, Soul, Mind and Body, and Arguments for the existence of God. At this stage though we want you to start with the basics.

Why this work?

Before starting the course, it is really useful to have some background knowledge about what Philosophy and Ethics is so the first preparation for sixth form study will focus on this to help you understand how the approaches and ways of thinking in this subject are very different to what you might be used to. You might find that people are using vocabulary that you have never heard and ideas that you've never come across. Do not worry - remember we will go through all of this when we teach you! We just want you to begin to develop some knowledge and understanding in these areas.

Where should I complete it?

Please complete any notes either on paper or on your computer and save them to bring into school at a later date.

How long will it take?

The work has been divided into weekly tasks. Each week of tasks should take between 2-3 hours.

Philosophy and Ethics year 11 to 12 transition work – week 1

Task one: *What is Philosophy?*

➢ Go to the two links below and Summarise the main ideas of each video using subheadings:

1. What is Philosophy (Crash Course)
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1A_CAkYt3GY

- Ancient Greek times and the beginning of Philosophy
- What is the world like and Metaphysics
- How we know the answers to questions and Epistemology
- How we should act and Value Theory (Ethics)
- Logic – and reasoning
- The two-step system

2. Theory of Knowledge (Epistemology)
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_Y3utIeTPg

- What kinds of things can you know?
- Comparison of the words 'knowledge' and 'believe'.
- Confidence as a key feature of knowledge.
- Judgement needs a good basis to count as knowledge.

Task two: *What is Ethics?*

➢ Go to the link below:
3. What is Ethics?
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rr7U49RPpTs&t=302s

- Write a list of 10 interesting things you have learnt about ethics. Include new vocabulary.

Task three: *Why study Theology?*

➢ Open the link below. Choose one of the videos from the interview series titled:
4. 'Why study theology?'
   https://www.closertotruth.com/series/why-study-theology

- Which clip have you chosen?
Explain in 15 lines, the main argument from the clip about why to study theology.

Philosophy and Ethics year 11 to 12 transition work – week 2

Task one: *An introduction to Philosophy*

'The Man Who Asked Questions: Socrates and Plato' by Nigel Warburton, *A Little History of Philosophy*

- Read the information (scanned pages – file 1) from start to finish.
- Write a summary of what philosophy is about – this should be approximately 20 lines.
- Copy and complete the table:

What I have learnt about:	
Socrates	Plato
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5
6	6
7	7
8	8
9	9
10	10

Task two: *The Socratic Method*

https://hwcdn.libsyn.com/p/0/9/4/094f2a0c73fbafff/M.M._McCabe_on_Socratic_Method.mp3?c_id=1779479&cs_id=1779479&expiration=1589195421&hwt=fd1da8caaf5890b9dfc245deed20cdbe

➢ Listen to the podcast: **MM McCabe on the 'Socratic Method** (file 2) which deals with questions about the best ways to do practical ethics and how to behave. As you listen, write a list of possible answers to the questions below.

a. Who was Socrates?
b. How do we know about the life and views of Socrates?
c. What is the socratic method? What was Socrates trying to show people through using this method?
d. Why was the socratic method controversial to some people?
e. What does McCabe think Socrates means when he says 'the unexamined life is not worth living?'
f. What might be the problems with examining all aspects of life?
g. Is there something we can learn from Socrates today? Why is questioning and reflecting important?
h. Are there any problems? (e.g. with exams, courses).

Philosophy and Ethics year 11 to 12 transition work – week 3

Task one: *What is Ethics?*

'What is Ethics'
- Read the information (word document - File 3) from start to finish.
- Summarise each sub-heading in a maximum of 30 words.

Sub-heading	30 word summary
Moral absolutism	
Moral relativism	
Consequentialism	
Non-consequentialism	
Virtue ethics	
Situation ethics	
Ethics and ideology	

Task two: *Real World Ethics*

James Wilson 'Real World Ethics' [20 minutes]
https://hwcdn.libsyn.com/p/3/5/3/353a0393c3b08eed/James_Wilson_on_Real_World_Ethics.mp3?c_id=52696484&cs_id=52696484&expiration=1585134153&hwt=14fbe132999e47a16eadc71efd13f114

➢ Listen to the podcast: **Real World Ethics** (File 4) which deals with questions about different methods of practical ethics and working out how to behave. As you listen, write a list of possible answers to the questions below.

   a. What are thought experiments? (Give an example). What is Wilson's view on the use of thought experiments?
   b. What is meant by real world ethics?
   c. How are real world problems different from thought experiments?
   d. Why does context matter when thinking about ethical issues (according to Wilson)?
   e. Aside from thought experiments, what other techniques or tools could be used to help make ethical decisions?
   f. What does Wilson think about the use of principles in ethics? (strengths/weaknesses)

Philosophy and Ethics year 11 to 12 transition work – week 4

Task one: *Key Scholar Research*

In Philosophy and Ethics, you will be introduced to many scholars to support arguments you make in your essays.

➢ You are going to create a biography of three of the scholars listed below. Each biography should be one side of A4 and can include a maximum of two small pictures (see below for size).

As part of your biography, you should include responses to the following questions:

- When were they alive?
- What key books did they write?
- What key issues did they write   about?
- Are there any key quotes?
- Do you find their work convincing?

Potential scholars for your biographies:
- Plato
- Aristotle
- St Augustine
- St Thomas Aquinas
- Richard Swinburne
- Mary Daly
- Joseph Fletcher
- Jeremy Bentham
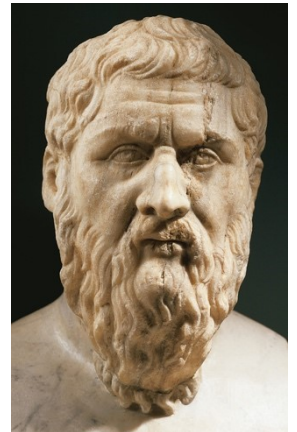
➢ **Make sure that you include a list of the sources you used when putting your biography together**

Task two: *Critical analysis*

As you will have noticed from the list above, most of the scholars we study are male. Write a paragraph explain reasons why this is the case.

Task three: *Feminism*

➢ Listen to the following Ted Talk from author **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**.

https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_we_should_all_be_feminists?language=en

- List at least five reasons why we should all be feminists.
- Which of your reasons do you think is the most convincing / persuasive? Explain why.

Philosophy and Ethics year 11 to year 12 transition work

Philosophy and Ethics year 11 to 12 transition work – week 5

Task one: *Key Language*

> ➤ Research the following terms and write an explanation linked to Philosophy and Ethics. You might want to start by reading the scanned pages (file 5 and file 6) for assistance.

TERM	EXPLANATION
LOGIC	
EPISTEMOLOGY	
METAPHYSICS	
ETHICS	
VALIDITY	
SYLLOGISM	
MAJOR PREMISE	
MINOR PREMISE	
A PRIOI	
A POSTERIORI	
SENSE EXPERIENCE	
PREDICATE	
TAUTOLOGY	
EMPIRICISM	
COSMOLOGICAL	
ONTOLOGICAL	
TELEOLOGICAL	
LOGICAL FALLACY	
TRANSCENDENTAL LEAP	
ANALYTIC STATEMENT	
SYNTHETIC STATEMENT	
NORMATIVE ETHICS	
APPLIED ETHICS	
META-ETHICS	
EMOTIVISM	
SUBJECTIVISM	
DIVINE COMMAND THEORY	
NATURAL LAW	
EXISTENTIALISM	
TELEOLOGICAL THEORIES	
DEONTOLOGICAL THEORIES	
RELATIVIST THEORIES	

Philosophy and Ethics year 11 to 12 transition work – week 6

Task: *Making a Case*

Philosophy and Ethics at A level will require you to make judgements about issues.

Create a for and against case for three of the following issues, one from each component:

Task one: *Being a philosopher*

➢ **Component one: Philosophy of Religion**

<p align="center">God does not exist.
Or
There is an afterlife.</p>

Task two: *Being an ethicist*

➢ **Component two: Religion and Ethics**

<p align="center">Active euthanasia should be legal.
Or
The role of a business is just to make a profit.</p>

Task three: *Being a theologian*

➢ **Component three: Developments in Christian Thought**

<p align="center">Jesus really was the Son of God.
Or
The Bible is the direct word of God.</p>

This will require you to write at least two paragraphs. (approximately ¾ to 1 full typed A4 page – but you can always write more!)
If possible, try to include evidence or scholars to support the points you make.
Below is a sample paragraph not in response to any of the above statements.

Some would argue that all people do indeed go to heaven when they die. This is because of the belief that God is benevolent, all loving. In the Bible it states that 'God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.' This clearly shows that because God is benevolent His love would mean that no-one would ever go to hell when they die. Furthermore, many people would question why God would punish someone forever if He is meant to be all-loving. On the other hand, many people would argue that not all people go to heaven as some people, like Hitler, would not deserve to go there. Heaven is a place for the sinless and therefore would not make sense if Hitler went there. Additionally, many Christians would argue that faith is really important, why should all people go to heaven, they need to believe in Jesus to be able to go there which is a fundamental Christian belief.

Philosophy and Ethics year 11 to 12 transition work – week 7

Task one: *Consolidation of knowledge - Article*

➤ You are writing a letter for Park Life – the school's magazine about the importance of Religion, Philosophy and Ethics.
  - Think about your <u>audience</u> – the magazine is read by all students in the school: year 7 all the way to year 13. However, the magazine has a wider readership including teachers, parents and visitors to the school.
  - Consider the <u>language</u> you would use – how can you make your article challenging yet accessible?

<u>Key points to include:</u>
  - Definitions of religion, philosophy and ethics
  - Names and theories of at least three key thinkers. You can select from the list below, or you can research your own:
    - Plato
    - Aristotle
    - St Augustine
    - St Thomas Aquinas
    - Richard Swinburne
    - Mary Daly
    - Joseph Fletcher
    - Jeremy Bentham

  - Skills that can be developed from studying religion, philosophy and ethics to a higher level and how these transferable skills could be of use to you in the future.
  - The importance of studying religion, philosophy and ethics when there has been a rise in acts of discrimination and intolerance around the world. (include specific examples)

<u>Online sources</u>
The following online sources might be of use, but of course, feel free to conduct your own research:
  - www.philosophybites.com
  - www.rsrevision.com
  - www.peped.prg
  - www.bbc.co.uk/religion
  - www.bbc.co.uk/ethics
  - www.alevelphilosophy.co.uk
  - www.utilitarianism.com
  - www.allaboutphilosophy.org
  - www.philosophypages.com

<u>Final points</u>
  - **Your article should be <u>500 words</u> not including any titles or headings. You can include pictures.**

viii   CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

The Man Who Asked Questions
SOCRATES AND PLATO

About 2,400 years ago in Athens a man was put to death for asking too many questions. There were philosophers before him, but it was with Socrates that the subject really took off. If philosophy has a patron saint, it is Socrates.

Snub-nosed, podgy, shabby and a bit strange, Socrates did not fit in. Although physically ugly and often unwashed, he had great charisma and a brilliant mind. Everyone in Athens agreed that there had never been anyone quite like him and probably wouldn't be again. He was unique. But he was also extremely annoying. He saw himself as one of those horseflies that have a nasty bite – a gadfly. They're irritating, but don't do serious harm. Not everyone in Athens agreed, though. Some loved him; others thought him a dangerous influence.

As a young man he had been a brave soldier fighting in the Peloponnesian wars against the Spartans and their allies. In middle age he shuffled around the marketplace, stopping

2   A LITTLE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

people from time to time and asking them awkward questions. That was more or less all he did. But the questions he asked were razor-sharp. They seemed straightforward; but they weren't.

An example of this was his conversation with Euthydemus. Socrates asked him whether being deceitful counted as being immoral. Of course it does, Euthydemus replied. He thought that was obvious. But what, Socrates asked, if your friend is feeling very low and might kill himself, and you steal his knife? Isn't that a deceitful act? Of course it is. But isn't it *moral* rather than *immoral* to do that? It's a good thing, not a bad one – despite being a deceitful act. Yes, says Euthydemus, who by now is tied in knots. Socrates by using a clever counter-example has shown that Euthydemus' general comment that being deceitful is immoral doesn't apply in every situation. Euthydemus hadn't realized this before.

Over and over again Socrates demonstrated that the people he met in the marketplace didn't really know what they thought they knew. A military commander would begin a conversation totally confident that he knew what 'courage' meant, but after twenty minutes in Socrates' company would leave completely confused. The experience must have been disconcerting. Socrates loved to reveal the limits of what people genuinely understood, and to question the assumptions on which they built their lives. A conversation that ended in everyone realizing how little they knew was for him a success. Far better that than to carry on believing that you understood something when you didn't.

At that time in Athens the sons of rich men would be sent to study with Sophists. The Sophists were clever teachers who would coach their students in the art of speech-making. They charged very high fees for this. Socrates in contrast didn't

THE MAN WHO ASKED QUESTIONS   3

charge for his services. In fact he claimed he didn't know anything, so how could he teach at all? This didn't stop students coming to him and listening in on his conversations. It didn't make him popular with the Sophists either.

One day his friend Chaerophon went to the oracle of Apollo at Delphi. The oracle was a wise old woman, a sibyl, who would answer questions that visitors asked. Her answers were usually in the form of a riddle. 'Is anyone wiser than Socrates?' Chaerophon asked. 'No,' came the answer. 'No one is wiser than Socrates.'

When Chaerophon told Socrates about this he didn't believe it at first. It really puzzled him. 'How can I be the wisest man in Athens when I know so little?' he wondered. He devoted years to questioning people to see if anyone was wiser than he was. Finally he realized what the oracle had meant and that she had been right. Lots of people were good at the various things they did – carpenters were good at carpentry, and soldiers knew about fighting. But none of them were truly wise. They didn't really know what they were talking about.

The word 'philosopher' comes from the Greek words meaning 'love of wisdom'. The Western tradition in philosophy, the one that this book follows, spread from Ancient Greece across large parts of the world, at time cross-fertilized by ideas from the East. The kind of wisdom that it values is based on argument, reasoning and asking questions, not on believing things simply because someone important has told you they are true. Wisdom for Socrates was not knowing lots of facts, or knowing how to do something. It meant understanding the true nature of our existence, including the limits of what we can know. Philosophers today are doing more or less what Socrates was doing: asking tough questions, looking at reasons and evidence, struggling to answer some of the most important questions we can ask

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ourselves about the nature of reality and how we should live. Unlike Socrates, though, modern philosophers have the benefit of nearly two and a half thousand years of philosophical thinking to build on. This book examines ideas of some of the key thinkers writing in this tradition of Western thought, a tradition that Socrates started.

What made Socrates so wise was that he kept asking questions and he was always willing to debate his ideas. Life, he declared, is only worth living if you think about what you are doing. An unexamined existence is all right for cattle, but not for human beings.

Unusually for a philosopher, Socrates refused to write anything down. For him talking was far better than writing. Written words can't answer back; they can't explain anything to you when you don't understand them. Face-to-face conversation was much better, he maintained. In conversation we can take into account the kind of person we are talking to; we can adapt what we say so that the message gets across. Because he refused to write, it's mainly through the work of Socrates' star pupil Plato that we have much idea of what this great man believed and argued about. Plato wrote down a series of conversations between Socrates and the people he questioned. These are known as the Platonic Dialogues and are great works of literature as well as of philosophy – in some ways Plato was the Shakespeare of his day. Reading these dialogues, we get a sense of what Socrates was like, how clever he was and how infuriating.

Actually it isn't even as straightforward as that, as we can't always tell whether Plato was writing down what Socrates really said, or whether he was putting ideas into the mouth of the character he calls 'Socrates', ideas which are Plato's own.

One of the ideas that most people believe is Plato's rather than Socrates' is that the world is not at all as it seems. There is

a significant difference between appearance and reality. Most of us mistake appearances for reality. We think we understand, but we don't. Plato believed that only philosophers understand what the world is truly like. They discover the nature of reality by thinking rather than relying on their senses.

To make this point, Plato described a cave. In that imaginary cave there are people chained facing a wall. In front of them they can see flickering shadows that they believe are real things. They aren't. What they see are shadows made by objects held up in front of a fire behind them. These people spend their whole lives thinking that the shadows projected on the wall are the real world. Then one of them breaks free from his chains and turns towards the fire. His eyes are blurry at first, but then he starts to see where he is. He stumbles out of the cave and eventually is able to look at the sun. When he comes back to the cave, no one believes what he has to tell them about the world outside. The man who breaks free is like a philosopher. He sees beyond appearances. Ordinary people have little idea about reality because they are content with looking at what's in front of them rather than thinking deeply about it. But the appearances are deceptive. What they see are shadows, not reality.

This story of the cave is connected with what's come to be known as Plato's Theory of Forms. The easiest way to understand this is through an example. Think of all the circles that you have seen in your life. Was any one of them a perfect circle? No. Not one of them was absolutely perfect. In a perfect circle every point on its circumference is exactly the same distance from the centre point. Real circles never quite achieve this. But you understood what I meant when I used the words 'perfect circle'. So what is that perfect circle? Plato would say that the idea of a perfect circle is the Form of a circle. If you want to understand what a circle is, you should focus on the Form of the

circle, not actual circles that you can draw and experience through your visual sense, all of which are imperfect in some way. Similarly, Plato thought, if you want to understand what goodness is, then you need to concentrate on the Form of goodness, not on particular examples of it that you witness. Philosophers are the people who are best suited to thinking about the Forms in this abstract way; ordinary people get led astray by the world as they grasp it through their senses.

Because philosophers are good at thinking about reality, Plato believed they should be in charge and have all the political power. In *The Republic*, his most famous work, he described an imaginary perfect society. Philosophers would be at the top and would get a special education; but they would sacrifice their own pleasures for the sake of the citizens they ruled. Beneath them would be soldiers who were trained to defend the country, and beneath *them* would be the workers. These three groups of people would be in a perfect balance, Plato thought, a balance that was like a well-balanced mind with the reasonable part keeping the emotions and desires in control. Unfortunately his model of society was profoundly anti-democratic, and would keep the people under control by a combination of lies and force. He would have banned most art, on the grounds that he thought it gave false representations of reality. Painters paint appearances, but appearances are deceptive about the Forms. Every aspect of life in Plato's ideal republic would be strictly controlled from above. It's what we would now call a totalitarian state. Plato thought that letting the people vote was like letting the passengers steer a ship – far better to let people who knew what they were doing take charge.

Fifth-century Athens was quite different from the society that Plato imagined in *The Republic*. It was a democracy of sorts, though only about 10 per cent of the population could vote.

Women and slaves, for example, were automatically excluded. But citizens were equal before the law, and there was an elaborate lottery system to make sure that everyone had a fair chance of influencing political decisions.

Athens as a whole didn't value Socrates as highly as Plato valued him. Far from it. Many Athenians felt that Socrates was dangerous and was deliberately undermining the government. In 399 BC, when Socrates was 70 years old, one of them, Meletus, took him to court. He claimed that Socrates was neglecting the Athenian gods, introducing new gods of his own. He also suggested that Socrates was teaching the young men of Athens to behave badly, encouraging them to turn against the authorities. These were both very serious accusations. It is difficult to know now how accurate they were. Perhaps Socrates really did discourage his students from following the state religion, and there is some evidence that he enjoyed mocking Athenian democracy. That would have been consistent with his character. What is certainly true is that many Athenians believed the charges.

They voted on whether or not he was guilty. Just over half of the 501 citizens who made up the huge jury thought he was, and sentenced him to death. If he'd wanted to, he could probably have talked his way out of being executed. But instead, true to his reputation as a gadfly, he annoyed the Athenians even more by arguing that he had done nothing wrong and that they should, in fact, be rewarding him by giving him free meals for life instead of punishing him. That didn't go down well.

He was put to death by being forced to drink poison made from hemlock, a plant that gradually paralyses the body. Socrates said goodbye to his wife and three sons, and then gathered his students around him. If he had the choice to carry on living quietly, not asking any more difficult questions, he would not

take it. He'd rather die than that. He had an inner voice that told him to keep questioning everything, and he could not betray it. Then he drank the cup of poison. Very soon he was dead.

In Plato's dialogues, though, Socrates lives on. This difficult man, who kept asking questions and would rather die than stop thinking about how things really are, has been an inspiration for philosophers ever since.

Socrates' immediate impact was on those around him. Plato carried on teaching in the spirit of Socrates after his teacher's death. By far his most impressive pupil was Aristotle, a very different sort of thinker from either of them.

CHAPTER 2

True Happiness
ARISTOTLE

'One swallow doesn't make a summer.' You might think this phrase comes from William Shakespeare or another great poet. It sounds as if it should. In fact it's from Aristotle's book *The Nicomachean Ethics*, so called because he dedicated it to his son Nicomachus. The point he was making was that just as it takes more than the arrival of one swallow to prove that summer has come, and more than a single warm day, so a few moments of pleasure don't add up to true happiness. Happiness for Aristotle wasn't a matter of short-term joy. Surprisingly, he thought that children couldn't be happy. This sounds absurd. If children can't be happy, who can? But it reveals how different his view of happiness was from ours. Children are just beginning their lives, and so haven't had a full life in any sense. True happiness, he argued, required a longer life.

Aristotle was Plato's student, and Plato had been Socrates'. So these three great thinkers form a chain: Socrates–Plato–Aristotle.

What is ethics?

At its simplest, ethics is a system of moral principles. They affect how people make decisions and lead their lives. Ethics is concerned with what is good for individuals and society and is also described as moral philosophy. The term is derived from the Greek word *ethos* which can mean custom, habit, character or disposition.

Ethics covers the following dilemmas:

- how to live a good life
- our rights and responsibilities
- the language of right and wrong
- moral decisions - what is good and bad?

Our concepts of ethics have been derived from religions, philosophies and cultures. They infuse debates on topics like abortion, human rights and professional conduct.

Are ethical statements objectively true?

Do ethical statements provide information about anything other than human opinions and attitudes?

- Ethical realists think that human beings *discover* ethical truths that already have an independent existence in some way, within the universe and / or is hard-wired into the human brain (perhaps by a God or genetics).
- Ethical non-realists think that human beings *invent* ethical truths drawing on their experience of what is necessary in the world for us to co-exist with each other.

The problem for ethical realists is that people follow many different ethical codes and moral beliefs. So if there are real ethical truths out there (wherever!) then human beings don't seem to be very good at discovering them.

Are there universal moral rules?

One of the big questions in moral philosophy is whether or not there are unchanging moral rules that apply in all cultures and at all times.

Moral absolutism

Some people think there are such universal rules that apply to everyone. This sort of thinking is called moral absolutism. Moral absolutism argues that there are some moral rules that are always true, that these rules can be discovered and that these rules apply to everyone. Immoral acts - acts that break these moral rules - are wrong in themselves, regardless of the circumstances or the consequences of those acts. Absolutism takes a universal view of humanity - there is one set of rules for everyone - which enables the drafting of universal rules - such as the Declaration of Human Rights. Religious views of ethics tend to be absolutist.

Why people disagree with moral absolutism:

- Many of us feel that the consequences of an act or the circumstances surrounding it are relevant to whether that act is good or bad
- Absolutism doesn't fit with respect for diversity and tradition

Moral relativism

Moral relativists say that if you look at different cultures or different periods in history you'll find that they have different moral rules. Therefore it makes sense to say that "good" refers to the things that a particular group of people approve of. Moral relativists think that that's just fine, and dispute the idea that there are some objective and discoverable 'super-rules' that all cultures ought to obey. They believe that relativism respects the diversity of human societies and responds to the different circumstances surrounding human acts.

Why people disagree with moral relativism:

- Many of us feel that moral rules have more to them than the general agreement of a group of people - that morality is more than a super-charged form of etiquette
- Many of us think we can be good without conforming to all the rules of society
- Moral relativism has a problem with arguing against the majority view: if most people in a society agree with particular rules, that's the end of the matter. Many of the improvements in the world have come about because people opposed the prevailing ethical view - moral relativists are forced to regard such people as behaving "badly"
- Any choice of social grouping as the foundation of ethics is bound to be arbitrary
- Moral relativism doesn't provide any way to deal with moral differences between societies

Different Ethical Theories

Consequentialism

This is the ethical theory that most non-religious people think they use every day. It bases morality on the consequences of human actions and not on the actions themselves.

Consequentialism teaches that people should do whatever produces the greatest amount of good consequences.

One famous way of putting this is 'the greatest good for the greatest number of people', a phrase coined by Jeremy Bentham the famous 19th century British Utilitarian and supported by John Stuart Mill (his godson and probably the greatest British philosopher of the Victorian age).

The most common forms of consequentialism are the various versions of utilitarianism, which favour actions that produce the greatest amount of happiness.

Despite its obvious common-sense appeal, consequentialism turns out to be a complicated theory, and doesn't provide a complete solution to all ethical problems.

Two problems with consequentialism are:

- it can lead to the conclusion that some quite dreadful acts are good
- predicting and evaluating the consequences of actions is often very difficult

Non-consequentialism or deontological ethics

Non-consequentialism is concerned with the actions themselves and not with the consequences. It's the theory that people are using when they refer to "the principle of the thing".

It teaches that some acts are right or wrong in themselves, whatever the consequences, and people should act accordingly. One particularly famous deontological ethicist was the 18th century European philosopher Immanuel Kant, who believed that each of us had a duty to obey moral principles that were universally and objectively true (true in each context, without exception and with no reference to consequences of circumstance). For example Kant believed truth telling was always the right thing to do and them lying could never be acceptable, even to save someone's feelings or someone's life.

Virtue ethics

Virtue ethics looks at virtue or moral character, rather than at ethical duties and rules, or the consequences of actions - indeed some philosophers of this school deny that there can be such things as universal ethical rules. Virtue ethics is particularly concerned with the way individuals live their lives, and less concerned in assessing particular actions. It develops the idea of good actions by looking at the way virtuous people express their inner goodness in the things that they do. To put it very simply, virtue ethics teaches that an action is right if and only if it is an action that a virtuous person would do in the same circumstances, and that a virtuous person is someone who has a particularly good character.

The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle was one of the most famous supporters and writers of Virtue Ethics, believing that we should judge a person's character as displayed in their actions over time. We don't judge someone on a single action, but on how they behave over a number of actions.

Situation ethics

Situation ethics rejects prescriptive rules and argues that individual ethical decisions should be made according to the unique situation. Rather than following rules the decision maker should follow a desire to seek the best for the people involved. There are no moral rules or rights - each case is unique and deserves a unique solution.

The most famous recent exponent of Situation Ethics was the former Christian Joseph Fletcher, who believed that all actions should be aimed at promoting selfless love (agape) just as Jesus taught. He believed that it was acceptable to break rules if love was best served by doing so, for example breaking the command not to kill if euthanasia was the best option to stop someone's suffering.

Ethics and ideology

Some philosophers teach that ethics is the codification of political ideology, and that the function of ethics is to state, enforce and preserve particular political beliefs. They usually go on to say that ethics is used by the dominant political elite as a tool to control everyone else. More cynical writers suggest that power elites enforce an ethical code on other people that helps them control those people, but do not apply this code to their own behaviour.
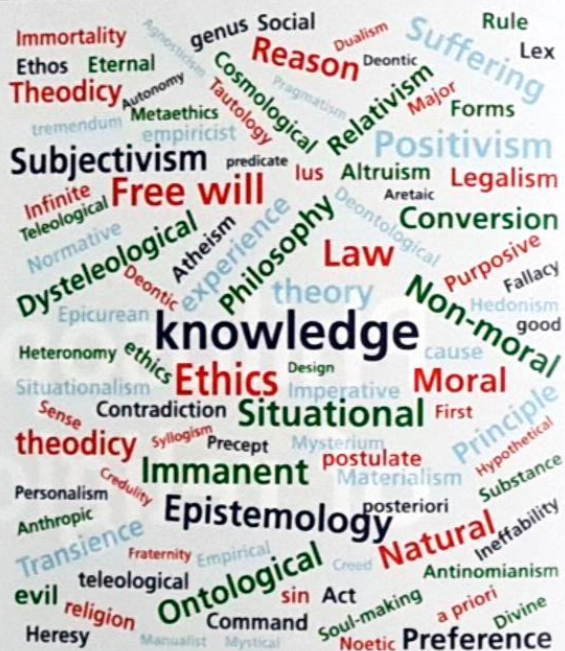
Chapter 1

Philosophy and its methods

1 Introduction

Immortality · genus · Social · Rule · Lex · Ethos · Eternal · Reason · Dualism · Deontic · Suffering · Theodicy · Autonomy · Agnosticism · Cosmological · Relativism · Major · Forms · tremendum · Metaethics · Tautology · Pragmatism · Positivism · empiricist · **Subjectivism** · predicate · Ius · Altruism · Legalism · Infinite · **Free will** · Aretaic · Teleological · Deontological · **Conversion** · Normative · **Dysteleological** · Atheism · **Philosophy** · **Law** · Purposive · Deontic · experience · theory · Non-moral · Fallacy · Epicurean · **knowledge** · Hedonism · good · Heteronomy · ethics · cause · Situationalism · **Ethics** · Design · **Moral** · Sense · Contradiction · **Situational** · First · **theodicy** · Syllogism · Precept · Mysterium · Principle · **Immanent** · postulate · Hypothetical · Personalism · Credulity · Materialism · Substance · Anthropic · **Epistemology** · posteriori · Ineffability · Transience · Fraternity · Empirical · **Natural** · Creed · Antinomianism · **evil** · religion · **Ontological** · sin · Act · a priori · Divine · Heresy · Manualist · Mystical · Command · Soul-making · Noetic · **Preference**

2 Philosophy is a conversation

> 'Why did you think that?'
> 'Is that really a good enough reason?'
> 'Why did I do that?'
> 'How did you reach that conclusion?'
> 'Why on earth do things like that happen?'

We have all heard ourselves and others use sentences like these. We ask questions, both of ourselves and others, and we think about and probe the answers we give. If someone gives a silly reason for an action, we tend to ask more questions and try to probe more deeply.

Key term

Philosophy The study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and existence, especially when considered as an academic discipline.

Key quote
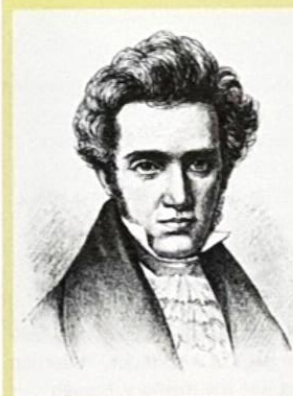
> The thing is to understand myself. To see what God really wishes me to do: the thing is to find a truth which is true for me, to find the idea for which I can live and die.
>
> Søren Kierkegaard 1813–55

When we do this, we are conversing – but we are also being philosophers. We are looking for understanding. To understand and to be aware of the questions we ought to ask, and not to be afraid to ask them, is the beginning of wisdom. The word **philosophy** means 'love of wisdom'. In philosophy, we question and think about the answers, then perhaps look for clarification, explanation and justification, just as we do when we are talking to people, so we understand more clearly. Living philosophers talk to each other, and discuss among themselves what other philosophers (including the dead ones) might have meant when they gave their opinions.

Philosophy, including ethics, is not a subject to be learned, but an activity. This is true also in how philosophy relates to theology.

That sounds odd, but understanding this is what makes the difference between doing well in the subject and merely knowing enough to pass an examination. Being good at philosophy is not a question of how much you know, because anyone can, with enough hard work, learn facts. If all you did in the next year or so was learn facts about philosophy, you would have learned the basics to begin philosophy, but no more.

This need not seem so strange. If all you had ever done in mathematics was to learn the meaning of basic arithmetical signs, and learned by heart dozens of different formulas, would you be good at mathematics? Knowing about mathematics is not the same as being a good mathematician. A good mathematician actively uses mathematics, working through problems, using specific knowledge of formulas to work out the solution to problems. This is why the study of mathematics goes beyond mechanical or rote learning. You have to practise it as a set of skills, and in the practice you discover its deeper meanings.

Philosophy is like that. It is quite different from learning something such as the names of the bones in the foot or the periodic table; though good biologists and chemists do more than simply learn these basic facts. They also think through the implications of what has been learned – the meaning of these facts – for understanding the skeleton or chemical structure.

Philosophy, then, requires *engagement*. You should not approach it as you would approach learning a set of notes or a teacher's PowerPoint presentation. Instead, it requires you to think about the issues, reaching your own conclusions – with sound reasoning for the conclusions you reach.

Philosophy discusses big issues. In Ancient Greece, much philosophy, especially as practised by the great philosophers like Socrates, Plato, Aristotle or Pythagoras, was, at its heart, a considered conversation. Perhaps the conservation took place in the market place or, often, during and after a friendly meal.

When a philosopher develops a theory or a new argument, he or she is not saying to the world:

> 'Learn this!'

Rather, the philosopher asks a question:

> 'What do you think of this?'

The right response is not to say that you have learned it, but to respond with a considered opinion. You should point out strong or weak points in the argument offered, judging its effectiveness. Sometimes two or three competing arguments are offered, and the philosopher is asking

for a reasoned judgement about which of these arguments might most effectively answer the problem they are designed to solve.

If this sounds challenging, there is some practical advice later in this chapter on how to think in the way required. For the moment, it is important to reflect on, and discuss, what you study. Examination questions and essays call on you to reach judgements, not simply to write down what you have learned. It is too late to work out what you think of theories if you have never discussed them or reached a judgement about them before you go into the examination room. Discussion and reflection are habits to be worked on during the study. The same skills apply more broadly in life. In philosophy we need to bear in mind Socrates' idea that:

'The unexamined life is not worth living.'

To live most fully means thinking about the meaning of our experiences, such as our adventures or friendships. Effective philosophising is just an extension of the same activity. By reflecting we discover ways of thinking and being that we had not considered before, and we learn new possibilities. One of the most exciting moments in philosophy is when you can say, 'I never thought of that!' In time you can think about how you have grown since meeting the idea.

There are practical advantages to this type of engagement, and not simply getting better examination results. There are things in philosophy, as in mathematics, that need to be learned. The process of learning is much easier when you have discussed and argued about something than it is when trying to learn cold facts off the page of a textbook. Reflection and discussion engage the whole mind, not just the memory, though memory is stimulated by them.

Of course, there are things which you must learn. It would be absurd to attempt to learn mathematics without mastering the language of mathematics. You have to learn the meaning of arithmetical symbols, of multiplication, division, square roots and all the rest. Without a grasp of that mathematical grammar, the activity is impossible, though the grammar is best learned in practice, using the symbols and concepts by working through problems.

The same is true in philosophy. There are tools of the trade, which need to be understood through use.

This chapter is designed to show you some basic tools and give a little idea of their use in practice. As you work through the chapters of this book, you will learn to use these terms, and you will become more familiar with their correct use.

3 Naming the parts – essential vocabulary for philosophical thinking

Key term

Logic Branch of philosophy concerned with the structure of ideas and arguments.

(a) Four branches of philosophy

Philosophy of religion needs several disciplines – **logic, epistemology** (theory of knowledge), and **metaphysics. Ethics** is also important. Religion makes claims about the good life and religious systems are usually, perhaps always, ethical systems. They encourage us to live in particular ways, both individually and in relation to others. In one sense,

Key terms

Epistemology Also known as theory of knowledge. This asks about what we can claim to know. What we truly know is not always the same as what we believe.

Metaphysics Branch of philosophy which asks what it is for something to be, to exist.

Ethics Branch of philosophy concerned with moral questions, not simply what we should do but also such things as the meaning and justification of goodness.

Validity This refers to an argument which is soundly constructed, so that if the premises were true, the conclusion would also be true. An argument might be valid but not true.

Key person

Aristotle (384–322вс): A Macedonian, son of the court physician. He studied at the Academy for 20 years, but disagreed with Plato's theory of the Forms, taking a much more empirical approach to his studies. He created his own school, the *Lyceum*.

Key terms

Syllogism Basic structure of an argument as set out by Aristotle, containing at least one major premise and one minor premise.

Major premise In a syllogism, a sentence which is all or nothing, with no exceptions.

Minor premise In a syllogism, a sentence containing an individual piece of information.

ethics can be seen as one of the original tasks of philosophy. Greek philosophers continually asked, 'What is the Good Life for Man?' For the moment, we will postpone discussion of ethics until the next part of the book, when we look at ethical theory in more detail.

There are other branches of philosophy. A philosophical discipline can accompany anything that can be the subject of reflection and questioning. As philosophers, we learn through continual questioning of our beliefs and practices. As long as that is the case, there will be philosophy.

(b) Logic

Logic is about the structure of arguments. Its primary concern is not whether a particular argument is *true*, but rather whether it is *structured to yield true conclusions*. It searches for the **validity** of arguments. An argument is valid if it is in a form that, if the information underlying the argument were true, then the conclusion would also be true.

Until the beginning of the twentieth century, all logic was based on the principles which Aristotle had set out in his logical works. These were known collectively as the *Organon*, comprising six books – *Categories, On Interpretation, Prior Analytics, Posterior Analytics, Topics* and *Sophistical Refutations*.

(c) The syllogism

Aristotle's logic is also called 'syllogistic logic', because the **syllogism** is the most basic logical form within the system.

A syllogism has a minimum of three elements: a **major premise**, a **minor premise** and a conclusion.

The most famous example of a syllogism is:

All men are mortal. (major premise)
Socrates is a man. (minor premise)
Therefore: Socrates is mortal. (conclusion)

The first line is a *major premise* because it is an 'all' sentence. The argument would fail if, instead of 'all' we wrote 'a few', 'some' or even 'most'. Socrates might then be one of those men who are not mortal. It could, of course, be 'none' rather than 'all', as long as the term permits no exception. It must include everything of the type because any exception would disprove the rule. The major premise always acts as a universal rule. Just remember that it must always be a case of 'all or nothing'.

The *minor premise* is an individual piece of information. In this case, it is about one particular man, Socrates. Notice that it is the *structure* of the argument that makes the conclusion true. The form of the argument is:

All p are q.
r is p.
Therefore r is q.

We can see that any argument of this form will give us a true conclusion if both premises are true.

Think about a different argument:

All Celts have fifteen fingers.
Brian Boru was a Celt.
Therefore Brian Boru had fifteen fingers.

definition of 'thinking' in the way that having three sides is essential to the definition of a triangle. Mathematics can be seen as *a priori*, because all mathematical calculations are variations on the basic tautological truth that $x = x$. That is, the result of all sums, such as $453 + 247 = 700$, is simply a variation of $x = x$.

Some philosophers, such as St Anselm and Descartes, have attempted to prove the existence of God *a priori*. We will see their theories in Chapter 6.

Philosophers point out two things about tautologies:

1. They tell us nothing about the world. For example, 'A mermaid is half-woman, half-fish' is true, because that is what we mean by the word 'mermaid'. But the only way we can know whether mermaids exist is through sense experience. Tautologies are definitions about the meaning of words.
2. Their truth is certain because we make the rules we are using. That is why mathematics is certain. Mathematicians have made the rules by which $2 + 2 = 4$ is true. If someone showed us a triangle and said 'this is round', we would say 'that's not true'. Without circularity, we would not allow the word 'round' to be used.

(ii) A posteriori

This refers to those things where our knowledge depends on sense experience. Knowledge of this kind is called **empirical knowledge**, from the Greek term *empeiria*, which means 'experience'.

In a descriptive sentence which is not a tautology, some things can be known to be true by using our senses in some other way. Knowing the meaning of the words in 'my cat is playing with a mouse' or 'there are mermaids in the Waters of Leith' is not enough to tell us whether these things are true. Someone would need to look to confirm that it is so. And even if these sentences were true today, we would have to look again tomorrow to see whether they were still true.

Any sense experience has limitations. We can only ever perceive the world with the senses we have. We can never get outside ourselves to check whether our perceptions are accurate. If we look at photographs or see films to check what is out there, we still see those things with our own eyes. We can never certainly know that the world is indeed as it seems to be to us. We can only know that this is how it appears to us.

To think about this a little more, consider the sentence, 'That chair is green.' How do I know whether the chair has any kind of existence beyond my imagination, that outside what-is-me lies this other, not-me object, the chair? I see it as green. All I truly know is that I describe it as green. I may hear you also describing the chair as green. The most I could know is that you use the term 'green' to describe the chair. I do not know what green looks like to you. I cannot get inside your mind to share your understanding of what green feels or looks like, any more than I can know what something tastes like to you. Philosophers call this privacy of experience the 'problem of other minds'.

4 Sense experience and its problems
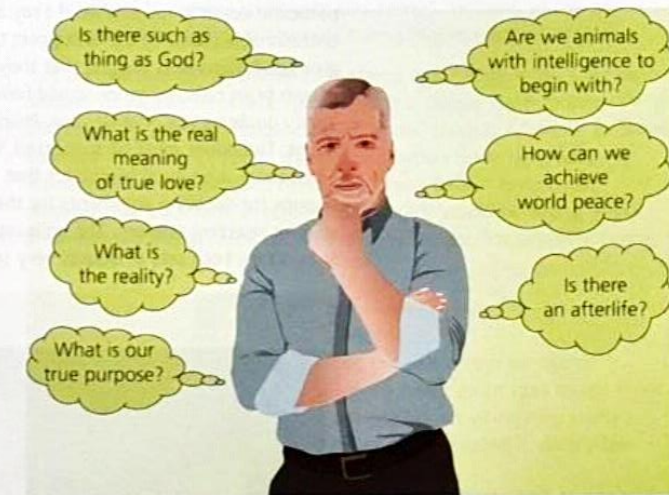
If knowledge of the outside world depends on our observations, then how do we make sense of the information? How do we take our random observations and make general rules of how things work in the universe? Only through making theories of this kind can we have science.

Many philosophers, including David Hume and Bertrand Russell, argue that most of our science – apart from mathematics, which is deductive – is based on making general conclusions from many observations. So, for example, we notice apparently endless instances of the Sun rising every morning, and draw the general conclusion: 'The Sun rises every morning.' This becomes a principle of geography and astronomy. But, of course, the conclusion is at best only probable. There could still be the exception, when the Sun does not rise, because it has burned out. This kind of reasoning, called *inductive*, can only give us probabilities at best.

But induction involves the logical problem of induction. The problem is easy to understand. The only proof that events give us probable general conclusions is that we have experienced them enough times to notice a pattern in them. It is this pattern that leads us to probable general conclusions. The only evidence for induction is induction itself.

(a) Philosophical doubt

A posteriori judgements can never be wholly certain. It is unavoidable that they are uncertain, but this need not be a reason for total scepticism or sleepless nights. After all, many things in life are uncertain. We do not withhold friendship because we cannot prove that our best friend will never betray us, and there is no reason to despair of all our knowledge because we are aware of its limitations.

There is an important difference between genuine philosophical doubt and other types of doubt. A good test about doubt is to ask whether a particular doubt is reasonable. If I say a table cannot think, it would be unreasonable doubt to try to suggest tables could think, unless you could give good reasons to suggest that they might. Given that tables have no known brain cells, someone would have to make a remarkable case to justify doubting my original view. Philosophical doubt is always reasoned doubt. The doubt must be supported. We ought not to entertain a doubt when there is no good reason for that doubt. There are good philosophical reasons for doubting arguments for the existence of God – as there are also for rejecting atheism. The philosopher, regardless of personal belief, should take both sets of doubts very seriously.

> **Key quote**
>
> Take the risk of thinking for yourself, much more happiness, truth, beauty, and wisdom will come to you that way.
>
> Christopher Hitchens (1949–2011)

(b) Knowledge and belief

When can we claim that we *know* something and not simply that we *believe* it?

Philosophers generally agree that four criteria must be satisfied in order to claim knowledge:

1   What we believe to be true must in fact be true. I can hardly be said to *know* that Snaefell is the world's highest mountain when it is not.
2   We must believe that what we believe to be true is really true. If someone said: 'I think Paris is the capital of France, but I'm really not sure', we would not say he had knowledge. He has a belief which happens to be true.
3   We must have sufficiently good reasons – not inadequate ones such as, 'it's in the newspaper' or 'my dad says ...'. This is called justification of our beliefs. There is great debate about what counts as sufficient justification. Some say that all attempts at justification ultimately fail.

4   Our belief must not rest on any false information. I could not be said to truly know who the king was who conquered England in 1066 if I believed that every conqueror was named 'William'. In this case I happen to be right, but I believe it for a reason which is mistaken.

It is important to remember these claims about knowledge. On religious matters, as well as on others, such as politics, people claim to *know* things that really they do not. People claim to 'know' there is a God, or to 'know' there is no God, or to 'know' that nationalisation is the right policy for industry. There may be good reasons for those beliefs, and people certainly may be sincere in holding them, but it would be wrong to say they have knowledge. After all, they may be sincere, but sincerely wrong.

5 Metaphysics

The name 'metaphysics' has an odd history.

After Aristotle died, his pupils edited the notes from his course lectures. They had just finished editing the notes about how things move and change, which they sensibly called *The Physics* when they started on a course for which they had no name, so they called it simply *The Metaphysics*, which meant 'beyond the physics'.

Metaphysics is sometimes understood to deal simply with transcendent matters. That is, it deals with things beyond our normal experience. In ordinary language, when people describe something as 'metaphysical', they refer to something beyond our experience. But it is a mistake to think of the philosophical activity on metaphysics in this way.

The central metaphysical question is: What exists? So, asking whether material objects, such as chairs or cats or guinea pigs, exist is as much a metaphysical question as asking whether God exists or souls exist.

Traditionally, metaphysical theories are divided into two kinds:

1   **Cosmological** – this approach refers to theories of the whole of being. They can be found in the work of Plato. He gave a metaphysical account of the entirety of the universe in relation to the Forms (see next chapter). They can also be found in Hegel, in relation to consciousness and the Absolute (covered in Year 2).
2   **Ontological** – these are theories of whether things of a particular kind exist. They do not attempt to make a grand theory of everything. Ontological approaches are piecemeal. So, for example, to ask whether souls exist is an ontological question. It does not ask what other kinds of things might also exist.

6 Study advice – making notes

The art of note-taking is essential to effective study. Remember that your ability in the subject is not determined by the number or length of notes you take, but by how effective they are as a guide to learning. Some students try to write everything the teacher says, but without truly listening, as if they were merely taking dictation, leaving themselves with a mass of notes which – as the examination approaches – they fear they will never be able to learn. You do not wish to finish the course with a daunting pile of notes any more than you should think you have *learned* something just because you have written it all down in class. If you are just writing in class, it becomes mechanical, passive not active.

Chapter 9

The issues of ethics

1 Introduction

> **Chapter checklist**
>
> This chapter gives essential background to the understanding of ethical discussion. It begins by seeing how ethics affects and permeates daily life, not only in making decisions about actions but in making judgements about others, giving advice and developing good character to live a good life. It relates ethical thought to practical reasoning and the nature of the person. The chapter then deals briefly with issues of ethical language, the relationship between morality and religion, before giving an overview of the subject, explaining some main technical issues. It briefly defines concepts which will be used in both AS and full A Level Studies. As in any subject, knowledge of terminology matters.

When we hear or think of the term 'ethics' we recognise that we are talking about the good life, and how we might live – that is, the question of morality.

It is essential when embarking on ethical studies to be conscious of what is involved in the ethical life. When we hear that we should be moral, we think at first of what we are expected to do, or what we ought ourselves to do. But that is not the total of what is required by the ethical life. To be sure, we do have to act. There are things we need to do, and things we should do. There are also things we ought not to do, as well as things we ought to do, but which we leave undone. Each of these involves moral judgement.

Even when we have listed all these, there are other activities which are part of the moral life. We raise young people. How should we do that? What is the good we want those children to have? Sometimes we are asked to advise others. What is the right thing to seek when doing this? Should we advise for our own good, or for the sake of others?

Beyond this, we sometimes have to make judgements on the actions of others. These judgements are not simply about whether someone has performed a right or wrong act, but whether he or she should be held responsible for that action. Aristotle argued that we cannot hold someone responsible for an act if that person acted in unavoidable ignorance or through being forced to do so. This view was subsequently adopted in Catholic moral teaching.

> **Key person**
>
> **Aristotle** (384–322BC): A Macedonian, son of the court physician. He studied at the Academy for 20 years, but disagreed with Plato's theory of the Forms, taking a much more empirical approach to his studies. He created his own school, the *Lyceum*.

2 Person and community
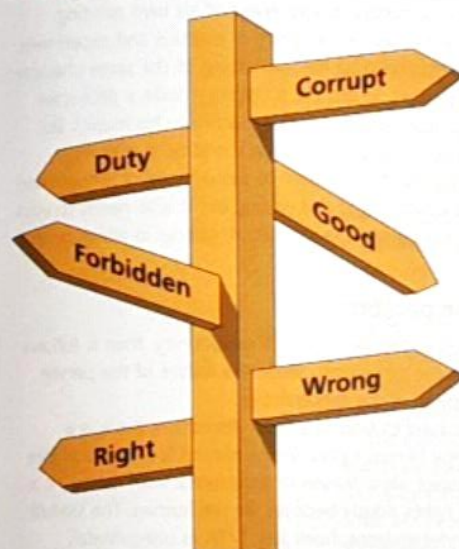
Discussion of this kind reminds us that morality arises from the fact that we are social creatures, living in community. Living in community has so many advantages, because we are not self-sufficient. A baby cannot look after herself but depends on the care of others. In the same way, I cannot provide for all my physical and emotional requirements. I need to relate to others who help to supply my needs, just as I find I must contribute to their needs. If I treat my neighbour without concern, with contempt and ingratitude, he may feel less inclined to give me the help I need. Therefore, I need to constrain my behaviour in various ways.

It can be argued, as it has been throughout the history of moral thought, that ideas of duty, responsibility, rights and obligations must arise out of this mutual need. Alan Gewirth gives a detailed justification of this approach in *Reason and Morality* (1978). It is interesting to consider whether someone living alone on a desert island could be considered capable of living a genuinely moral life. He presumably has no duty to others, and there is no one to have a duty towards him. Does he perhaps have duty towards himself? Even if he can be said to have moral demands, these will fall short of the full moral life. He is beholden to no other human being. He has no one other than himself to educate, counsel or judge.

If these considerations are true, the moral life entails life in community.

3 Ethical life

(a) Ethics and practical reasoning

If our ethical life is something lived in community, then it follows that it requires certain types of skill. This will be developed further in Chapter 10, but it is helpful to think carefully about the type of understanding entailed in the moral life.

Plato attempted, not successfully, to argue that the moral life flowed properly from our understanding of the Form of the Good. His was an essentially intellectualist account. For him, wrongdoing is always the result of ignorance. This is psychologically unconvincing. I can know that some activity, such as smoking, is harmful, but still do it anyway. The smoking habit is not the result of ignorance of why it is harmful but must have some other explanation.

If this is true, simply knowing what is right or wrong is not enough to direct our behaviour. Aristotle and a rich tradition since his time argue that moral life requires a kind of practical reasoning, just as art does. Knowing what a good painting is will not make me a good artist, and, in any case, there is no one 'right' painting to paint. The painter has to make judgements not only about what to paint but how to paint it. He may be

Key person

Plato (c.427–347BC): Pupil of Socrates. Created the Academy c.387BC and developed the ideas of Plato into his own distinctive philosophy, explained in a series of dialogues still central to philosophical discussion.

restricted in the size of canvas he may use, and by many other factors. He brings not only intellectual skill to the creation of his painting, but accumulated experience of materials, awareness of his own painting abilities and their limitations, as well as years of practice and experiment.

If Aristotle is right, moral thinking has something of the same character, although there are differences. In art, the artist may make a deliberate error as part of the art (Josef Haydn loved to do this in his music). But deliberate error seems not to be acceptable in morality in that way. Nevertheless, moral judgement does seem to require careful thought and the ability to work out what is right and wrong. But it also needs to work out what is practically manageable, in the circumstances in which people find themselves.

(b) Ethics and the person

If, as suggested, ethics is about the person in community, then it follows that we need to have some agreement about the nature of the person and what he or she is owed in our moral duties.

Agreement on this is hard to find. In ethical discussion, there is a large literature on natural human rights. In the natural law tradition (see Chapter 10), thinking about 'right reason in accordance with nature', it is assumed that we have rights simply because we are human. The United States Declaration of Independence, from July 1776, is unequivocal:

> We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

The assumption that we are endowed with rights makes for much discussion. The claim, 'I know my rights!' seems to follow every perceived injustice that someone suffers.

Yet it is not self-evident to philosophers that we have such rights. What is their origin? What are these rights? When you study utilitarianism you will discover that the theory dismisses any theory of natural rights, arguing that a notion of natural rights interferes with the goal of achieving the best possible outcome. From a different perspective, the American philosopher Ronald Dworkin (1931–2013) argued that rights were not to be understood absolutely. In *Life's Dominion: An Argument About Abortion, Euthanasia and Individual Freedom* (1993), he argues that we should instead see a human life in investment terms, and think of rights incrementally. If a young person dies at 20, it is an immense tragedy. So much has been invested in her by way of care and education, but little return has been given. This life is so much more significant than that of an old person who has paid back society through all she has given, or a baby in whom little investment has been made.

Against such views, Ingolf Dalferth (b. 1948) has argued that basic rights, and above all human dignity, are central. Human dignity is not a possession that can be taken away, as freedom may be in some circumstances. We are dignified in being ourselves. It is the essence of being human.

Religious views emphasise that we are children of God. From this they derive an insistence on the sacredness of life and the infinite value of the human person.

See Ingolf Dalferth: 'Religion, Morality and Being Human: The Controversial Status of Human Dignity', in: P. Jonkers and M. Sarot (Eds.), *Embodied Religion* (2013), pp. 143–179.

However, the question of the status of the person is developed, it seems at least clear that ethics makes sense only in terms of human activity. It is about persons and for persons.

(c) Ethics and language

If we are social persons, much of that sociality comes through language. We use language to frame the ideas we use to understand the world. We use language to tell others our memories and activities. We also use it when we think out the meaning of what we are doing or have done. We use language to reach judgements, to advise, to give instructions or to make requests. We use language to give thanks, whether to other people or to God. We use it to teach and learn, to encourage or to condemn, to complain or to praise.

Being human and being speaking persons are intricately entwined. If we are in constant relationship with each other, and we speak in but also about those relationships, then we cannot think about morality without thinking about the language we use.

The questions to think about in relation to language are not simply questions about the meaning of words or sentences. They are questions about how they are or should be used. If I describe someone as 'good', what am I saying about her? After all, 'good' is used in so many ways. Sometimes we use it as a term of moral approval: for example, when I say 'Mother Teresa was a good person', or 'Giving to the poor is good'. But sometimes I use the term in non-moral ways, such as when I praise someone for being good at something: 'Picasso was a good artist' or 'Marin Alsop is a good conductor'. Again, I may use it to express pleasure: 'That was a good meal.' Sometimes I use 'good' as a description, sometimes as an encouragement on a student's piece of work.

Both moral and non-moral uses of 'good' are significant for ethics, but there are also deep questions to consider about whether 'Giving alms to the poor is good' is a descriptive sentence like 'Everest is a high mountain'. These questions are called metaethical, and will be important in your Year 2 work.

Ethics

Ethics in business
moral principles
rules and regulations
of right conduct
values that guide

(d) Ethics and religion

Ethics is often taught in schools in conjunction with, or as part of, the subject of religious studies. Such a connection has value. All the great religions make ethical claims and provide guidance, and sometimes firm directions, on what it means to be moral.

This connection can sometimes have an unfortunate side-effect of leading people to imagine that there is a necessary condition of the ethical, that morality somehow *depends* upon a religious basis. This assumption leads to misunderstandings. People sometimes say of an action that it is wrong *because it is forbidden by the Ten Commandments*. Many Christian philosophers, including St Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther and Pope St John Paul II, would argue that this interpretation gets things the wrong way round. Murder, theft, adultery and lying are forbidden by the Ten Commandments *because they are wrongful acts*. In other words, they are wrong in themselves, and can be known to be wrong in

themselves by reason. Natural law theory argues that what is right and wrong is knowable by reason. On this view, the Ten Commandments simply sum up what we should know by reason.

This view seems to have a good biblical foundation. The Jews behave badly and God gives Moses the Ten Commandments. He does this not to tell his people something new but forcibly to remind them of what they ought to have known very well. Evil and wrongdoing happen in Genesis before the Commandments are promulgated, as we can see in the tales of Noah and the Flood or Abel's murder by Cain. These actions are not presented as those of people acting in ignorance – the wrongdoer is not given the excuse that he couldn't know he had done wrong because the Ten Commandments had not yet been set out. Much later, in the New Testament, St Paul says:

> When Gentiles, who do not possess the Law do instinctively what the Law requires, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves. They show that what the Law requires is written in their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them on the day when, according to my gospel, God, through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all.

Romans 2:14–16

Notice the mention of the law written on men's hearts, by which they can work out what is right and wrong. Closer to our own time, the future Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, was categorical:

> In its nature, the moral judgement is quite wholly independent of Religion.

William Temple: *The Kingdom of God* (1914), p. 42

Of course, some religious people insist that their beliefs rest simply on the commands of scripture, thinking that *x is wrong* just because the Bible or the Qu'ran says so. But this belief might not always be more than skin-deep. Suppose a critic were to say, 'So if God changed his mind and decided to make murder, pillage, adultery and lying compulsory, then we should all do that!' If that is their reply, it suggests that there really is something intrinsically wrong about those actions. This is why a good God would not command them. These are things knowable as wrong in themselves.

4 Theories of ethics

Key term

Normative ethics Theories of ethics which give guidance (norms) on how we should behave and/or the character traits we should develop.

Philosophers generally distinguish three areas of enquiry: **normative**, **applied** and **metaethics**.

Metaethics concerns the theory of ethics. It involves questions such as what we mean by terms like 'right', 'wrong', 'good', 'bad', and important issues such as the justification of ethics or the relationship between ethics and law. Some especially significant metaethical theories include:

- **Emotivism**: the view that ethical sentences simply evince [exhibit] an emotion and have no factual justification. 'Killing is wrong' is logically

Key person

William Temple (1881–1944): British churchman, ecumenist, social activist and philosophical theologian. The only son of an Archbishop of Canterbury to become Archbishop of Canterbury (1942–44). Works include *Nature, Man and God*. Coined the term, 'Welfare State'.

Archbishop William Temple

Key terms

Applied ethics Discussion of ethical approaches to specific problems of living, such as medicine, politics, theories of punishment, sport, taxation and so on.

Metaethics The branch of ethics concerned with the justification of ethics and the meaning of the language used. It would be a metaethical question to ask what we mean by the term 'good'.

Key quote

A system of morality which is based on relative emotional values is a mere illusion. A thorough vulgar conception which has nothing sound in it and nothing true.

Socrates

Key person

Martin Luther (1483–1546): Religious reformer and prolific author. Initiated the sixteenth-century Reformation when in 1517, he published the 95 Theses in Wittenberg, where he was a professor. Attacked the excesses of medieval religion, seeking a simpler and more direct form of religion, based on scripture and personal faith.

Key term

Deontic ethics Any type of ethics, such as Kantianism or utilitarianism (see Chapters 12 and 13), which emphasises the actions we should perform.

equivalent to 'Killing – boo!' This theory was held by, among others, Rudolf Carnap and A. J. Ayer.

- **Subjectivism**: the view that *x* is right because I say so and for no other reason. This view is held most notably by **Existentialists** such as Jean-Paul Sartre or Martin Heidegger.
- **Relativism**: the view that rightness is culturally or religiously determined. Incompatible positions are justifiable by their cultural roots. This view is surprisingly common today, especially in the form of **vulgar relativism**, which holds that as all beliefs are relative, all should be tolerated. The theory has only to be stated for its absurdity to be apparent: if there is a requirement to be tolerant, then there is, after all, a universal principle of tolerance. If there is a single universal principle, then this version of relativism is contradictory.
- **Divine command theory**: the view that *x* is right because God commands it. This view is rejected by most Christian philosophers, including St Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther and Pope St John Paul II. It is sometimes found in some – but not all – Evangelical circles.
- **Natural law theory**: believes that moral rightness can be determined through careful reflection on the facts of the world: 'right reason in accordance with nature'. Aristotle, Cicero, St Thomas Aquinas, Richard Hooker, Hugo Grotius and, today, John Finnis, support this view.

Metaethics will be studied in more depth in the second year of the course. For the moment you need only to understand what metaethical questions are about.

Key terms

Emotivism A theory that argues that ethical statements do no more than evince emotions, having no factual content. These statements do not express emotion as the emotion might not be felt by the speaker.

Subjectivism The view that all ethical judgements are simply statements of the speaker's beliefs and are right because the speaker says they are, and for no other reason.

Divine command theory (sometimes called theological voluntarism) The theory that something is right *because* God commands it, rather than believing that God commands something *because it is right*.

Natural law 'Right reason in accordance with human nature'. This can be worked out by considering what is good for human flourishing.

Existentialism A philosophical movement that believes the universe just exists and has no meaning in itself. Any value it has is the meaning each individual chooses to give it. Famous existentialists include Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers and Jean-Paul Sartre.

Vulgar relativism The belief that as every value judgement is relative, all should be tolerated. The position is contradictory because tolerance would be a universal value, not a relative one.

The main concern of the first year of your course is normative ethics. It consists of particular theories of how we ought to live. An important division is between **deontic ethics**, which emphasises what we should do, and **aretaic ethics** (virtue ethics), which emphasises the type of persons we should strive to be.

Key terms

Aretaic ethics Term for virtue ethics which concentrates on the goodness of the agent rather than the goodness of the action performed. It emphasises the dispositions, motives and character of the person who performs the action.

Teleological theories Any theory in which goodness or rightness is determined by the outcome.

Utilitarianism The moral doctrine that one should always seek the greatest balance of good over evil.

Deontological ethics Any ethical system which ignores outcomes, concentrating just on whether the act is good in itself.

Categorical imperatives are discussed in Chapter 12.

Aretaic ethics are associated with Aristotle and his followers, both ancient and modern. Alisdair Macintyre, Philippa Foot, G. E. M. Anscombe and Martha Nussbaum are key writers in the modern tradition. The perception that it is not enough to perform a good act is crucial to this school of thought. One might perform a just act for an unjust reason. One can never be a just person without performing just acts. But performing just acts does not make one a good person. Motivation and character are crucial.

Deontic ethics are normally split into two kinds:

1 **Teleological theories** (often called consequentialist) determine what is good by outcomes: *x* is seen as good because it leads to good results. Some well-known theories of this kind include:
   - **Utilitarianism** which holds that we should seek always the greatest balance of good over evil. This does not mean 'the greatest good of the greatest number' as the theory is sometimes inaccurately described. It is important to notice that this theory stresses the idea that we should always follow this one principle. The theory has no room for any view of natural rights. Rights get in the way of utility. Supporters of this theory include Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, Henry Sidgwick and, more recently, Derek Parfit and Peter Singer.
   - **Egoism** (not egotism, which is not a moral theory, but simply refers to complete selfishness) is an ethical theory which believes that we should all seek to act in our own best interests. It argues that if everyone did this, we would all achieve the best results. This approach is presupposed in many theories of economics, including some types of free market theory.
   - **Situation ethics,** generally associated with Joseph Fletcher, argues that in each situation we should do that which will produce the most loving outcome. This approach is sceptical about rules, arguing that always following rules can lead to cruel and unloving consequences.

2 **Deontological** theories argue that something is right in itself:
   - **Kantian** ethics are often understood to emphasise the primacy of doing one's duty regardless of consequences. The categorical imperative emphasises in its first form that we should act only on that maxim we can at the same time will to be universal law, in its second that we should so act as to treat people always as ends and never as means only. What matters above all is having a good will.
   - **Agapism** stresses love. It holds that we should just love. 'Love is all you need.' This theory has few philosophical adherents – Archbishop William Temple dismissed it as 'fatuous bleating' – but it is sometimes heard. The absence of a specific theory of justice appears to make it impractical and emphasises its distance from other views, including those of Christianity.
   - **Divine command theory** also sometimes appears in this category as well as under the guise of a metaethical view.

is GOD NECESSARY FOR MORALITY?

See Chapter 12 for a discussion of Kantian ethics.

Key persons

John Stuart Mill (1806–73): English utilitarian, Liberal politician and social philosopher. Brought up on utilitarian principles by James Mill, his father, and Jeremy Bentham. Major works include Utilitarianism (1863) and On Liberty (1859). His marriage to Harriet Taylor greatly influenced his thinking on social policies. Supported womens' legal rights. His basic philosophical position is that all knowledge is based on experience and that our desires and beliefs are products of psychological laws. Ethics, for example, are based on the psychological law that all humans desire to be happy (although he famously differed from Bentham in that he considered that intellectual pleasures are higher than other forms of happiness). MP for Westminster 1865–68, until defeated by W. H. Smith (of the bookseller's). Godfather to Bertrand Russell.

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804): Philosopher from Konigsberg in East Prussia. One of the greatest thinkers in history, attempted to reconcile the insights of the Rationalists, such as Descartes and Leibniz, and the Empiricists such as Locke, Hume and Berkeley. Author of The Critique of Pure Reason, the Critique of Practical Reason and Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals.

Background

Teleological and deontological theories: a word of caution

The division between deontological and teleological theories is best understood in terms of orientation rather than dogmatic categories.

The American philosopher William K. Frankena (1908–94), especially in his very influential textbook Ethics (1973), devoted attention to systematic categorisation of ethical theories, especially in the distinction between teleological and deontological theories. The result of the distinction was to create a climate of discussion in which people became needlessly wrapped up in whether a given theory is deontological or teleological, often at the expense of concentrating on what the theories said.

An obvious example was in Kantian ethics. Frankena labelled this deontological, which has led many to understand Kant as strictly unconcerned with consequences. But this is to misread him. As you will see when you study him, he says that we should always do our duty because it is our duty, not because it leads to good outcomes. This is deontological, but, at the same time, when he comes to working out what our duty is, he becomes consequentialist. The principle of universalisation says that we can only treat as moral an action that we are willing for everyone to do. Also we should treat people always as ends, never as means only. Both these principles are consequentialist, and do not make sense without thinking about outcomes. William Temple always treated Kant consequentially and there are interesting essays taking this view in Essays on Derek Parfit's On What Matters (2009). Perhaps we can say of Kant that the right-making feature of his theory is whether we have done our duty, which is deontological, but determining that duty requires a teleological approach.

In the same way, natural law is occasionally rather oddly described as a deontological theory, though it is much more commonly understood as a teleological one. For Aristotle and Aquinas, 'right reason in accordance with nature' is to be understood in terms of the consequences for human flourishing.

The important thing to remember is that philosophers who devise or outline ethical theories do not begin their work by thinking 'I am going to write a deontological theory about how to live'. They set out what they believe is right. Any categorising comes later, and by others.

The best way to think of Frankena's categories is that they illuminate the general direction of theories. They are not definitive pigeonholes.