

# Ethics

## KEYWORDS

**Ethics:** The study of morality

**Morality** = What we decide is right or wrong

**Absolute Morality** = the belief that actions are either ALWAYS right, or ALWAYS wrong

**Relative Morality** = An action is right or wrong depending on the situation

**Morals:** A set of standards for good or bad behaviour

**Imago Dei:** Humans are made in God's image

**Conscience:** A sense of right and wrong

**Commandments:** Rules given by God.

**Duty:** Something you must do

## How can we decide what is right and wrong?

### WHAT ARE ETHICS AND MORALITY?

Ethics is the study of what is right and wrong.

All over the world people have different opinions on what is right and wrong, and it can sometimes be hard to decide what the right thing is to do.



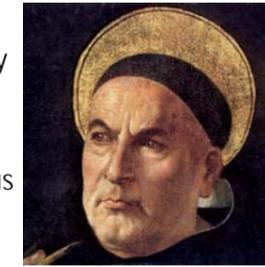
How to behave toward ourselves and toward other people is a matter of making choices: whether to be friendly or unfriendly; whether to tell the truth or lie; whether to be generous or greedy; whether to study to pass an exam or to spend that valuable study time watching television and then cheat to pass it.

These, and all other questions about how people act toward themselves and one another are dealt with in a field of study called ethics. Another name for ethics is morality.

### NATURAL LAW

**Thomas Aquinas** (1225-1274) developed Natural Law; a Christian theory that is still followed by many Roman Catholics today. He argued that there are natural laws that we all know that are given by God.

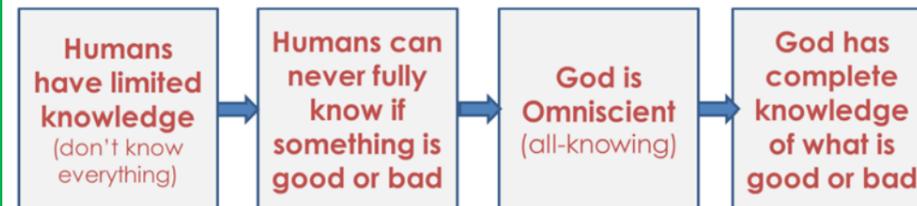
He believed that all people want to '*do good and avoid evil*'. To help us to do this we should follow five clear and absolute rules that God has given to us. He called these the **PRIMARY PRECEPTS**. These never change, and should be followed by all people, always. If we break these then we are doing the wrong thing.



**The five Primary Precepts are:** Protect the innocent, Reproduce, Ordered society, Worship God, Learn

### DIVINE COMMAND THEORY

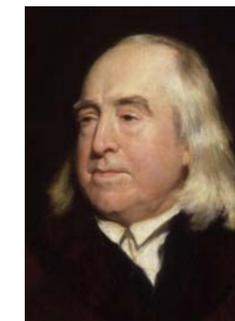
This theory says that **the right thing to do is that which God tells us to do**. God has given us rules and holy texts to follow that clearly tell us how to live. Only God is omniscient (all knowing, and so only God can truly know what is



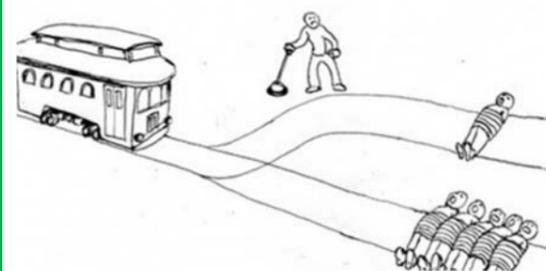
right and wrong in each situations. People must follow God's rules if they want to do good.

### UTILITARIANISM

**Jeremy Bentham** (1748 – 1832) developed his ideas based around what would give the '*greatest happiness for the greatest number of people*'. He thought that doing something that increases happiness is a good thing. Doing something that increases suffering is a bad thing. The happiness of a lot of people usually counts for more than the happiness of a few. He called this idea the Principle of Utility.



What would you do?



**Utilitarianism** is an example of a relative ethical theory. It says that **the right action to do is that action that causes the most pleasure (happiness) or reduces that most suffering**. In this theory you have to think about everybody that will be affected by a decision—both now and in the future.

EVERYONE is equal; your life and views are equal to those of your family, friends, and complete strangers.

### KANTIAN ETHICS

Kant believed that humans are intelligent enough to work out right and wrong for themselves. We can work out what is right or wrong by working out what the **MOTIVE** for our action is (the reason why we do it), the consequence is not what is important. We can never be motivated by self interest. A moral action must be based on 'good will'.

He said there were 3 main rules that we must follow when working out what to do. These are called the Categorical Imperative.

- 1) the action must be able to be 'universalised' - this means it would be ok if everyone in the world did it
- 2) Must not use people as a 'means to an end' - this means all people are equally important, we cant use them to get what we want.
- 3) It would exist in a 'kingdom of ends' - would this action exist in a perfect world? If not then it's wrong!

### SITUATION ETHICS

Situation ethics is a Christian ethical theory that is based on love.

It was developed by a man called Joseph Fletcher who said that "*The morality of an action depends on the situation*". There is nothing that is always right or always wrong, it depends on the situation.



Jesus taught that we should show love to all people—ourselves, the people we know, strangers, enemies, and God.



This theory says that the right thing to do is that action that brings about the most love in each situation.