

Ethics and Questioning in RE - KS2 & Secondary Focus

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CREative and REinspiring Annual RE Conference 2022

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Ethics and the Worldviews approach

- Worldviews is encouraging us to consider the ways in which we approach our world.
- Affected by religious, cultural, political, financial, physical experiences.
- Many of the worldviews in our classroom may be secular, minimally affected by religion.
- Do we reflect these in our teaching?
- When we teach ethics do we exclude these children?
- Do we imply these children do not have ethical views?
- Do we allow non-religious children to develop their ethical approaches?
- Do we give non-religious students the ability to identify with ethical viewpoints more similar to their worldviews?



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Situation Ethics

- Key thinker(s) – Joseph Fletcher (Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Paul Tillich)
- Key idea – The right action is the one that brings about the most loving consequence.
- Key idea – Based on the Christian principle of ‘agape’, moral actions are those which will bring the greatest good for the greatest number of people.
- The requirement to ‘sin bravely’ suggests that we should go against the law if it produces the most loving outcome.
- Strengths - More flexible than traditional Christian ethics and applicable for both religious and non-religious believers.
- Weaknesses – It is too vague and makes it difficult to ‘know’ what is right or wrong. It could be used to justify anything.



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Situation Ethics

- Applying this to moral dilemmas
- Dilemma – Using physical force to stop a bully when other approaches have failed.
- Situation Ethics would suggest that we can break conventional rules to achieve the most loving consequence. It also favours the most practical approach so it would probably suggest that this course of action is not only morally right, it becomes our moral obligation.
- Are we ok with this?



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Utilitarianism

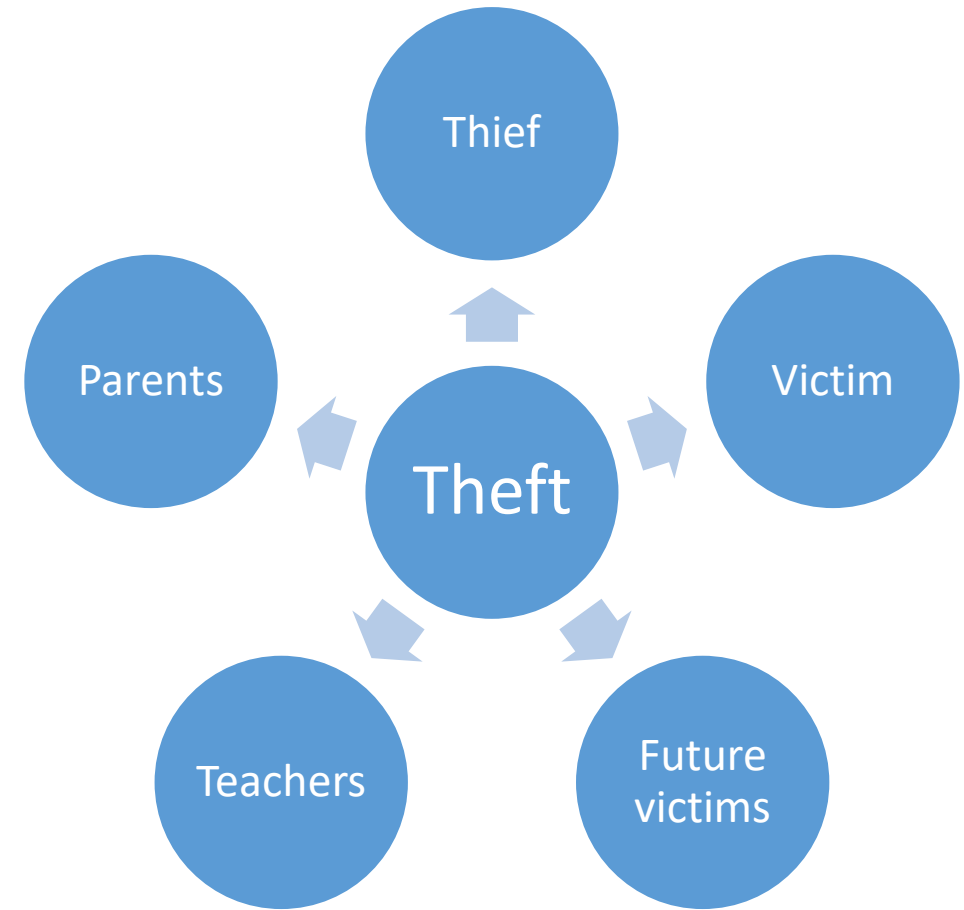
- Key thinkers – Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill
- Key idea – Moral actions are those which will bring the greatest good for the greatest number of people.
- Act utilitarianism thinks this process needs to be applied to every moral act. Rule utilitarianism thinks this process should be used to create rules which lead to this result in the majority of cases.
- Strengths - Benefits the most people, allows for individual situations, based on happiness which instinctively seems right.
- Weaknesses – Difficult to predict all consequences, can disadvantage minorities, happiness is subjective and difficult to measure.



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Utilitarianism ctnd.

- Applying this to moral dilemmas:
- Dilemma – Child sees someone stealing – should they tell?
- Work out the consequences of telling/not telling
- Choose the action which causes the most happiness for the most people



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Hedonism

- Key thinker(s) – Epicurus (341 – 270 BC)
- Key idea – “What is pleasurable is good, what is good is pleasurable...”
- This is an Ancient Greek consequentialist philosophy that suggests that how morally right an action is linked to how much pleasure it produces.
- Strengths – Very compatible to how most humans reason. It is natural for us to do what we find the most pleasurable.
- Weaknesses – If it is universalised it can encourage selfishness as we focus on our own pleasures before anyone else's.



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Hedonism

- Applying this to moral dilemmas
- Dilemma – Lying to a teacher to keep a friend out of trouble.
- Based on the pleasure that will come from the deepening of the friendship and the pleasure of the friend that will be relieved not to be in trouble a Hedonist would probably say that lying in this circumstance would be ok.
- Are we ok with this?



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Break out rooms

- A chance to discuss the ethical theories
- Do you like/dislike any of these views? Why?
- Do you recognise any of these approaches in the children you teach?



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Materialism

- La Mettrie (and many others including Hindu/Buddhist/Christian thinkers as well as atheists)
- There is no God or supernatural element, no life after death – we should focus on only those things we need to live. Mind is a physical process.
- Humans who are acting as machines will follow the laws of nature and ignore their own interests for the benefit of others.
- 'Do not fear god, do not worry about death; what is good is easy to get, what is terrible is easy to endure.' (Philodemus)

- Strengths – Values human life (as this is the only life), encourages us to be less anxious (status etc. are not essential to life), minimises the things we need, focuses on the things all humans have in common.
- Weaknesses – Often misunderstood, with no God/judge there is no motivation to be less selfish, many varieties so difficult to explain.



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Materialism ctnd.

- Applying this to moral dilemmas
- Dilemma – Seeing a child cheat on a test – should they stop them?
- Materialism would say that status from tests etc. are not essential to life, and therefore we should not get anxious about them. Cheating should be unnecessary. Talking to the other child and asking them to think about whether the test result is really essential for their material needs/survival could be a solution.



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Existentialism

- Key thinker(s) – Jean Paul Sartre
- Key idea – ‘Existence precedes essence’. We are born as blank slates and make ourselves into the type of person we want to be through creating ‘essence’ as we act.
- Strengths – It offers total freewill and encourages us to take total responsibility for our own actions.
- Weaknesses – Many people have criticised it as leading to anarchy as people create their own personal concept of goodness.



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Existentialism

- Applying this to moral dilemmas
- Dilemma – Ending a friendship because a new friend asks you to.
- Existentialists would suggest that you are free to do whatever you want to do as long as you are happy to take responsibility for the outcome of both your own action and those that choose to do the same as you. So as long as you are happy to accept this level of anguish the you are free to do what you want to do.
- Are we ok with this?



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The Ramayana

- Rama is due to inherit the kingdom from his father.
- His father is manipulated and exiles Rama, so his brother Bharata can inherit the kingdom.
- Rama, Sita (wife) and Lakshmana (brother) live in exile.
- Sita is kidnapped.
- Rama, Lakshmana and various helpers search for Sita, defeat the demon Ravana and rescue Sita.
- Rama regains his kingdom (Bharata put Rama's sandals on the throne to show he was waiting for Rama's return).
- Sita has to prove her purity, and then can join Rama.

<https://youtu.be/pp59n0So-XE>



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The Ramayana – using other ethical approaches

- Include ‘what if’ questions
 - Rama was a hedonist
 - Lakshmana was a utilitarian
- Would the story have the same conclusion?
- Look at the moral messages – would these same ideas (loyalty/duty/good over evil) be important to situation ethicists etc.



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Ramayana ctnd

What does the Ramayana teach?	How does it teach this?	How might a Hindu follow this teaching today?
Always do the right thing, even if it means facing your fears.		
Be loyal to the important people in your life.		
Good always triumphs over evil.		



What does the Ramayana teach?	How does it teach this?	How might a Hindu follow this teaching today?
Always be honest, it is the right thing to do.	Sita walked through fire to prove she had been honest to her husband, but was not burned.	Always be honest and tell people the truth.
Support your family and friends.	Rama's brother knew Rama was the true king, so he placed Rama's sandals on the throne.	Be loyal to the people you love.
Good always triumphs over evil.	Rama (god) defeated <u>Ravana</u> (demon) in the end.	Don't worry if things look difficult, they will get better.



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Ramayana ctnd

Ramayana – Key events – What if ...

<i>Ravana, acted out of revenge</i>	<i>Sita is kidnapped by Ravana.</i>	<i>Jatayu, the bird, died trying to save Sita.</i>	<i>Rama goes after Sita</i>
What if ... Ravana followed situation ethics?	What if ... Sita was a utilitarian?	What if ... Jatayu was a materialist?	What if ... Rama was a utilitarian?
<i>Hanuman and his army stay loyal to Rama</i>	<i>Rama defeats Ravana.</i>	<i>Bharata did not take control of the country, but waited for Rama to come back.</i>	<i>Sita remained pure</i>
What if ... Hanuman had been a hedonist?	What if ... Rama followed situation ethics?	What if ... Bharata was a utilitarian?	What if ... Sita was a hedonist?

1. Discuss in your pairs how the story would be different in each 'What if ...' scenario.
2. Choose one of the 'What if... ' scenarios and rewrite part of the story to show how the ethical decisions made by that character would affect the story outcome.
3. Explain why the decisions/actions of that character would be different if they followed that ethical theory.

Extension

4. Choose another ethical theory and explain how the characters actions would be different if they followed that theory.
5. Look at the actions above and highlight any you think would be the same if the **character** followed a different ethical theory.

Hedonism	Situation Ethics	Utilitarianism	Materialism
Doing what gives you the most pleasure.	Doing the most loving action.	Doing the action which brings the greatest good for the greatest number.	Doing actions which reflect that only material things exist/there is no life after death.



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Open discussion/Break out rooms

- What topics do you teach that include moral dilemmas?
- Where could you add a question that allows students to consider a non-religious ethical theory?



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Keeping in touch

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