

Key concepts:

- If humans are in control of their own actions, as Libertarianism claims, then they can be held responsible for them.
- It is necessary for **moral agents** to believe that they are free, so that they can make decisions about their behaviour and not be paralysed by determinism.
- The worth of human ideas of right or wrong may depend upon where the ideas come from. They may be constructed by the mind or understood by it.
- If ideas of right or wrong are an awareness of something bigger than us, then they are meaningful because we choose to follow or reject them.
- If human ideas of right and wrong are subjective and there is no meta-physical guide to which we can turn to for help, then ideas of right or wrong are constructed by individuals and may be worthless.
- Libertarianism suggests that there is value in praising of blaming moral agents because they take ultimate responsibility for everything they do.
- However, if there is no objective way to know how we 'ought' to behave, moral judgements are personal and there is no standard by which to judge moral choices.
- Sartre's '**ethics of we**' suggests that far from being only **beings-for-ourselves**, we are also **beings-for-others** as we are members of a society.
- But Sartre also argues that there is nothing that can ultimately guide us through life. This could mean that normative ethics are useless in giving people guidance through an absurd existence.
- Alternatively, normative ethics may give people a framework they can use to guide moral behaviour whilst remaining free to choose whether they adhere to it.
- Rogers requires **fully functioning** people to be creative, accept responsibility and be flexible in their lives. Relativist systems encourage people to come up with creative solutions and take risks in solving moral dilemmas.

- If moral agents are free beings, they are free to **sin** or to do **good**. This means that **moral evil** is not God's **responsibility**, it is the responsibility of humanity.
- God's responsibility for moral evil extends as far as creating humanity with the capacity for evil, with full knowledge of the consequences. The implication is that the existence of evil is worth the benefit of free will.
- Natural evil allows humans the freedom to perform **second-order goods** such as charity and benevolence which would be impossible in a perfect world. Therefore, God retains His **omnibenevolence** and we our responsibility.
- Calvin and Augustine thought God would lack **omnipotence** if we saved ourselves through our actions. However, God may have the power to do all things and yet refrain from using it so that human choices have meaning.
- If humans have free will, **prayer** is meaningful because it shows a human freely reaching out to God. It may have no effect on God Himself, but it may have a changing effect upon the person praying.
- God cannot answer human prayers without compromising their freedom. Performing actions in the world may require God to suspend human freedom.
- If God intervenes in the world to suspend the laws of nature by performing **miracles**, he suspends human freedom. God cannot intervene to protect us from evil because we are only free if we can do evil deeds with real consequences.

Key quotes:

'Man must rely upon his own fallible will and moral insight. He cannot escape choosing.' — Sartre

'So, I say to you, ask and it will be given to you; search and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you.' — Luke 11:9

'It would seem strange that no miraculous intervention prevented Auschwitz or Hiroshima, while the purposes apparently forwarded by some of the miracles acclaimed in traditional Christian faith seem trivial by comparison.' — Wiles

Issues for analysis and evaluation:

Key arguments/debates

Some question whether there is any worth in following normative ethical systems.

Some ask if punishment has any value if it does not cause moral behaviour.

Others question the extent to which we can blame human beings for their moral actions if they are uncaused or even random.

Key questions

Is prayer worthwhile or pointless?

Can God perform miracles?

Does it make any sense to believe in both free will and predestination?

Key words:

moral agents

ethics of we

beings-for-ourselves

beings-for-others

fully functioning

sin

moral evil

responsibility

second-order goods

omnibenevolence

omnipotence

prayer

miracles