

The Big Question: What is human nature?

The Life of Augustine

370AD At 16 begins his studies at Carthage.	Encountered Manicheism.	374AD Taught at Carthage, aged 19.	384AD Orator at the Imperial Court, Milan.	Converts to Christianity.	391AD Ordained a priest Then bishop (396AD).	411AD Argued with the Pelagians.	1298 Canonised.
354AD Born in N. Africa.	Read Cicero's <i>Hortensius</i> .	Had a son, Adeodatus by his mistress.	383AD Teaches in Rome.	Married Encountered Platonists.	Returned to N. Africa.	397-400AD Wrote <i>Confessions</i> .	430Ad Died.

3.1 Developments in Christian thought: Augustine of human nature

The Fall is the moment when Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden. Many scholars believe this to be a defining moment in the development of homo sapiens. For Augustine, it is an important turning point in human nature.

Before the Fall: Augustine taught that before the Fall humans had God-given will and were free to choose to accept God or reject him. There was no lust and friendships were without tension and stress.

What caused the Fall? Pride. Adam and Eve were deceived by Satan.

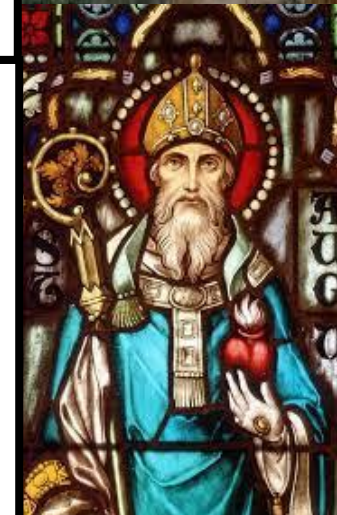
After the Fall: Human nature is entirely corrupt. The Original Sin and guilt are passed on through generations. Human will became divided: rational enough to know what is morally good but weakened by desires. All humans are incapable of choosing to do good and can only be saved by God's grace.

Pride is the start of every kind of sin. Augustine: City of God Book XIV Chapter 13

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate... For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. Romans 7:15, 19-20.

Hence from the misuse of free will there started a chain of disasters: mankind is led from that original perversion, a kind of corruption at the root, right up to the disaster of the second death, which has no end. Only those who are set free through God's grace escape from this calamitous sequence.

Augustine: City of God Book XIII, Chapter 14



The debate on human nature
Are humans 'born free', intrinsically good and then fettered by the shackles of society, relationships, and so on (Rousseau)? Or are humans born cold-blooded and brutish with a purpose to conquer that animal side (Hobbes)? Augustine became the leading authority on human nature for many years and wrote about human will before and after the Fall. For Augustine, the Fall was the defining point in the development of human nature and a point from which free will ended.

Relevance Today:

- Different interpretations of the Fall exist.
- Augustine's beliefs have been challenged by humanism and Freud.

The Big Question: What do we know about death and the afterlife?

c. 2nd - 1st century BCE
The Hebrew Bible is finished
(with the Torah forms the Old Testament).

4BC
Jesus of Nazareth is born. Most Christians believe he is the Messiah foretold in the Old Testament.

30-36 AD
Jesus is arrested and crucified.

70 - 115 AD
Scholars date the New Testament.

1646
The Westminster Confession of Faith.

c. 5th century BCE
The Torah is completed.

Traditional ideas on eschatology: the judgement of the world by God, its transformation into its perfect state.

Jesus taught as a Jewish teacher and healer.

His followers form the early Christian Church.

1308
Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

3.2 Developments in Christian thought: Death and the Afterlife

Traditional teachings emphasises a final judgement when the world is restored to a state of perfection. At this point all will be judged. However, some argue there is an initial 'personal' judgement prior to this 'general' second judgement. Parousia is the return of Christ that is believed to herald in the final stages of life to usher in the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God itself is interpreted differently; as a real and tangible place, or a spiritual and symbolic state. Jesus' parables on The Richman and Lazarus and The Sheep and Goats have been used as evidence of what will happen after death and who is saved by God's grace.

Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), the Italian statesman and poet, is noted for his vivid descriptions of heaven, hell and purgatory in his *Divine Comedy*.

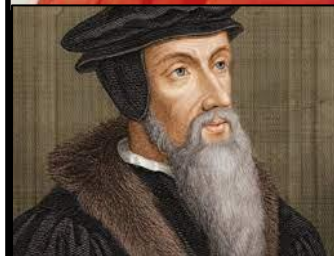
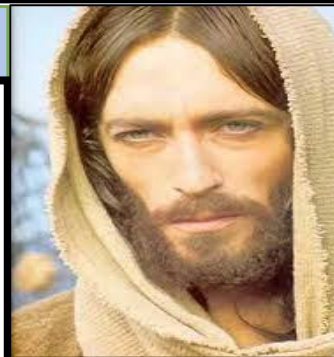
John Calvin is noted for his dedication to the idea of double predestination where God selects those who will be saved but also those who are destined for hell.

Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already. John 3:16-18

Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. John 5:28-29

God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Romans 11:2

This is good, and is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of truth. 1 Timothy 2:4



The debate on death and the afterlife

The discussion of what happens at the end of life and the end of the world is eschatology. This has been a fundamental part of religion and philosophy and theology as people have interpreted the Old and New Testament and the life of Jesus.

There are a number of debates surrounding what the kingdom of God might be and where and when it might arrive. When will Jesus return again? In addition, theologians have debated the meaning of heaven, hell and purgatory and who will be granted salvation.

Relevance Today:

- Theologians and theists interpret heaven and hell in different ways.
- The Catholic Church teaches single predestination.

3.3 Developments in Christian thought: Knowledge of God's Existence

The Big Question: What knowledge do we have of God's existence? What is meant by true knowledge? There is a Christian argument that true knowledge is knowledge of God. This is expressed as natural knowledge and revealed knowledge.

Types of knowledge

True knowledge.
Incorrigible facts, some may see this as scientific knowledge. This might help to understand physical matter but what about understanding life and its purpose? In the Ancient world is was called wisdom. The Catholic Church believes it is knowledge of God.

Natural theology
Knowledge of God is evident through observation of the natural world.

Offers a **rational and reasonable justification** for God's existence. But as an infinite being God lies beyond reason.

Revealed theology
God is known when he has revealed himself to humans as recorded in the scriptures, through prophets, prayer and Christ.

Could mean only true knowledge of God is accessible to Christians. But what evidence have we to support the historical accounts? Are they just myths and stories or is that necessary as a means of explaining the inexplicable?

Calvin on natural knowledge of God's existence

Humans have an innate sense of God: *sensus divinitatis*.

The universal consent argument: So many believe in God. This is not proof of existence but suggests a belief in God is perfectly reasonable. The Catholic Church agrees by saying humans are 'religious beings.'

Natural theology means knowledge of God the Creator is known through nature. He talks about 'sparks of glory'.

The principle of accommodation: God shows himself through creation so he can be recognised by finite human minds.

Nature is organised and spectacular. But does it show us enough to know God? William Paley's design argument is a powerful analogy. But does it account for the brutality of nature? Also, Darwin's evolution shows life has no purpose beyond mere survival. This renders God redundant.

Calvin on revealed knowledge of God's existence

The Fall prevents the *sensus divinitatis*, human conscience and creation from allowing humans to build a relationship with God. Only Christ can restore the relationship by providing knowledge of God the Redeemer.

The Catholic Church agrees that revelation is key.

What else is required? Faith and grace.

Calving argues the Bible must be read from a Trinitarian perspective. God accommodates himself to our minds through Jesus Christ.

Christ acts as a 'mirror' to reflect God's qualities and a mediator to reconcile us from sin. Christ's role makes The New Testament necessary to know God.



Karl Barth: There is no point of contact with God after the Fall. Only Christ can save us.
Brunner: There is some knowledge of God through nature: spiritual, conscience, observation, but revelation is necessary.
Plantinga: certain Christian truths are basic knowledge.

Relevance Today:

- Scientific knowledge sometimes changes so we hear of probabilities rather than absolutes.
- To understand aspects of the world around us we may well need to use our imaginations or faith to deal with complex and abstract issues.

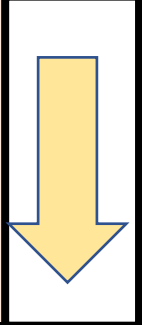
3.4 Developments in Christian thought: Jesus Christ

The Big Question: What authority does Jesus have?

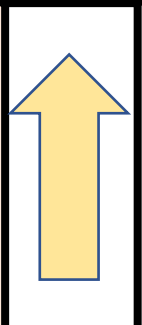
Authority is derived from various things; experience and a greater understanding of the world; a depth of specific, expert knowledge; or by proxy from a respected, legitimate institution like a government.

The nature of Jesus' relationship with God is called **Christology**.

Christology from above focuses on Jesus' divinity and God's act of bringing humanity back into relationship with him. High Christology cannot be proved but relies on faith.



Christology from below focuses on Jesus' message, example and teaching. Salvation is how people respond to Jesus to develop their relationship with God and the world.



Jesus the teacher of wisdom
Leo Tolstoy and Ludwig Wittgenstein argue Jesus' authority lay in his moral teaching. The latter writing Jesus affirmed authentic human living as he lived, practiced and taught what he preached.
The **Sermon on the Mount** (Matthew 5-7) is Jesus' longest discourse on ethics. He talks about good virtues and then discusses a range of moral and religious issues, from the use of force to the practice of prayer. At the heart of the arrival of the Kingdom of God was a call to others to repent.
Jesus taught morality was about developing one's character and this required a detailed analysis of motive.

Jesus the liberator
How politically motivated was Jesus and his followers after his death?
S.G.F. Brandon presents him as a freedom fighter whose activism is toned down by later authors. Liberation theologians like Gustavo Gutierrez are drawn to the way Jesus helped the poor and exploited, those who occupy the 'underside of society'. They describe Jesus' actions as a preferential option for the poor. Camilo Torres Restrepo argued, "If Jesus were alive today, He would be a guerrillero".
Jesus' parables often dealt with those on the fringes of society, and he kept table-fellowship with thieves, prostitutes and beggars.

Jesus the Son of God
Jesus' followers used the term Son of God to describe his special relationship with God however, it was not a term he used himself. The exclamation from the centurion after Jesus had died on the cross expresses a belief that Jesus was not a mere mortal:
Truly this man was God's son! (Mark 15:39)
Jesus also describes his unique relationship with God in John's Gospel:
The Father and I are one (John 10:30), and *Whoever has seen me has seen the Father* (John 14:9). However, some argue that this is not evidence that Jesus was God, but that he was fully aware of God's will and refer to *...the Father is greater than I* (John 14:28)
Most Christians use miracles (as signs of great wonder and a means of salvation), the incarnation and the resurrection as the foundation for their belief that Jesus is the Son of God.



Is Jesus unique?
Every life is unique but most Christians argue Jesus is 'the way...' not 'a way...' The resurrection is often the defining feature of his uniqueness.



The Parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32) is about forgiveness.



The Good Samaritan (10:25-37) uses a 'sinner' as an everyday example of morality.

Relevance Today: Jesus still has authority. The authority he has relates to ways in which Christians and other scholars interpret the bible. Many Christians hold Jesus in the highest authority as divine. In Islam, Jesus is still highly respected as *Isa*, a prophet.



Two different types of miracles: Jesus calms the sea and heals a man born blind.

3.5 Developments in Christian thought: Christian moral principles

The Big Question: How are Christian moral principles (ethics) formed?
 There are different views over what exactly Christian ethics are and should be influenced by. For some, the Bible is paramount, but other Christians prefer to use a range of sources to inform their values with some arguing that the correct moral choices are self-evident to each individual depending on the situation.

What is the difference between natural law and human laws?

Natural Law: primary precepts or premises:
 1) to live/survive (all animals).
 2) to reproduce and nurture (all animals).
 3) purely human – to develop reason and to know God.

Human Laws: secondary precepts or premises:
 Detailed rules deduced from primary precepts. E.g. the goodness of marriage, wrongness of murder, adultery, etc.

Natural Law: St Thomas Aquinas

- God's law is 'imprinted upon us...The light of natural reason, whereby we discern what is good and what is evil, is nothing else than an imprint on us of the divine light'
- There are at least some moral truths, derived from God and grounded in God, that everyone, regardless of their religious beliefs or cultural background, must be responsible for knowing.
- Distinguish this (as Romans did) from 'civil' or 'positive' law, and also from 'divine' or 'revealed' law (the church has custody of this).

In his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas acknowledges universal moral truths.

Theonomous Christian ethics and practices

This is when Christian ethics (moral decisions) are governed by God's law or command: *Theos* (God), *nomos* (law or rule).
 The Bible is the revealed Word of God and is the only source of authority for Christian ethics (Biblicism).
 For example, moral teachings are outlined in the Old Testament in The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17), and the New Testament in The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).
 The problem lies with interpreting contradictory passages in the Bible.
 For example, the old testament supports capital punishment with its ideas on retribution, 'an eye for an eye, tooth for tooth' (Exodus 21:24), but Jesus emphasized reconciliation and not retribution.

Heteronomous Christian ethics and practices

Heteronomous Christians argue ethics must be governed by several sources of authority or law. **Heteros** (several) and **nomos** (rule or law). These varied sources are the Bible, Church teaching and human reason. Roman Catholic heteronomy teaches Christian ethics are accessible through the natural world, reason, conscience and Church authority. Collectively the ethics derived from these sources are known as **natural law**.
 A problem with the range of authorities is the hierarchy, which authorities are greater than others and should some be used at all (e.g. Marxism by liberation theologians)?

Autonomous Christian ethics and practices

Autonomous Christian ethics are self governed. *Autos* (self) and *nomos* (law or rule). There is one-guiding principle which is self-evident which shapes the mindset of Christians – *agape*: Jesus' sacrificial and generous love for others.
 Hans Kung argues Christian ethics are not different to those of any person of good will. He calls for a 'global ethic' of minimal values and fundamental moral attitudes. The 'global ethic' is a Christian concern as it is motivated by the Christian's desire to love one's neighbour as someone created in the image of God and part of the global community.
 Joseph Fletcher's *Situation Ethics* (1966) considers every situation is judged relative to the principle of love and is guided by four 'working principles'.

Relevance today: Moral principles guide decisions made by millions of people everyday. These decisions have a range of influences and lead to a range of different outcomes. There are approximately 2.8 billion practicing Christians globally so it is important to understand the what guides Christian moral principles.



The story of David and Bathsheba (Samuel 2:11) from the Old Testament.



3.6 Developments in Christian thought: Christian moral action: Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The Big Question: What was Bonhoeffer's Christian and moral teaching?
 Dietrich Bonhoeffer developed Christian moral and theological teaching in the time of Hitler and the Nazis. His teaching addressed three key areas; the role of the state, the Church as community and discipleship – living as God wills.

Key events from Bonhoeffer's life

- 1918: Brother Walter died in WWI. He considers studying theology.
- 1923: Went to Tübingen then Berlin University.
- 1930: Completed his doctoral thesis *Act and Being*.
- 1930: Studied in New York.
- 1933: Almost immediately begins to publicly resist Nazism. Wrote 'The Church and the Jewish Question.'
- 1934: Established the Confessing Church.
- 1935: Set up the community at Finkenwalde.
- 1943: Arrested for aiding Jewish immigrants.
- 1945: Mock trial and execution.

Duty to God and the state

Ideologies are dangerous as extensions of human ideas to justify power over others.
On Christian ethics: humans are finite and sinful; no human decision can ever be absolutely right or wrong.
On the state: he broadly agreed with Luther that the Christian duty was to be obedient to the state as it aimed to impose law and order over sinful human tendencies. But, in practice the state often amasses too much power and sometimes made justice subordinate to its policies. It inflates its own importance and fails to acknowledge its obedience to God's will. The state can never represent God's will so can never assume any form of power. Therefore, the role of the Church is not to be part of the state but to keep it in check.
 Leadership is about community but the notion of a leader is specific to that person and this is what the German people succumbed to in the 1930s.

The role of the Church as Community

Bonhoeffer believed no Christian can act morally in isolation. A person acts out of duty in solidarity of all humankind (Kantian ethics). For the Christian, the Church should provide a moral and spiritual community that equips each person to live morally in the world. This is why Bonhoeffer argued the middle-class Church needed to be stripped of its false religious pretence.
 Religionless Christianity: the fill the Western void in the liberal, Western societies he argued for a Christian belief stripped of its baggage from the past and contamination with the present.

There should be 'no rusty swords'. This was a metaphor for outworn ethical attitudes which the Church had effectively used in the past but had no use, today.



The cost of discipleship

Bonhoeffer's ethical contribution was to focus on the will of God rather than being side-tracked into issues of good and evil. But how do people know the will of God? Christianity is grounded in the everyday world. Thus, Christians should not be asking questions about the nature of Christ's divinity but, 'who is Christ for us today?'
 Christology (the nature of Christ's relationship with God), ethics and discipleship are inseparable for Bonhoeffer.
 Ethics is action and action is liberating. Moral actions are the result of one's conscience.
 Agape is revealed in God's love for humanity through Jesus Christ: *'Only in Jesus Christ do we know what love is, namely, in His deed for us.'* (Ethics)
 'Costly grace' is obtained by following the three Christian principles of Christ, scripture and faith. Solidarity against injustice can be part of obtaining 'costly grace'.

Relevance Today: Bonhoeffer has gained a position as one of the most prominent Christian martyrs of the last century. His influence is so widespread that even nearly 80 years after his execution by the Nazis, Bonhoeffer's life and work are still the subject of fresh and lively discussion.

The Confessing Church (1934)

Set up with Niemöller and with significant input from Karl Barth. The Church was in opposition to the Nazified Christian movement that was followed National Socialist race theory.

The community at Finkenwalde

Established in 1935 to train ministers and pastors for the Confessing Church. It was based on the five principles of discipline, meditation, Bible, brotherhood and community.

