Can rules guide morality? – Knowledge organiser

Key words:

Morals- principles of right and wrong

Rules- regulations or principles

Agape- unconditional love (Situation ethics)

Absolutist- what is right and wrong stays the same no matter what

Relativist- what is right or wrong depends on the circumstances

Absolutism

- Absolutists think that there are certain moral principles (rules) that remain the same no matter what.
- For absolutists all actions should be judged by these principles.
- When people have disagreements, people can be right or wrong. E.G it is a fact that stealing is wrong.

Relativism

- Relativists prefer to look at the situation and decide what is the moral thing to do in that particular case.
- They think that moral rules will need to be broken, morality isn't the same for everyone
- Whether stealing something is wrong depends on the particular circumstances of the people involved.

Utilitarianism

- Jeremy Bentham, who came up with utilitarianism thought it was morally good to to maximise pleasure and minimise pain.
- They try to work out what the consequences of you actions are, and work out the best thing to do based on that.
- Utilitarianism is a type of relativism- there are no absolute rules and in each situation you should aim to maximise pleasure.
- changes pleasure to "happiness" (for e.g, it may not always bring pleasure to study hard, but doing well in exams might make you happy)
- Distinguishes between higher and lower order pleasures. Higher pleasures satisfy the mind and are more valuable (poetry, watching a play at the theatre), lower satisfy the body (e.g pizza)
- Mill thought you needed both (you can't survive without food) but higher pleasures are more valuable to the utilitarian.

Situation Ethics

- In every situation you should do *the most loving thing.* This makes the theory relativistic (the right thing according to the situation)
- According to situation ethics you can break religious rules, if it means doing the most loving thing.
- One of the 10 commandments says lying is wrong. Look back at your starter scenarios- when could it be argued that lying might be the most loving thing to do

Natural Moral Law

Natural Moral Law is an ethical theory outlined by St Aquinas. He thought that all humans had a shared nature and that moral rules were the same in all places and all times. This is called moral absolutism. The came up with the five precepts to help guide humans which are,

1. Protection of innocent life
2. Reproduction
3. Ordered society
4. Worship God
5. Education for all

From these precepts people can come up with more specific secondary precepts which guide moral action. E.g A secondary precept for "Protection of innocent life" could be "Do not murder"