**Lesson 5** Ethical theories and moral problems.

Ethical theories help us decide what is RIGHT, WRONG, GOOD, or BAD.

**Task:** Which of these explanations A –E appeals to you most? Rank them in order of your preferred approach to ethics.

A ‘ I base my decisions on the rules and laws that I have learnt. If something goes against the law I won’t do it.’

B ‘ I think about the rights of the people concerned so I know what the right thing to do is’

C ‘I try to work out the consequences of my action before I do it. If I think the result is going to be good I’ll do it. If it looks bad I won’t’

D ‘ I base my decision on how I feel and what I think, on how what I’ll do will fit in to the sort of person I am and the sort of person I want to be’

E ‘I try to weigh up the situation I am in when I have to make a decision, so I do the best thing for the people involved in the situation’.

Which did you decide you preferred overall? Why?

**Now link each explanation with these five statements. Which goes with which?**

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| Ethical theory 1  YOU MATTER  ABCDE | In this approach your own personal development matters most. So you make decisions based on whether your character will be made a better one, and whether you will be happier and get more out of life. The key idea is that you learn from experience and learn to be good by following the example of good people. You want to learn and understand yourself and other better. ( Aristotle and Virtue Ethics) |
| Ethical theory 2  PEOPLE MATTER  ABCDE | Here, the key principle is that you always treat each person as important just as they are, and you don’t use them for your own benefit. Every single person is of great importance. You have a duty to others as they have to you. When you make moral decisions you put others in the centre of your thinking (Immanuel Kant 1724-1804) |
| Ethical theory 3  SITUATIONS MATTER  ABCDE | You decide each situation differently. Your concern is to do the kindest, most loving thing for all the people affected by the situation. So you can’t tell in advance what your decision will be because it depends on each situation. (Joseph fletcher 1905-2001) |
| Ethical theory 4  CONSEQUENCES MATTER  ABCDE | You are most concerned for what you think is the most likely result of the decision you make. How will the people affected be in the long run? Will the effects of your decision be good or bad? Your ‘mantra’ is ‘The greatest happiness for the greatest number of people’. (Utilitarianism, Jeremy Bentham1748-1832) |
| Ethical theory 5  RULES MATTER  ABCDE | You believe that if you follow the rules then you will be doing the right thing. Rules were made through thought, reason, experience and collectively. Rules help everyone to know clearly what is right and wrong. Life is like a game of chess. The rules are clear – it doesn’t matter where you live or what your background is. Rules make life fair! (Natural Law, Aquinas) |

What are the strengths and weaknesses of each theory?

Which of these approaches do you think is best and why? Use examples to explain your view.