

Component 3: Religion and Ethics
Theme 3: Teleological Ethics
Booklet 1

Knowledge and understanding of religion and belief

<p>A</p> 	<p>Joseph Fletcher’s Situation Ethics - his rejection of other forms of ethics and his acceptance of agape as the basis of morality: Fletcher’s rejection of other approaches within ethics: legalism, antinomianism and the role of conscience;</p>  <p>Fletcher’s rationale for using the religious concept of 'agape' (selfless love) as the 'middle way' between the extremes of legalism and antinomianism;</p> <p>The biblical evidence used to support this approach: the teachings of Jesus (Luke 10:25:37) and St Paul (1 Corinthians 13).</p> <p>Situation Ethics as a form of moral relativism, a consequentialist and teleological theory</p>
<p>B</p>	<p>Fletcher's Situation Ethics - the principles as a means of assessing morality:</p> <p>The boss principle of Situation Ethics (following the concept of agape); the four working principles (pragmatism, relativism, positivism and personalism);</p>  <p>The six fundamental principles (love is the only good, love is the ruling norm of Christianity, love equals justice, love for all, loving ends justify the means and love decides situationally).</p>
<p>C</p>	<p>Fletcher’s Situation Ethics - application of theory: The application of Fletcher’s Situation Ethics to both of the issues listed below:</p>  <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. homosexual relationships 2. polyamorous relationships
<p>AO2</p>	<p>Issues for analysis and evaluation will be drawn from any aspect of the content above, such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The degree to which agape is the only intrinsic good. • Whether Fletcher’s Situation Ethics promotes immoral behaviour. • The extent to which Situation Ethics promotes justice. • The effectiveness of Situation Ethics in dealing with ethical issues. • Whether agape should replace religious rules. • The extent to which Situation Ethics provides a practical basis for making moral decisions for both religious believers and non-believers.

Key Terms

Agape love

Antinomian ethics

Conscience

Four working principles

Individualistic

Intrinsically good

Justice

Law of Love

Legalistic ethics

Personalism

Positivism

Pragmatism

Prescriptive

Proportionalism

Relativism

Situation Ethics

Subjective

The social and intellectual background

Situation ethics emerged at a time when traditional religious morality was facing drastic and permanent change. It is most commonly associated with **Joseph Fletcher** and **J.A.T. Robinson**. When **Fletcher** wrote '**Situation Ethics**' in **1966** society's direction was changing: women were increasingly prominent in the work force, initially as a result of the absence of men due to WWII. The 1960s marked a period in which many changes, which had come about before and since the World War Two had a deep impact on public and private morality. Anti- War protestors were a strong movement in USA voicing their disagreement with the **Vietnam War**. **JFK's assassination** had led to a distrust of government and a disappointment with American society. What was the point of sacrificing life and youth in patriotic obedience to a country that could not deliver and that rejected heroes on their return from the battlefield? The **Civil Rights movement** was still being shaped by **Martin Luther King's legacy**.

The **sexual revolution** of the 1960s was a time where the post-war generation threw off the shackles of authority, law and government, freely available and reliable contraception allowed them a new individualism. Fashion, music, politics, mixed-race relationships religion and drugs were all affected. Between 1945 and the end of 1960s Western Europe and North America were transformed.

However, the theological origins of Situation Ethics are much more complex than its popular social context may suggest.

Religious background – changing attitudes in Christianity

The changing moralities and questioning of authority that are usually associated with Situation Ethics had their origins much earlier in theological circles. Situation Ethics found a niche in the growing dissatisfaction of religious followers with the inflexible nature of tradition.

Bishop John Robinson in *Christian Morals Today* wrote 'There is no one ethical system that can claim to be Christian.'

Bultmann claimed that Jesus had no ethic; by this he meant that Jesus did not put forward any form of moral theory. He claimed that to follow the teaching 'Love thy neighbour as thyself' is a Christian ultimate duty.

Ideas about Situation Ethics before Fletcher can be summed up in two quotes.

'There is only one ultimate and invariable duty, and its formula is 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' How to do this is another question, but this is the whole moral duty.' **Temple (1923)**

'The law of love is the ultimate law because it is the negation of law; it is absolute because it concerns everything concrete. ... The absolutism of love is its power to go into the concrete situation, to discover what is demanded by the predicament of the concrete to which it turns. Therefore, love can never become fanatical in a fight for the absolute, or cynical under the impact of the relative.' **Tillich (1951)**

Robinson's Contribution to Situation Ethics

In 1963, **J.A.T. Robinson's** book '*Honest to God*' threw the Church into disarray due to its controversial content. It shook the traditional church at its roots. Robinson challenged the traditional, conservative view of God as an objectively real being 'up there' at the top of a three-storied universe and in line with

Paul Tillich suggested that God be understood as 'the ground of our being' of ultimate significance but not a supernatural being who intervenes in the world from outside it.

If this was not enough, Robinson also supported the 'new morality'. Joseph Fletcher had not yet written '*Situation Ethics*' but he had written an article in the Harvard Divinity Bulletin entitled 'The New Look at Christian Ethics' stating that the new Christian morality for 'man come of age' was based on one law only: the law of love.

John Robinson, Bishop of Woolwich, writing in 1963 anticipated that this change in moral perspective would lead to an increasing rift between Christians: 'I am inclined to think that the gulf must grow wider before it is bridged and that there will be an increasing alienation, both within the ranks of the church and outside it.'

Soon after, the Working Party of the BCC came to the conclusion that 'the Christian position is not so easily defined as many imagine. Underlying much of our modern confusion there is a real uncertainty about what is the proper basis for Christian moral judgement.' The way forward was not going to be easy but Robinson was to argue that 'Dr Fletcher's approach is the only ethic for 'man come of age'. To resist his approach in the name of religion will not stop it, it will only ensure the form it takes will be anti-Christian.'

To speak of 'man come of age' is to speak of humans having reached intellectual and rational maturity, able to make free moral decisions independent of rules prescribed by religious authorities.

Church's reaction to social and intellectual developments

In 1964 the **British Council for Churches** on the advice of its Advisory Group on Sex, Marriage and the Family, appointed a Working Party that set out to: 'Prepare a Statement of the Christian case for abstinence from sexual intercourse before marriage and faithfulness within marriage ... and to suggest means whereby the Christian position may be effectively presented to the various sections of the community'. The BCC wanted to convey 'a sane and responsible attitude towards love and marriage in the face of the misleading suggestions conveyed by much popular literature, entertainment and advertising'. The 'misleading suggestions' that concerned them the most were, naturally, those that related to sexual behaviour. They observed a 'widespread feeling, especially among Christian people, that recent years have witnessed a general lowering of moral standards and that this is particularly evident in the realm of sexual behaviour'. The BCC made extensive use of the Schofield report which identified the influences to which young people in the 1960s were exposed: 'greater independence; more money in their pockets and purses; the weakening of family bonds and religious influences; the development of earlier maturity, physically, emotionally and mentally; the impact of modern books, television and periodicals'. In the light of these influences, the BCC wanted to reassess where Christian moral truth lay, and this was a task that many theologians and ethicists were aware was an urgent task.

Similarly, in the Catholic Church, **Pope Pius XII** had declared Christian ethics based on situations as 'an opposition to natural law, God's law.'

Task 1

Create a mind map of the social, intellectual and religious background to situation ethics.

Include: the new ideas that were developing in Christianity in the 20th Century and how the organisation of the Church of England responded to these new ideas

Joseph Fletcher and Situation Ethics – read the extract from Fletcher’s book

Joseph Fletcher developed **Situation ethics** in the **1960s** in reaction to Christian legalism and antinomianism (the belief that there are no fixed moral principles, but that morality is the result of individual spontaneous acts).

In the beginning of his work, Fletcher argued that there are three possible options for making moral decisions: legalism, antinomianism and the situational approach.

Legalism – Fletcher pages 18-22

Legalism has a set of prefabricated moral rules and regulations. Judaism and Christianity both have legalistic ethical traditions. Pharisaic Judaism has a law based approach to life, founded on the Halakah oral tradition. Christianity has been focused on either natural law or biblical commandments. According to Fletcher, this runs into problems when life’s complexities require additional laws. For example, once murder has been prohibited, one has to clarify killing in self-defence, killing in war, killing unborn human beings and so on. The legalist must either include all of the complex alternatives in the law or create new laws to cover the result. This can produce a puritanical, choking web of laws, a kind of textbook morality that leaves people simply to check the manual to decide what is right and wrong. This error has been made by Catholics through their adherence to natural law and by Protestants through puritanical observance of the sayings of the Bible. Fletcher rejects legalistic ethics. The laws of scripture do not give specific guidance on dealing with various modern ethical dilemmas for example genetic engineering and it can be unsatisfactory to apply general rules to contemporary moral issues, particularly those arising out of modern advances in technology.

‘The Christian ethicist agrees with Bertrand Russell and his implied judgement, ‘To this day Christians think an adulterer more wicked than a politician who takes bribes, although the latter probably does a thousand times as much harm.’ Fletcher

2. What is legalism and why did Fletcher reject legalism? Include:

- a. What does legalism mean?
- b. What problems did Fletcher identify in legalistic religions? Judaism, Christianity – Catholic and Protestant
- c. What was Bertrand Russell’s judgement on Christianity?
- d. Write a summary of the Mrs X example. Chastity means not to have sex

5. Fletcher's example pages 37-39

A teenage girl has become pregnant as a result of being raped. She's very poor and very young.

How would a legalist go about considering what the moral thing to do is?

How would antinomians decide what the moral thing to do is? Trick question

How would situationist consider what the moral thing to do is?

The role of conscience – Fletcher sees it as ‘a function, not as a faculty’

Conscience = in a religious sense the conscience is God ethically guiding us (through the Holy Spirit) in our minds. Therefore, many religious people believe ethical guidance comes from our conscience (God working in us).

Rejects = Fletcher rejects this because he claims the conscience is not a noun (a thing) and is instead a verb (a process). Therefore, the conscience cannot be God working inside us (a thing) but instead it is just the brain’s mechanical process of working out moral decisions (a process). Therefore, the conscience cannot be used as a basis for decision making.

Fletcher’s conclusion is that, ‘There is no conscience; conscience is merely a word for our attempts to make decisions creatively, constructively, fittingly.’

6. Complete the table below

Tradition views about the conscience that Fletcher rejected	Fletcher’s ideas about the conscience
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ‘An innate, radar-like, built in faculty – intuitionism’ 2. ‘Inspiration from outside the decision maker – Holy Spirit’ 3. ‘The internalised value system of the culture and society’ 4. ‘Reason making moral judgements or value choices.’ 	

Fletcher's Situation Ethics – the middle way between legalism and antinomianism

Situation Ethics is a **relativistic** moral theory in that it has no absolute moral rules that have to be followed in every circumstance. It is also a **consequentialist** theory, where the end result is held to be of great importance. Finally, it is a **teleological** ethical theory, claiming that moral truth can be found through nature and purpose. Fletcher argues that each individual situation is different and absolute rules are too demanding and restrictive. The Bible shows what good moral decisions look like in particular situations, but it is not possible to know what God's will is in every situation. Fletcher says: 'I simply do not know and cannot know what God is doing.' As it is not possible to know God's will in every situation, love or agape is Situation ethics' only moral 'rule.'

Fletcher's book *Situation Ethics* which was published in 1966 reflected the mood of the times- Christians should make the right choices without just following rules and by thinking for themselves.

Agape and agapeistic calculus

Christians should base their decisions on one single truth- the **rule of agape**. This love is not merely an emotion but involves doing what is best for the other person unconditionally. Agape is the word used to describe God's love for humanity and the love that Christians should show towards God and other people. Fletcher took the view of love outlined in the Bible by St Paul, who wrote:

'Love is patient, love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.' 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

'And now these things remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.' 1 Corinthians 13:13

Fletcher maintained that the right way to goodness was the application of agape, the love which Jesus commanded: 'You should love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself' –**Luke 10:27**. **St Paul** wrote that love is the fulfilling of the law: 'Love thy neighbour as yourself.' Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.' – Romans 13:10.

This focus on agape means that other guiding maxims could be ignored in certain situations if they do not serve **agape**; for example, Fletcher says it would be right for a mother with a 13 year old daughter who is having sex to break the rules about under-age sex and insist her daughter uses contraception- the right choice is the most loving thing and it will depend on the situation. However, the situation can never change the rule of agape which is always good and right regardless of the circumstances.

7 What is the law of love? Is Fletcher's definition of love convincing?

8. Read the teachings of Jesus in Luke 10:25-37 and St Paul's 1 Corinthians 13

a. Summarise the story and message in Luke 10:25-37

b. Summarise the key teachings in 1 Corinthians 13

11. Explain why Fletcher rejects 'antinomianism' and 'legalism' in favour of 'agape' love. [20 AO1]

Introduction

Antinomianism is

Fletcher rejected it because

Legalism is

Fletcher rejected it because

3 B The boss principle of Situation Ethics (following the concept of agape); the four working principles (pragmatism, relativism, positivism and personalism);

The boss principle of Situation ethics (following the concept of agape)

Having studied the whole Bible, Fletcher concluded the fundamental feature of the Christian holy book was the law of Love i.e. he said the Bible can be summed up in one word: **LOVE**

Fletcher therefore argued that there should be one single and simple guideline principle, with which all individuals could work out whether the consequences of their actions were right or wrong in every single moral situation. This single principle was LOVE.

However, Fletcher had a specific type of love in mind for his Situation Ethics. His idea of Love is defined by the Christian idea of Love known by the Greek term: AGAPE

Agape literally translates in English as 'selfless love'. However, selfless love really has 3 parts to it:

- a. Love is directed outwards towards others, not inwards towards ourselves i.e. love is not selfish.
- b. Love is given unconditionally i.e. love is not dependent on receiving anything back.
- c. Love is given constantly i.e. love is given to all.

This form of love, Fletcher believed, is best summed up in the Bible verse 1 Corinthians Chapter 13.

Therefore, in terms of ethical decision-making Situation Ethics states:

- Good = the consequences of our actions create selfless love (Agape).
- Bad = the consequences of our actions create selfishness.

For example, stealing a loaf of bread (bad action) is ethically justified by Situation Ethics if it creates agape consequences (like giving the bread to a starving family). However, Situation Ethics would condemn this same action (stealing bread) as ethically bad if it creates selfish consequences (eating the bread for ourselves).

The Old Testament is written in Hebrew and the word used for the loving relationship between God and God's people is '**chesed**'. This word describes a 'love' that is faithful, strong and consistently present and kind.

The word used in Leviticus 19:18, the verse that is referred to in the parable of the Good Samaritan, however, is '**ahab**', which is more descriptive of a spontaneous and impulsive love on behalf of humans towards God and fellow human beings. Ahab is universal in application and it is this sense of love that is the origins of agape.

Boss Principle:

As we have seen above the agape consequences are the main guiding principle of Situation Ethics.

Therefore, according to Fletcher love/agape is the only absolute law in ethics, therefore it is known as the '**Boss Principle**'.

The four working principles and the six fundamental principles (love is the only good, love is the ruling norm of Christianity, love equals justice, love for all, loving ends justify the means and love decides situationally).

According to **Fletcher's Situation Ethics** this ethical theory depends on **four working principles** and **six fundamental principles**:

Four working principles:

1. Pragmatism- what you propose must work in practice.
2. Relativism- words like 'always', 'never', 'absolute' are rejected.
3. Positivism- a value judgement needs to be made, giving the first place to love.
4. Personalism- people are put in first place, morality is personal and not centred on laws.

Six fundamental principles:

1. Love (agape) is the only good. It is the only thing which is intrinsically 'good' and 'right' regardless of the situation.
2. Love is the ruling norm of Christianity. This love is self-giving love, which seeks the best interests of others but allows people the freedom and responsibility to choose the right thing for themselves.
3. Love equals justice. Justice will follow from love, because 'justice is love distributed'. If love is put into practice, it can only result in justice. Justice is concerned with giving everyone their due- its concern is with neighbours, not just our neighbour.
4. Love has no favourites and is for all, it does not give whom we like preferential treatment- it is good will which reaches out to strangers, acquaintances, friends and even enemies.
5. The loving ends justify the means. Love must be the final end, not a means to an end- people must choose what to do because the action will result in love, not be loving in order to achieve some other result.
6. The loving thing to do will depend on the situation- and as situations differ, an action that might be right in one situation could be wrong in another. This is quite different from traditional Christian ethics and is far more relativistic, having just one moral rule- agape.

11 Read Vardy and Grolsh pages 125 – 129 and the summaries below

Write a detailed explanation of the four working principles and the six fundamental principles

Add scholars, examples and quotes

<p>Pragmatism – ‘a practical or success posture’ Fletcher – To be right, it is necessary that a proposed course of action should work, and work towards the end which is love.</p>	<p>Relativism – Supporters of Situation Ethics reject the use of words like ‘never’, ‘always’ and ‘absolute’ as they believe that circumstances always throw up exceptions. There are not fixed rules that have to be obeyed. However, nor is it a free for all! Fletcher maintained that all decisions must be relative to Christian love. Situation ethics ‘relativizes the absolute, it does not absolutize the relative’ Fletcher</p>
<p>Positivism – Situation Ethics depends on a positive and free decision by individuals to give first place to Christian love- this rests on a fundamental value judgement which cannot be rationally prove. If someone says ‘Why should I love?’ then there is no answer to this question. A person has to see for themselves that this is the most important thing.</p>	<p>Personalism – Situation Ethics puts people first, this is different to a legalist who puts the law first. Situationalists ask what to do to help humans best: ‘there are no ‘values’ in the sense of inherent goods – value is what happens to something when it happens to be useful to love working for the sake of persons.’ Fletcher 1963</p>
<p>First proposition – ‘Only one thing is intrinsically good; namely love; nothing else at all’ Fletcher 1963 Only love is good in and of itself. Actions aren’t intrinsically good or evil. They are good or evil depending upon whether they promote the most loving result. They are intrinsically good, depending on their circumstances and consequences.</p>	<p>Second proposition – ‘The ruling norm of Christian decision is love: nothing else.’ Fletcher 1963 Jesus replaced the Torah with the principle of love. Jesus healed on the Sabbath, he chose to break the commandments when love demanded it. Love replaces law.</p>
<p>Third proposition – ‘Love and justice are the same, for justice is love distributed, nothing else.’ Fletcher 1963 Love and justice can’t be separated from each other. Fletcher writes, ‘justice is Christian love using its head, calculating its duties, obligations, opportunities , resources ...justice is love coping with situations where distribution is called for.’ Justice is love at work in the whole community, for the whole community, for the whole community.</p>	<p>Fourth proposition – ‘Love wills the neighbour’s good, whether we like him or not’ Fletcher 1963 Fletcher is referring to agape and your neighbour is anybody; not just those we like but those we don’t like as well. Agape love is unconditional; nothing is required in return.</p>
<p>Fifth proposition – ‘Only the end justifies the means, nothing else’ Fletcher 1963 To consider moral actions without reference to their ends is a haphazard approach. Actions acquire moral status as a means to an end. For Fletcher, the end must be the most loving result. When weighing up a situation, one must consider the desired end, the means available, the motive for acting and the foreseeable consequences.</p>	<p>Sixth proposition – ‘Love’s decisions are made situationally, not prescriptively.’ Fletcher 1963 Jesus reacted against the kind of rule based morality that he saw around him. There were Jewish groups that lived on rule based moral systems; but Jesus distanced himself from them. Whether something is right or wrong depends on the situation. If an action will bring about an end that serves love must it is right. Fletcher believes that it people don’t feel that it’s wrong to have sexual relations outside marriage then it isn’t, unless they hurt themselves, their partners or themselves</p>

Fletcher's Four Examples

Joseph Fletcher famously gave **four situations** that he used as examples in which the established moral laws might need to be put on hold in order to achieve the greater amount of love. They were all either real situations, or based upon real situations; also he never gave any final judgment for these situations, but rather made people think about the best outcomes themselves. Here are four cases adapted from J Fletcher's "*Situation Ethics*"



Himself Might his Quietus Make: I dropped in on a patient at the hospital who explained that he only had a set time to live. The doctors could give him some pills (that would cost \$40 every three days) that would keep him alive for the next three years, but if he didn't take the pills, he'd be dead within six months. Now he was insured for \$100,000, double indemnity and that was all the insurance he had. But if he took the pills and lived past next October when the insurance was up for renewal, they

were bound to refuse the renewal, and his insurance would be canceled. So he told me that he was thinking that if he didn't take the pills, then his family would get left with some security, and asked my advice on the situation.

Special Bombing Mission No. 13: When the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, the plane crew were silent. Captain Lewis uttered six words, "My God, what have we done?" Three days later another one fell on Nagasaki. About 152,000 were killed; many times more were wounded and burned, to die later. The next day Japan sued for peace. When deciding whether to use "the most terrible weapon ever known" the US President appointed an interim committee made up of distinguished and responsible people in the government. Most but not all of its military advisors favoured using it. Winston Churchill joined them in favour. Top-level scientists said they could find no acceptable alternative to using it, but they were opposed by equally able scientists. After lengthy discussions, the committee decided that the lives saved by ending the war swiftly by using this weapon outweighed the lives destroyed by using it and thought that the best course of action. Were they right?



Christian Cloak and Dagger: I was reading Gardner's 'Biblical Faith and Social Ethics' on a shuttle plane to New York. Next to me sat a young woman of about twenty-eight or so, attractive and well turned out in expensive clothes of good taste. She showed some interest in my book, and I asked if she'd like to look at it. "No," she said, "I'd rather talk." What about? "Me." That was a surprise, and I knew it meant good-bye to the reading I needed to get done. "I have a problem I can't get unconfused about. You might help me to decide," she explained...There was a war going on that her government believed could be stopped by some clever use of espionage and blackmail. However, this meant she had to seduce and sleep with an enemy spy in order to lure him into blackmail. Now this went against her morals, but if it brought the war to an end, saving thousands of lives, would it be worth breaking those moral standards?

Sacrificial Adultery: As the Russian armies drove westward to meet the Americans and British at the Elbe, a Soviet patrol picked up a Mrs. Bergmeier foraging food for her three children. Unable even to get word to the children, she was taken off to a POW camp in Ukraine. Her husband had been captured in the Battle of the Bulge and taken to a POW camp in Wales. When he was returned to Berlin, he spent months rounding up his children, although they couldn't find their mother. She more than anything else was needed to reknit them as a family in that dire situation of hunger, chaos and fear. Meanwhile, in Ukraine, Mrs. Bergmeier learned through a sympathetic commandant that her husband and family were trying to keep together and find her. But the rules allowed them to release her to Germany only if she was pregnant, in which case she would be returned as a liability. She turned things over in her mind and finally asked a friendly Volga German camp guard to impregnate her, which he did. Her condition being medically verified, she was sent back to Berlin and to her family. They welcomed her with open arms, even when she told them how she had managed it. And when the child was born, they all loved him because of what they had done for them. After the christening, they met up with their local pastor and discussed the morality of the situation.



These situations were criticised by many as being quite extreme, although Joseph Fletcher agreed that they were so, because in normal cases, the general guidelines should be applied and it is only in extreme cases that exceptions would need to be made.

1. What should they do according to Situation Ethics?
2. What should they do according to Natural Law?

3 C Situation Ethics: Application of the theory

Fletcher's Situation Ethics - application of theory:

The application of Fletcher's Situation Ethics to both of the issues listed below:

1. homosexual relationships
2. polyamorous relationships

1. **Homosexual Relationships** (a term from Ancient Greek meaning 'same' and the Latin *sexus* meaning 'sex' is a romantic attraction, sexual attraction or sexual behaviour between members of the same sex or gender.)
 - Firstly, Fletcher is not saying that we should completely ignore every ethic principle or law in our community. However, the Situationalist is prepared to set aside those rules in a specific situation if love/agape seems better served by doing so. As Fletcher states: "The situationalist follows a law or violates it according to love's need."
 - Religious laws tend to suggest homosexual relationships are wrong: for example in the Bible (Book of Leviticus) it states: "You shall not lie with a man as with a woman; that is an abomination." (This became commandment 157 of the 613 commandments).
 - However, Joseph Fletcher's Christian Situation Ethics offers a potentially opposing view because fundamental principle 2 states 'love is the ruling norm of Christianity. Therefore, if loving consequences occur the above commandment from Leviticus can be ignored.

Boss Principle: What would Situation Ethics say about homosexual relationships?

- The boss principle Situation Ethics (create the most loving consequences) would never say homosexual relationships are always wrong or always right. This is because it is relativist ethic and therefore does not believe actions are right and wrong in themselves. Instead it will judge each homosexual relationship on a 'case by case' basis (Fundamental Principle 6: Love Decides Situationally).
- **Morally Good** = Fletcher argues Situation Ethics would say homosexual relationships could be ethical good if the consequences of the relationship led to agape consequences. In practical terms this means that if the homosexual relationship is based around loving commitment then Situation Ethics would say ignore the religious rules against homosexuality (such as in Leviticus). This is because agape is better served by allowing the relationship.
- **Morally Bad** = However, if the homosexual relationship was based just around lust (the selfish desire for self-satisfaction – such as casual sex) then Situation Ethics would say it was morally wrong. This is because the homosexual relationship is creating selfish consequences and not loving ones. Therefore, Situation Ethics would say stick to the religious rules on homosexuality (such as in Leviticus) because love is not best served by breaking the rule.

Using the six fundamental principles and four working principles

- The **Six Fundamental Principles** and **Four Working Principles** can also be used to help us decide what Situation Ethics would have to say about homosexuality.

Fundamental Principle 2 - Love is the ruling Norm of Christianity:

- If the homosexual act was carried out for an agape love outcome/consequences than this replaces any rules on homosexuality that may come from the Bible e.g. Bible (Book of Leviticus) it states: "You shall not lie with a man as with a woman; that is an abomination."

Working Principle 2 – Relativism

- This principle makes it clear than homosexual acts can never be considered always morally wrong or right. This is because no action is right or wrong itself. The homosexual act can only be judged wrong or right depending upon the loving consequences/outcomes.

Fundamental Principle 5 - Loving Ends Justify The Means:

- If the homosexual act was done to create selflessly loving (agape) outcome/consequences; then Fundamental Principle 5 would state this was morally justified. This is because the end (the loving outcome/consequences of deepening a loving relationship) justifies the means (the bad action of breaking the Biblical rules).

Working Principle 1 - Pragmatism

- However, the working principle pragmatism could potentially overrule the above point, if the chances of the homosexual relationship deepening the relationship were slim e.g. both were about to go to university miles from each other. Therefore, pragmatism would say it was a wrong action despite the intention of creating a loving consequence.

2. **Polyamorous Relationships** (from the Latin term Polyamory: poly means "several" and amour means "love". It is the practice of relationships involving more than two people, with the knowledge and consent of everyone involved; often referred to as an open relationship).

Situation Ethics would say similar about polyamorous acts as it would about homosexual acts.

- Therefore, again Fletcher is not saying that we should completely ignore every ethic principle or law in our community.
- For example, religious laws tend to suggest polyamorous relationships are wrong. Though the Bible does not explicitly address polyamorous relationships; however the Bible speaks of sex within marriage as pure (Hebrews 13: 'Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer') and also the Bible speaks of sex outside of marriage as immoral (1 Corinthians 6: 'The body is not meant for sexual immorality.)
- However, Joseph Fletcher's Christian Situation Ethics offers a potentially opposing view because fundamental principle 2 states 'love is the ruling norm of Christianity. Therefore, if loving consequences occur the above commandments above can be ignored.
- Generally Situation Ethics would never say polyamorous relationships are always wrong or always right. This is because it is relativist ethic and therefore does not believe actions are right and wrong in themselves. Instead it will judge each polyamorous relationship on a 'case by case' basis (Fundamental Principle 6: Love Decides Situationally).
- Morally Good = Fletcher argues Situation Ethics would say polyamorous relationships could be ethical good if the consequences of the relationship led to agape consequences. In practical terms this means that if the polyamorous relationship is based around loving commitment for all those involved then Situation Ethics would say ignore the religious rules against polyamorous relationships (such as in Hebrews). This is because agape is better served by allowing the polyamorous relationship.
- Morally Bad = However, if the polyamorous relationship was based just around lust (the selfish desire for self-satisfaction – such as casual sex) then Situation Ethics would say it was morally wrong. This is because the polyamorous homosexual relationship is creating selfish consequences and not loving ones. Therefore, Situation Ethics would say stick to the religious rules on polyamorous relationships (such as in Hebrews) because love is not best served by breaking the rule.



William Barclay outlined a carefully considered critique of Situation Ethics in *Ethics in a Permissive Society* (1971). Barclay observed that the cases Fletcher used to illustrate the need for solving moral dilemmas situationally were extreme ones: a woman in a prisoner of war camp; the decision whether to bomb Hiroshima. Barclay asked how often we are likely to make the kind of life-and-death choices on which Fletcher based Situation Ethics. He suggested that 'It is much easier to agree that extraordinary situations need extraordinary measures than to think that there are no laws for ordinary everyday life.'

Barclay also suggested that Fletcher overestimated the value of being free from rules and the constant decision-making processes that this forces humans into. If it were the case that agape could always be fairly and accurately dealt out, laws would be unnecessary. As it is, there are no such guarantees, so a degree of law is necessary for human survival. Barclay suggested that the law serves vital functions in making sense of our experience and enabling society to determine what a reasonable life is by defining crime, acting as a deterrent value and protecting society. Furthermore, Barclay argued that Fletcher was unrealistic in terms of how free humans really are, even if there was no law to guide them. Environment, upbringing and education all have an impact on the choices we make, so it is unreasonable to think that humans could make moral choices without taking anything into account except love. Above all, Barclay suggested, law ensures that humans do not make an artificial distinction between public and private morality: 'A man can live his own life, but when he begins deliberately to alter the lives of others, then a real problem arises.' By this Barclay means that moral decisions affect not only those who make them but also others and the law takes this into account.

Barclay's criticisms suggest that Fletcher was overly optimistic about the capacity of human beings to make morally correct choices, and not to be influenced by personal preferences. Furthermore, how can we arbitrate a case in which two people reach different conclusions about an action, yet both claim to be acting in the interests of love? Is it valuable, as Fletcher suggests to act independently and flexibly?

Read the information and highlight or underline the main challenges identified by Barclay.

- **Barclay's** criticisms suggest that Fletcher was overly optimistic about the capacity of human beings to make morally correct choices and not to be influenced by personal preferences.
- Human beings need the guidelines offered by rules to avoid moral chaos.
- Furthermore, how can we arbitrate a case in which two people reach different conclusions about an action, yet both claim to be acting in the interests of love? Are our actions as independent and flexible as Fletcher assumes?

Other challenges to Situation Ethics

Summary of *Cook – The Moral Maze*

Fletcher claims that Situation Ethics provides an end to absolutes and to legalism and then supports a new (or rather old) absolute, that of love. Love alone is the only intrinsic good. It is the sole norm for decision-making. He criticised the Pharisees and those who are rule centred, and then supported the necessity of four working principles or presuppositions for proper decision-making and argues that the actual content of Situation Ethics consists of six fundamental principles or propositions. What are these but laws or rules to be applied to every situation? One set of rules and regulations is replaced by a different set. Another problem with Fletcher's approach is the issue of how to define a 'situation', where does a situation start and end? Is it when you first think about something? Or when you perform an action? A further problem arises with weighing up love in terms of consequences, how do I know and how may I guarantee certain consequences? Calculating consequences is a hazardous business with little certainty and with the additional problem of knowing when to stop the calculation. Is the sum to be the most loving thing judged at the end of this year, next year, or in thirty years time? The answers may be very different according to when and where we draw the line.

Cook claims that to be a successful situationist we would have to be omniscient and able to withstand the pressures in every situation which make it very difficult to be objective and fair. To suggest that 'the loving thing' is objective is hard to believe, as there are a great variety of views amongst Christians as to what constitutes the loving action. Is it loving to refuse to marry people in the Church when one or both parties have been divorced? A proper answer to this question needs to ask, 'Loving to whom?'. Is it loving to the couple, for their families, for their previous spouses, for people in the Church struggling with difficult marriages, for young people asking whether marriage is for life or not, or for the vicar with a bishop breathing down his neck? Situationism tells us that love is what we need, but for whom?

Cook asks if love and justice are really the same thing and if the end always justifies the means. He claims a law court where justice is dispensed seems far from the contexts where love flows forth. Laws are minimalist and require a basic standard of behaviour in our relationships with others, for example we should not discriminate against those of a different colour or religious believe. The laws states discriminatory behaviour is unjust. This is hard to connect to the positive demands of love. The law cannot demand that we love our racially different neighbours. Such a law could not be enforced. Indeed some might argue that a proper enforcement of such a law would itself be unjust. Therefore, Cook states that love and justice are not the same.

Cook claims that the end does not always justify the means. He points out the examples of moral issues in Fletcher's book are exceptional cases (mental health patient who is raped and becomes pregnant) and we can't base our morality on exceptionals in life. The exceptional examples might show that the end justifies the means. However, that some ends justify some means, does not mean that all ends are

justified by any means. There are surely some means that are so disgusting, harmful and evil that we would never use them no matter how worthy our cause and the end in view. Cook uses the example that we would all accept that children need some protection from bad influences in the world. But we would question whether it was a good idea to use total separation from schools, playmates, televisions, radio, newspapers, books and other people as a proper means of achieving a worthy end. Not all means can be justified by the end.

Read the information and highlight or underline the main challenges identified by Cook

Christian challenges to Situation Ethics

Situation Ethics has been criticised by the Catholic Church, **Pope Pius XII** declared Christian ethics based on situations as 'an opposition to natural law, God's law.' He meant that it was a failed attempt by humans to try and excuse the fact that their actions were against God's will. Pope Benedict stated that 'We are moving towards a dictatorship of relativism which does not recognise anything as for certain and which has as its highest goal one's own ego and one's own desires... Being an 'Adult' means having a faith which does not follow the waves of today's fashions or the latest novelties.' Religious believers may argue that God should decide what is fair and just, God is the ultimate source of authority and not humans who often make wrong decisions because of their sinful natures. Also that humans need rules to avoid moral chaos.

<p>Read the list of weaknesses below – add further explanations and/or examples Which of the six AO2 questions could they be used in? Some will be used in more than one.</p>	<p>AO2 Questions</p>
<p>The absolute law of love is still a law</p>	
<p>It is ambiguous, because there is no objective way of ensuring two people will come to the same conclusion as to what the most loving thing to do actually is.</p>	
<p>It breaks down complex moral situations into individual moral decisions – this may not be the best way to resolve the problem</p>	
<p>It depends too much on an individual’s viewpoint and interpretation of the law of love, William Barkley was uncomfortable with Fletcher’s view that nothing is intrinsically good or bad</p>	
<p>The theory is teleological, dependent on the calculation of consequences. It is impossible to be always accurate in making such a calculation</p>	
<p>The theory justifies adultery, murder, and even genocide in the interests of love.</p>	
<p>Does love always justify the suffering of others</p>	
<p>Are some types of love better than others</p>	

Love is an abstract quality. How do we measure it?	
How can a group of individuals reach an agreement on what is the most loving thing?	
How far reaching should consequences of the loving action be? Are we concerned with immediate or ultimate consequences?	
How can people judge the moral value of a consequence when there are so many conflicting factors	
People like to be treated with a degree of consistency, and situation ethics permits inconsistency, even unreliability, in personal relationships.	
<p>It is not compatible with Christianity.</p> <p>Jesus praised many virtues in the Beatitudes – not just love.</p> <p>Aquinas praised the virtues of courage and justice.</p> <p>Love is not the only good in the Bible – in Genesis God said the world was good.</p>	

Summary of challenges

‘It is possible, though not easy, to forgive Professor Fletcher for writing this book, for he is a generous and loveable man. It is harder to forgive the SCM Press for publishing it’ **Professor Gordon Dunstan**

‘A false spirituality of this kind has always haunted the thinking of clever men’. **Glyn Simon in the Honest to God debate**

Ultimately, it seems that ethical theories such as situation ethics are idealistic; moral dilemmas are realistic.

Support for Situation Ethics

'The law of love is the ultimate law because it is the negation of law; it is absolute because it concerns everything concrete. ... The absolutism of love is its power to go into the concrete situation, to discover what is demanded by the predicament of the concrete to which it turns. Therefore, love can never become fanatical in a fight for the absolute, or cynical under the impact of the relative.' **Tillich (1951)**

'Dr Fletcher's approach is the only ethic for 'man come of age'. To resist his approach in the name of religion will not stop it, it will only ensure the form it takes will be anti-Christian.' Bishop Robinson

Read the list of strengths below – add further explanations or examples Which of the five AO2 questions could they be used in? Some will be more than one	AO2 Questions
It is easy to understand	
It is flexible and gives people the freedom to act according to the circumstances –it can be applied to new moral issues such as medical ethics and environmental concerns	
It enables people to respond emotionally and/or rationally to the situation, rather than act based according to proscribed rules e.g. abortion example	
It is based on agape love, which is a key characteristic of every moral system. Individual cases are judged on their own merits, irrespective of what has been done in similar situations in the past.	
Fletcher is very specific about what he means by agape – it is not just emotions – it is a process or an action	

<p>The situational idea of personalism appears to be in keeping with the teachings and actions of Jesus in the Bible</p>	
<p>Nothing is intrinsically right or wrong, except the principle of love.</p>	
<p>Love always seeks the well-being of others – it encourages people to put act selflessly and put other people first regardless of preferment ‘Love wills the neighbours good regardless of feelings.’</p>	
<p>It allows people individual freedom and true responsibility to make decisions for themselves.</p>	
<p>It is compatible with Christianity.</p> <p>St Paul said love was the greatest of the three revealed virtues and Aquinas agreed with this view.</p> <p>Jesus said ‘Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.’</p>	

The degree to which agape is the only intrinsic good

Some would argue that laws sent by God are intrinsically good because they are part of God's nature and will; for example, Divine Command theory suggests this. They would continue to express that following the will of God is vital in developing good character.

Jesus himself, in the Beatitudes, praises many virtues as good; for example, 'blessed are the peacemakers' and 'blessed are the meek'. Surely it cannot be one thing that is just classed as good? Also one could argue that agape is not the only intrinsic good because if it directs everything else then surely they become good like agape?

The main problems with seeing love as the only intrinsic good is that it means that morality is very narrow and that any other virtues are ignored and not developed, such as Aquinas' courage and justice. It also ignores the fact that 'good' is always a relative term and has no consistent value in that it is like a variable.

In addition, there is much biblical evidence to suggest that good is used many times to describe a variety of things. For example, God saw that creation was good; the 'Good Samaritan' did the right thing according to the story; it is 'good' to give praise to God. In Matthew 19:17 it states, 'Why do you ask me about what is good?' Jesus replied, 'There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.' Again in, Mark 10:18 it states, 'Why do you call me good?' Jesus answered, 'No one is good except God alone.' This all seems to suggest various applications and designations for what is good.

William Barclay was uncomfortable with Fletcher's view that nothing is intrinsically good or bad in itself. He allowed that some actions can be seen as morally right given an extraordinary situation; but this does not necessarily follow that the thing involved is in itself morally good. He went even further to suggest that there are some actions that can never be seen to be morally right; for instance, to encourage a young person to experiment and experience drugs for themselves knowing that it could lead to addiction. 'The right and the wrong are not so easily eliminated.'

However, in Fletcher's defence it could be argued that we need to define what he meant carefully. Fletcher, denies that it is some kind of 'thing' as in a 'noun', rather, it is an action and argues that 'Only in the divine being, only in God, is love substantive. With men it is a formal principle, a predicate. Only with God is it a property. This is because God *is* love. Men, who are finite, only *do* love.' This would be in agreement with Jesus' answer in Mark. This gives us a clue as to what Fletcher really means in that to do good one must always act lovingly or develop the quality of love.

Even Aquinas recognised this in agreement with Paul that 'love' was the greatest of the three revealed virtues and that this superlative was the basis of every other virtue. In this sense it can be seen that there is a case for seeing agape is the only intrinsic good.

In conclusion, it could be argued that to take Fletcher's proposition out of context means that it can be misunderstood and challenged. When it is considered carefully and in line with Natural Law and virtue theory it can be seen to be consistent with the idea that both Jesus and Paul propose that in intrinsic terms agape is the only thing that is good because it is, for want of a better phrase, 'godly' or 'god-like'.

AO2 Activity Possible lines of argument

Listed below are some conclusions that could be drawn from the AO2 reasoning in the accompanying text:

1. Agape is the only intrinsic good and is the foundation of Fletcher's ethical argument.
2. Agape is the only intrinsic good but this has to be qualified by careful explanation as to what is meant by this.
3. Agape is not the only intrinsic good because if it directs everything else then surely they become good?
4. Agape is the only intrinsic good is too simplistic to accept.
5. Agape is not the only intrinsic good because good is a relative term.

Consider each of the conclusions drawn above and collect evidence and examples to support each argument from the AO1 and AO2 material studied in this section. Select one conclusion that you think is most convincing and explain why it is so. Now contrast this with the weakest conclusion in the list, justifying your argument with clear reasoning and evidence.

Whether Situation Ethics promotes immoral behaviour

It can be seen that this has arisen from the accusation of antinomianism that Fletcher was so keen to avoid.

Some have argued that it promotes immoral behaviour because someone could claim to be acting out of love and could perform such acts as murder or adultery whilst really acting in a selfish, unfair and unjust way (on those who suffer as a result). Relativism gives too much freedom to the individual to decide what action to take. Humans are prone to making mistakes or being influenced by personal gain rather than love – this could lead to unjust and immoral behaviour.

William Barclay in his book *'Ethics in a Permissive Society'* wrote, 'If love is perfect then freedom is a good thing. But if there is no love, or if there is not enough love, then freedom can become licence, freedom can become selfishness and even cruelty.' The problem, according to Barclay, is one of human nature. Barclay referred to Robison's description of Situation Ethics as 'the only ethic for man come of age' and responded by arguing: 'This is probably true – but man has not yet come of age'. In other words, humanity as a whole is not mature enough for such a sophisticated philosophy.

Religious believers could argue that all people should follow divine law as God is the ultimate source of moral authority. They cannot rely on principles devised by sinful mankind.

Some Christians may also argue that God should decide what is fair and just, God is the ultimate source of authority and not humans who often make wrong decisions. For example, consequences may not always be loving or predictable and although the intention may have been to act in a loving, fair and just way, the outcome is not one that reflects goodness or right moral behaviour. People cannot accurately predict the consequences of their actions. Therefore they do not know if the desired goal of love will be achieved.

Fletcher's response would be that Situation Ethics avoids immorality because it is based in love and would quote Paul and Jesus in their recognition that love is the greatest commandment. To follow anything other than love is to make the mistake of legalism and fall into what Miller called 'the immorality of morality'. Remember, 'The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath'.

Like virtue theory, Situation Ethics promotes responsibility of the individual but most of all it is grounded in a loving concern for neighbour. As Fletcher comments, 'What a difference it makes when love, understood agapeically, is boss; when love is the only norm. How free and therefore responsible we are!'

In conclusion, it is clear that Situation Ethics, through the principle of agape, is not intended to promote immoral behaviour but in practice the question still remains, 'Can an individual always be trusted to be accurately applying the principle of agape?'

Indeed, this has long been the crucial problem for the practical application of Situation Ethics in that it rests entirely upon, not just the single notion of a universal understanding of agapeic love, but more importantly upon the ability of human beings to relate this accurately to many complex ethical problems. This was indicated by Barclay's argument against Robison who argued that Situation Ethics was the 'only ethic for man come of age' and the question of human ability to do this remains the central question in this debate.

Listed below are some conclusions that could be drawn from the AO2 reasoning in the accompanying text:

1. It is inevitable that Situation Ethics promotes immoral behaviour because of the imperfection of human beings.
2. Situation Ethics promotes moral behaviour and nothing else because it is guided by the ultimate principle of love.
3. Situation Ethics can promote immoral behaviour if it is not applied correctly but that is the same for any ethical theory.
4. Situation Ethics promotes immoral behaviour because it gives too much freedom to the individual.
5. Situation Ethics promotes immoral behaviour because it challenges laws that have been established through reason and experience and that are right.

Consider each of the conclusions drawn above and collect evidence and examples to support each argument from the AO1 and AO2 material studied in this section. Select one conclusion that you think is most convincing and explain why it is so. Now contrast this with the weakest conclusion in the list, justifying your argument with clear reasoning and evidence.

The extent to which Situation Ethics promotes justice

In promoting justice some would argue that as each situation is considered differently in Situation Ethics, unlike in absolutist theories where a person has to follow rules, this promotes greater justice in society overall. For example, an abortion may be allowed according to Situation Ethics if the abortion was an act of selfless love whereas in Natural Law this would not be allowed as it goes against the primary precept of reproduction and some would see this as unjust.

In addition, it could be argued that the use of Situation Ethics would encourage people to act selflessly and put other people first. This would make a more just society overall. Fletcher would also argue that acting in such a way would ensure justice as one of the six fundamental principles states 'love is justice distributed'.

As Situation Ethics is a consequential theory, we must consider any possible consequences before acting. Therefore some would argue that this makes us consider carefully the impact of our actions on others before taking them and can only promote a just end.

Another argument is that if people used Situation Ethics as a basis for moral decision making then everyone should act in a loving way to all as one of the six fundamental principles states 'love wills the good of others, regardless of feelings'. There would be no room for prejudice or discrimination. This means that people would in effect treat a stranger in the same way as they treat a member of their family.

However, an alternative line of reasoning could be that without absolute moral rules many people would fear that there would be chaos and no overall control over peoples' actions. Adopting a relativistic approach to ethics means what is 'right' then changes all the time and consequently many people are unsure what the 'right' thing to do is. It will therefore just promote confusion and is a sure recipe for injustices.

Many would also consider the idea of 'love' as subjective since what one person considers to be a selflessly loving act another person may not. For example, some people may argue that euthanasia is an act of selfless love whilst other might argue it is the opposite and that 'mercy' killing is not mercy at all.

Another point in opposition to Situation Ethics is that people cannot accurately predict consequences. What we think might end in loving consequences might actually lead to unloving consequences. In a book published in 1971, *Ethics in a Permissive Society*, Barclay presented concerns over the theory of Situation Ethics. Barclay was in no doubt of the sensitive and intelligent nature of agape; 'Obviously, when we define love like this, love is a highly intelligent thing'; however, it was Barclay's view there will always be a dispute as to what actually is the most loving thing to do and actually what this means in practice.

It is also highly unlikely that we would act in the same way and show the same amount of 'love' to a stranger as we would to our own spouse or children, despite Situation Ethics suggesting the contrary. There are clear emotional bonds and duties which link us to our relatives and friends more than to strangers and these will undoubtedly influence the decisions we make.

In conclusion, there are clearly times when Situation Ethics is very persuasive and definite examples of where justice might be served. However, there are also dangers and so no real overall quality control other than a positive in the abilities and nature of human beings to deliver justice through love. The cynic would say this is not at all practical and the historian may argue that history shows us it can never happen. Maybe Situation Ethics is more useful as a personal tool for ethics more than a blanket social rule?

Listed below are some conclusions that could be drawn from the AO2 reasoning in the accompanying text:

1. Situation Ethics promotes justice as it is flexible.
2. Situation Ethics promotes justice as it is the same as love according to Fletcher.
3. Situation Ethics does not promote justice because it is too dependent on the individual and not focused on society.
4. Situation Ethics does not promote justice because no-one will agree on the most loving course of action.
5. Situation Ethics can promote justice but it has to be applied very carefully and thoughtfully to work.

Consider each of the conclusions drawn above and collect evidence and examples to support each argument from the AO1 and AO2 material studied in this section. Select one conclusion that you think is most convincing and explain why it is so. Now contrast this with the weakest conclusion in the list, justifying your argument with clear reasoning and evidence.

The effectiveness of Situation Ethics in dealing with ethical issues

It could be argued that Situation Ethics as a relativistic theory is therefore flexible and practical enough to deal with ethical matters. It takes into account the complexities of human life (the situation) and can take tough decisions where, from a legalistic perspective, all actions seem wrong. It is therefore effective in accommodating the particular as opposed to applying the general.

Another line of argument could be that Situation Ethics allows people the individual freedom and responsibility to make decisions for themselves, which many people nowadays prefer to the prescriptive and legalistic approach. It helps people to see another's perspective and also to grow in moral awareness.

Indeed, the principle of agape involves 'selfless' love, that is, putting others first, which should ensure fairness and justice; in other words, it puts people before laws and this is the essence of ethical concern.

It could also be suggested that it is the consequences of an ethical action that matter; therefore people would have to consider the likely consequences of their actions before they take them, and it is only then that the consequences will be effective for human well-being.

In contrast to this, William Barclay criticised Fletcher's various examples of where an allegedly immoral action prevents further immoralities. He did this on the grounds that such actions were not the only possibilities to prevent further immorality and would certainly not guarantee the end intended. Once again, the abnormal or extraordinary appears to be the basis of Fletcher's theory of ethics.

Despite this, without absolute rules there could be potential for moral chaos for many reasons; for example, by using relativism, it is understood that ideas about what action is 'right' changes all the time. When things change they usually start with small numbers and then spread out to influence the population. This will mean several ideas of what is 'right' co-existing and conflicting.

A strong criticism of Situation Ethics is that relativism gives too much freedom to the individual to decide what action to take. Humans are prone to making mistakes or being influenced by personal gain rather than love. When applied to ethical issues, it is not necessarily the case that a personal viewpoint is always the best. Ethical issues need less emotive influence and involvement, and more rational thought.

In summary, Barclay recognises the value of a situationist approach in its reminder for people to be more flexible in applying moral rules and laws; however, 'we do well still to remember that there are laws which we break at our peril'. A great lesson, however, from Situation Ethics, according to Barclay, is that it teaches and encourages sympathy and discourages self-righteousness in approaching ethical dilemmas but this in no way means it should replace established teachings and rules.

Overall, Barclay's was a scathing critique of the new morality. His view was that Fletcher's morality was too dangerous for society as a whole. According to Barclay, there are certain moral principles that are absolute and always morally good. However, Barclay did concede that some absolute principles were not always absolute in their application, especially in extreme circumstances. Such circumstances, nonetheless, are 'so rare as to never justify questioning the whole fabric of the law'.

In conclusion, Situation Ethics can be effective in dealing with moral issues but this does not mean we should follow it entirely. Barclay makes a valid point in indicating what we can learn from Situation Ethics and maybe the way forward is for deontological systems to reflect upon this and try to adapt accordingly?

Listed below are some conclusions that could be drawn from the AO2 reasoning in the accompanying text:

1. Situation Ethics is effective in dealing with ethical issues and can be used in its fullest sense.
2. Situation Ethics is effective in dealing with ethical issues but not in replacing the law or religious teachings that have stood the test of time.
3. Situation Ethics is effective in helping other ethical systems in dealing with ethical issues in its emphasis on empathy.
4. Situation Ethics is not effective in dealing with ethical issues because it is too subjective.
5. Situation Ethics is not effective in dealing with ethical issues because it promotes chaos and anarchy.

Consider each of the conclusions drawn above and collect evidence and examples to support each argument from the AO1 and AO2 material studied in this section. Select one conclusion that you think is most convincing and explain why it is so. Now contrast this with the weakest conclusion in the list, justifying your argument with clear reasoning and evidence.

Whether agape should replace religious rules

Some would argue that Situation Ethics is modelled on altruistic love, which is a major feature of many religions. Fletcher himself was a Christian moral theologian at the time and advocated the principle of agape as found in the Bible in the teachings of Jesus and Paul. He was also influenced by other Christian theologians who argued the same.

Indeed, the idea of putting people first (personalism) is in keeping with the actions of many world religious leaders but especially in the life and work of Jesus. Jesus always put people before religious principles such as when he healed on the Sabbath and declared, when criticised, that 'Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath'. This would suggest that agape should supersede religious rules even if it does not replace them.

The idea of love has been a major feature of the teachings of several religious leaders especially in the history of Christianity such as Augustine and Aquinas who both held that agape was the superlative virtue.

However, the approach of Situation Ethics has been condemned by some religious leaders, for example the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church, as it puts too much emphasis on the benefits of relativism as opposed to the adherence to God's will. They argue that it also fails to consider the traditions within various denominations; for example, sex before marriage is allowed according to this theory if it is an act of selfless love whereas in some denominations it is held that sex is for marriage alone.

Christianity, along with other religions would also claim that love should not be the only desirable quality because other teachings and qualities are as important, for example justice, equality, and discipline through self-control.

The final line of argument in defending religious rules, teachings and traditions was that presented by William Barclay in his book *'Ethics in a Permissive Society'*. In response to Fletcher's attack on legalistic religious rules, Barclay clarifies the nature and function of the law as 'the distillation of experience' that society has found to be beneficial. If this is so 'to discard law is to discard experience' and with it the valuable wisdom and insight it may bring. He also argued that religious rules are actually 'the rule of reason applied to existing circumstances' and therefore a valuable tool for defining approval and punishment. Religious rules, for Barclay, serve to work together with human law for the protection of society but he also pointed out that 'there are many things which are immoral, but which are not illegal' indicating that religious rules also serve to maintain morality. Barclay pointed out that Fletcher's view of true morality existing with the freedom to choose does not really consider the fact that that freedom also involves the freedom not to choose a course of action as well!

In conclusion there are religious rules that are outdated that the Church recognises as such but maintains those which it deems necessary for both religious and moral living. Fletcher's challenge did not necessarily mean that religious rules need replacing but more that they need guiding by the principle of love and sometimes, where necessary, adapting. Barclay was a harsh critic but some would say that although religious rules are valuable, history has shown us that they can be contextual whereas the principle of love is not.

Listed below are some conclusions that could be drawn from the AO2 reasoning in the accompanying text:

1. Agape should replace religious rules as it is more flexible.
2. Agape should replace religious rules as it is an important biblical principle.
3. Agape should not replace religious rules but be guided by them.
4. Agape should not replace religious rules as it is too vague and subjective and open to misuse.
5. Agape should not replace religious rules as the religious rules that remain have stood the test of time.

Consider each of the conclusions drawn above and collect evidence and examples to support each argument from the AO1 and AO2 material studied in this section. Select one conclusion that you think is most convincing and explain why it is so. Now contrast this with the weakest conclusion in the list, justifying your argument with clear reasoning and evidence.

The extent to which Situation Ethics provides a practical basis for making moral decisions for religious believers

Much of the AO2 so far has dealt with society (i.e. secular notion that incorporates non-believers) so it makes sense to focus on religious believers in this evaluation although bear in mind the Specification does identify the term 'non-believers' for which other appropriate evaluations, much of which you have read so far, can be used.

For Christians, Situation Ethics fits in with the whole 'philosophy' and practical ethics of Jesus in the New Testament. Jesus broke religious rules and dealt with everyone as an individual and according to the circumstances, for example healing on the Sabbath, and declared 'Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath'.

Situation Ethics is flexible in that it gives personal freedom to people to decide what is the most loving action and still remains consistent with the actions and teachings of Jesus. Indeed, like Jesus, Situation Ethics does not reject laws but sees them as useful tools which are not absolutely binding.

It could be argued that the 'situationism' of Fletcher has been instrumental in, for example, the Church of England (among others) recognising areas of possible injustice, such as the issues of equality, the role of women in the Church, and slavery. This means that it can provide, and has provided, a basis for religious ethical decisions.

Again some would argue that there can only be a Christian basis of morality if agape love is seen as central to morality. There will always be a dispute as to what really is the most loving thing to do, and what this actually means in practice but that is no different to difficulties when applying rules.

However, some see Fletcher's views as not necessarily accurately reflecting New Testament views on morality; for example, the New Testament appears to have clear moral views on theft and adultery. Indeed, the examples Fletcher uses to justify Situation Ethics are so extreme that they account for very few real instances in life. For example, how often does a woman need to commit adultery and get pregnant to escape a captor? This is the point made by William Barclay who argued that the cases are too extreme as to justify changing religious or moral rules.

William Barclay has argued that if law is 'the distillation of experience' that society has found to be beneficial, then 'to discard law is to discard experience' and the valuable wisdom and insight it may bring. Barclay was particularly critical of Situation Ethics. Barclay firmly believed that the law and absolutes are there for the protection of society and a product of past reasoning and experience. This is the reason they exist.

Finally, Situation Ethics seems to deconstruct itself because we need an idea of what outcome is most valued, best or right before we can decide upon which acts are needed to bring about that right!

In conclusion, there are strong arguments against Situation Ethics as a practical basis for making moral decisions for religious believers, most pertinently, those put forward by William Barclay. However, to reject it outright, as Barclay himself pointed out, would be a mistake. Even Barclay said that religious believers could learn something from it when approaching ethical issues. It must be pointed

out, nonetheless, that Fletcher's examples of the application of Situation Ethics in practice, using extreme cases, was never with the intention of demonstrating Situation Ethics at its best; rather it was with the intention of pointing out the inadequacy of deontological, absolute systems of ethics and this must be recognised in any objective evaluation.

Listed below are some conclusions that could be drawn from the AO2 reasoning in the accompanying text:

1. Situation Ethics provides a practical basis for making moral decisions for religious believers because it is flexible and reflects the complexity of modern ethical debates.
2. Situation Ethics provides a practical basis for making moral decisions for religious believers because it is based in the universal religious principle of love for one's neighbour.
3. Situation Ethics does not provide a practical basis for making moral decisions for religious believers because it is too dangerous for religious society as a whole.
4. Situation Ethics does not provide a practical basis for making moral decisions for religious believers because it is itself inconsistent.
5. Situation Ethics can provide a practical basis for making moral decisions for religious believers but only in conjunction with other religious teachings and ethical theories.

Consider each of the conclusions drawn above and collect evidence and examples to support each argument from the AO1 and AO2 material studied in this section. Select one conclusion that you think is most convincing and explain why it is so. Now contrast this with the weakest conclusion in the list, justifying your argument with clear reasoning and evidence.

