ISSN 2053-5163
Issue 5
Summer 2014

Challenging Religious Issues

Philippe Dauphin
on Jung and the
Psychology of Religion

David Wilkinson
on Miracles in a
Scientific Age

Jeff Astley
on the Development
of Faith

Ashley Wilson
on Situation Ethics
and Joseph Fletcher

Supporting A-level Religious Studies. The St Mary's and St Giles' Centre

Challenging Religious Issues

Supporting Religious Studies at A-level and beyond

Issue 5 Summer 2014

Contents

Jung and the Psychology of Religion 2
Philippe Dauphin

Is Belief in Miracles Reasonable in a Scientific Age?
Professor David Wilkinson 8

The Development of Faith
Professor Jeff Astley 13

Situation Ethics: Was Joseph Fletcher Right All Along?
Dr Ashley Wilson 20

Editor
Professor Jeff Astley (Glyndŵr University)

Managing Editor
Dr Tania ap Siôn (Glyndŵr University, The St Mary's and St Giles' Centre)

Editorial Advisors
Professor Leslie J. Francis (University of Warwick)
Libby Jones (The St Giles' Centre, Wrexham)
Professor David Lankshear (Glyndŵr University)
Professor William K. Kay (Glyndŵr University)
Phil Lord (System leader, GwE)
Professor Peter Neil (Bishop Grosseteste University)
Dr Stephen Parker (University of Worcester)
Jenny Rolph (Glyndŵr University)
Dr Paul Rolph (Glyndŵr University)
Mary Stallard (The St Giles' Centre, Wrexham)
The Right Revd David Walker (Glyndŵr University)
Professor Michael West (Glyndŵr University)

Design: Phillip Vernon

Challenging Religious Issues
The St Mary's and St Giles' Centre
Llys Onnen
Abergwyngregyn
Gwynedd
LL33 0LD

Telephone: 01248 680131
E-mail: t.apsion@glyndwr.ac.uk
Website: www.st-marys-centre.org.uk

Sponsored by the Welsh Government

Challenging Religious Issues
Issue 5 Summer 2014
© Philippe Dauphin
St Mary's and St Giles' Centre
ISSN 2053-5163

Jung and the Psychology of Religion

Philippe Dauphin

This article critically discusses Jung's key ideas, focusing especially on the concepts of the collective unconscious, archetypes and individuation, and his views on religion.

Specification link: WJEC RS1/2 CS: Introduction to Religion in Contemporary Society (AS) 4. Religion and the Individual.

Jung's childhood and relation with Freud

Carl Gustav Jung was born in 1875 as the son of a Reformed pastor in Kesswil, Switzerland. The religious beliefs of his father, and the way he struggled with them, left a big impression on Jung when he was young. Growing up as an only child, Jung was very withdrawn and had a vivid imagination. In his autobiography, *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*, he describes many of his early memories and the dreams and visions that he had. Jung even speaks frankly about the fact that he believed that he had two personalities while growing up. Personality 'No. 1' was a normal schoolboy, while 'No. 2' was an older man from the eighteenth century who wore a white wig and travelled in coaches (Jung, 1995, pp. 33-34). The interaction between his two personalities and the active imaginings that he had would later influence Jung in his theory that psychic images are of great importance for the mental health of people.

Nowadays, Jung is mostly remembered for the friendship he had with Sigmund Freud. The two met in 1907 and would work closely together for almost six years. Jung saw Freud as a much-needed father figure, and Freud in his turn considered Jung to be his heir as the leader of the psychoanalytical movement. Unfortunately for Freud this did not come to be, as Jung disagreed with some of Freud's ideas and broke from Freud to continue on his own. This happened in 1913 and had a profound impact on Jung. Looking back, Jung said that he came close to having a nervous breakdown: 'When I parted from Freud, I knew that I was plunging into the unknown. Beyond Freud, after all, I knew nothing; but I had taken the step into the darkness' (Jung, 1995, p. 225). During this period, Jung experienced many strange dreams and visions, but eventually found his way out with the

blueprint of a theory that would shape the rest of his life.

The collective unconscious and archetypes

According to Jung, the human mind could be divided into three parts. The first part is the ego or the conscious. This consists of our thoughts, feelings and personality: the part that is exposed to the outside world. However, our conscious also interacts with the other two parts: the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious. The personal unconscious is made up of our experiences and memories. It was of relatively minor importance to Jung, as we can easily become aware of it. What is of the utmost importance, however, is the collective unconscious. The collective unconscious is an underlying layer of pre-existent forms that is shared by the whole of humanity. It is built up of human reaction patterns that have been around since time began and acts a sort of container for the 'constantly repeated experiences of humanity' (Jung, 1990*,* p. 69).

Archetypes are the specific reaction patterns that the collective unconscious communicates to us, and the pre-existent forms of which it consists. An archetype arises as a kind of urge or instinct that tries to tell you what to do in a certain situation. Jung says there are just as many archetypes as there are normal human situations. However, archetypes can only be experienced and not consciously understood. Our mind, working to bring together the conscious and unconscious, therefore, fashions the archetypes into *archetypal images*, which we can understand consciously. So when the conscious becomes aware of the archetypal images communicated to it by the archetypes, it makes sense of them by putting them into a narrative form, such as myths or dreams (Walker, 1995, pp. 9-15). Stories like that of Theseus and the Minotaur, and Perseus and Medusa, but also the story of Jesus and other religious stories from all over the world, were a way of telling a group of people or an entire society not to lose balance but to stay focused on stability and well-being. The same goes for dreams, but on a personal level. For Jung, this also explained why the world's religions where so much alike while, at the same time, being different. Archetypes are the same for people all over the world, but the archetypal images they make to understand them are dependent on their background and culture. Figures like Jesus and the Buddha, for example, are different archetypal images of the same archetype.

The main role of archetypal images is to act as an intermediary between the conscious personality and the unconscious archetypes. For Jung, the mental health of an individual was very much a question of balance. It was the most important duty of one's life to attain balance between the forces of the unconscious and the preferences of the conscious. This balancing act was promoted by the archetype of the *self*. Other important archetypal images include the *shadow* (the negative and socially unacceptable habits of someone's personality), the *anima* (the female aspect of the male mind) and the *animus* (the male aspect of the female mind).

The self and individuation

The archetype of the self is central to Jung's thinking. The self is a synonym for the process of *individuation*, which is the key element of every person's life. According to Jung, everybody yearns for wholeness, or becoming a complete

person. While this wholeness can never be completely achieved, it is nevertheless the goal of all human life. This striving is what is called individuation, and you strive for it regardless of whether you are consciously aware of it or not.

Here Jung parallels Aristotle's teleological view of the universe. Aristotle thought that every being (whether it be human, animal or plant) had an inner drive to realise its own completeness. This, for Aristotle, explained the entire course of Nature. So just as an acorn will always want to become an oak tree, a person always strives to become unique and complete (Soccio, 2009, pp. 160-161).

Individuation is the driving force that underlies dreams, myths and other expressions of the unconscious. Jung thought that myths were especially important for the healthy mental life of people. He often regretted the fact that myth no longer seemed to exist in our modern society, and blamed Christianity for this. What Christians had done was to take the story of Jesus, ignore all the symbols and metaphors within it and say instead that it was all literally true. For Jung, this was a perfect example of how people place too much emphasis nowadays on the conscious and forget about the unconscious (Jung, 1991b, pp. 88-89).

But try as you might to brush off the unconscious, it will always keep sending us messages. Jung gave the example of the rumours of UFO's and extraterrestrial life that were going round in the first half of the twentieth century. According to Jung, these stories were modern versions of the saviour myth, as in the story of Jesus. Because the people of the 1940s and 50s were too much preoccupied with conscious fears and anxieties, the archetype of the self was activated by the unconscious to try and restore balance (Jung, 1991a, pp. 322-324). As the self relates to wholeness, the particular archetypal images that were constructed (namely UFOs) were round, which for Jung symbolised wholeness and order.

Jung often said, therefore, that people should identify themselves with either a myth or a mythical hero, to help them maintain balance between the conscious and the unconscious. Originally, this was the task of religion, but as this had been forgotten we find ourselves in a society that places too much importance on the conscious and its capabilities. It should be noted, however, that Jung was much more positive about religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism than about Christianity, because he thought that the Eastern religions had not entirely yet abandoned the unconscious for the conscious.

For Jung, one of the most important tasks on the way to achieving individuation was to 'confront' the unconscious. This was one of the most difficult things to do and he often compared it to ancient hero myths and legends. Jung saw the unconscious as tricky and dangerous, but not necessarily evil or destructive (Stein, 1995, p. 5). The first hurdle a person had to take, in coming to an understanding of the unconscious, was to confront and integrate one's shadow, because this is the figure closest to the conscious mind (Jung, 2009, p. 270). In Jung's thought an individual had first to become aware of the dark and negative aspects of their own psyche. Only then could they become capable of sound moral judgement and continue on the path towards individuation. The shadow (like all other archetypal images, except those that the self produces) stands for a part of the process towards individuation.

Criticisms

One of the most common criticisms of Jung was that his theories were unscientific. Jung himself was convinced that his version of psychology (which he called analytical psychology) was a science. His evidence for this was his own experiences and those of his patients, whom he saw daily in his practice. However, as the workings of the human mind can still not be scientifically proven with certainty, there is no empirical proof for his theories.

Jung has also been criticised for his belief that psychic images are real. But by ‘real’ Jung did not imply that they had an actual physical presence. Rather he meant that the fact that they were in our minds did not make them any less important, and did not reduce the influence that they could have on the mental health of a person. Jung even spoke frankly about a character from his own imagination that helped him in his confrontation with the unconscious: an old man called Philemon. According to Jung, Philemon told him about thoughts that he had not been conscious of, and so helped him along the way to individuation (Jung, 1995, p. 185). Thus, while in general we claim that for things to be real they must exist independently of our minds, for Jung this distinction was based on wrong reasoning that placed too much importance on the conscious.

What goes for psychic images also goes for God. For Jung, God was neither an idea that needed scientific proof nor a simple object of belief. It was a ‘psychic fact’ (Jung, 1991b, p. 464). God was an experience, and that in itself made it valuable as it expressed an archetype, namely that of the self (Jung, 1992, p. 243).[1] Belief in spirits could be explained in the same way. Jung said that such beliefs were quite natural because the fact that people thought they were real showed how they tried to interpret messages from the unconscious.

However, critics have maintained that Jung’s explanations are unsatisfactory. By saying that God is an inner experience of the self, Jung denied the objective existence of God. At the same time, non-believers argued that there was no proof for something like archetypes and the collective unconscious, and that people’s experiences required interpretation as much as anything else.

Another criticism is that, while Jung claims to be an empiricist, his theory of archetypes and individuation actually itself shows the characteristics of a religious and metaphysical doctrine, to the point that it has been called *pantheist* (Fuller, 2008, pp. 101-102). So even though Jung believed that he was scientifically explaining religion, he was instead closer to building up his own belief system. Nowadays, Jung’s theories are therefore mostly celebrated by followers of New Age movements. The only academic subject that continues regularly to use his theory of archetypes is literary criticism. Psychologists, aside from a band of loyal followers, have largely rejected his ideas and his methods.

However, Jung was nothing if not original and people continue to find themselves in his ideas. When given a choice, most people would still prefer to believe that things in their life happen for a reason, whether that is individuation or not, rather than as the result of blind chance.

[1] However, Jung also used ‘God’ as a synonym for the collective unconscious (Jung, 1991b, p. 163).

Glossary

Archetype: a specific experience that is part of the collective unconscious and sometimes seeks to contact us to guide us.

Collective unconscious: Jung's term for what he thought of as a sort of psychic reservoir, shared by all of humanity, containing experiences and instincts from ages past.

Empiricism: the belief that all knowledge comes from sense experience.

Individuation: the process of becoming a whole and complete person, which Jung thought was the goal of life.

New Age: a spiritual movement that sprung up in the Western world in the second half of the twentieth century and which combines Eastern and Western religion and philosophy with elements of psychology and other disciplines.

Pantheism: the belief that God is synonymous with the universe, or that everything in Nature is part of an all-encompassing and immanent deity.

Psyche: the totality of the human mind; *psychic*: belonging to the human mind.

Links

http://www.cgjungpage.org/ (*The Jung Page*)

http://www.carl-jung.net/index.html (*Carl Jung Resources*)

http://www.thesap.org.uk/ (Society of Analytical Psychology)

Discussion points

1. If the unconscious is so important to us, why is it so difficult to understand?
2. How could theists make use of Jung's theories to justify their belief in God? And how could atheists make use of Jung to justify that God does not exist?
3. If religion is something that comes from the collective unconscious, can we ever have something like objective morality?

How does Jung differ from pantheists when he compares God with the self?

References

Fuller, A.R. (2008). *Psychology and religion: Classical theorists and contemporary developments*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.

Jung, C.G. (1990). *Two essays in analytical psychology*, Collected Works, vol. 7. London: Routledge.

Jung, C.G. (1991a). *Civilization in transition*, Collected Works, vol. 10. London: Routledge.

Jung, C.G. (1991b. *Psychology and religion: West and East*, Collected Works, vol. 11. London: Routledge.

Jung, C.G. (1992). *Psychological types*, Collected Works, vol. 4. London: Routledge.

Jung, C.G. (1995). *Memories, dreams, reflections.* London: Fontana Press.

Jung, C.G. (2009). *The archetypes and the collective unconscious*, Collected Works, vol. 9, pt. 1. London: Routledge.

Soccio, D.J. (2009). *Archetypes of wisdom: An introduction to philosophy.* Belmont: Wadsworth.

Stein, M. (Ed.) (1995). *Jung on evil*. London: Routledge.

Walker, S.F. (1995). *Jung and the Jungians on myth*. London: Garland Publishing.

Philippe Dauphin studied at the universities of Maastricht, Colchester and Louvain, and currently teaches Religious Studies and Philosophy at Totton College in the South of England.

Challenging Religious Issues
Issue 5 Summer 2014
© David Wilkinson
St Mary's and St Giles' Centre
ISSN 2053-5163

Is Belief in Miracles Reasonable in a Scientific Age?

David Wilkinson

Many people doubt the existence of miracles because 'science rules them out'. This article explores the complexity of this kind of argument, noting that the definition of miracles is far from straightforward, even within a religious community; and suggesting that scientific objections against miracles are weak and that the current scientific description of the world is very different from a Newtonian predictable clock where God has no freedom to act in unusual ways.

Specification link: WJEC RS3 PHIL: Studies in Philosophy of Religion (A2), 3. Is religious faith compatible with scientific evidence?.

There is a resurgence of interest in miracles in many religious groups today, not least the Christian churches. The beginning of the Pentecostal movement, at the outset of the twentieth century, and the charismatic movement of the last 40 years have raised the profile of the 'supernatural' in many churches, and particularly raised questions about healing. Some claim that miracles are central to Christian faith, while others argue that 'we live in a universe which is closed off from divine intervention, in which truth is arrived at through empirical means and rational thought' (Wimber, 1985, p. 77).

Defining miracles: The complexity of the biblical material

It is undeniable that the Bible is a book that unashamedly records events that are by any definition miraculous. Jesus turns water into wine at a wedding (John 2:1-11) and apparently defies gravity by walking on water (Mark 6). Even these acts seem almost insignificant alongside the virgin birth and the resurrection.

Yet within the Bible there is a spectrum of cases that are commonly called miracles. Some are clearly not at odds with our known scientific laws: they could be rare but natural events. Finding a coin in the mouth of a fish is highly improbable in the statistical sense, but does not contravene a known law (Matthew 17:27). Others, however, such as the resurrection of Jesus, do seem to go against our current understanding of the regularities in the universe. In all cases the writers show little interest in

how these things happened. (One of the few exceptions is the parting of the Red Sea which delivers the people of Israel out of the hands of the Egyptian chariots; according to Exodus 14:21 this was understood to be due to a strong East wind.)

We must be careful, therefore, not to draw too big a distinction between what we commonly call the 'miraculous' and other events. What is important is their meaning or significance. John's Gospel emphasises this aspect. John calls the miracles *signs* and they are intricately woven into the story and structure of his Gospel.

But what role did miracles play? Various answers are given in the New Testament.

- The raising of Lazarus from the dead was 'for the glory of God' (John 11:4); but
- it was also a demonstration of the compassion of Jesus (John 11:33, 35, 38).
- A demonstration of Jesus as the Son of God (John 20:30).
- The healing of the blind man is an acted parable of the way that Jesus will soon open the spiritual eyes of the disciples (Mark 8:22-26; cf. 27-33).
- Other miracles seem to reveal things about Jesus and the Father, such as the right to forgive sins (Mark 2:1-12).

The common theme is that these actions are more than just acts of mercy, pointers to the divine origin of Jesus or to attract the crowds. They are first and foremost signs and indications of the fact that the messianic age had arrived in Jesus. That is, they are a dramatic demonstration of God's reign – of the arrival and character of the Kingdom of God in Jesus.

Problems with miracles

A number of arguments from scientists, philosophers and theologians have been used against the existence of miracles.

First, *God cannot work miracles in a scientific universe.* The scientific revolution disclosed a universe that was regular and predictable. Newton's law of gravitation, coupled with Kepler's elliptical orbits, was successful in explaining the movement of the planets around the sun. Although Newton himself did not take this view, seeing the universe as a predictable clock is often called 'the Newtonian world-view'. The beauty, regularity and simplicity of scientific laws were seen as reflections of the order and faithfulness of the creator God. But this in itself led to problems. If everything could be explained by scientific laws, was there space for God to do miracles? And if everything was perfect, having been created by God, why did God have to 'correct the mechanism' of Nature through miracles, acting against his own wisdom and violating his own laws? As Leibniz (1646–1716) wrote concerning Nature, 'I maintain it to be a watch, that goes without wanting to be mended by him' (Alexander, 1956, p. 18).

Second*, the evidence for miracles is unreliable.* One of the main critics of miracles was the Scottish philosopher, David Hume (1711–1776). He suggested that miracles were not recorded by 'men of good sense' but by uncivilised people who knew no better and therefore could not be relied upon. In addition, Hume argued, 'a wise man proportions his belief to the evidence.' As the evidence for miracles was rare compared to the evidence for the natural laws of science, miracles should not to be believed. Hume held that in our knowledge of the world, our personal experience has

priority and the testimony of others is only to be accepted if it fits with all our previous experience. Therefore, as most of us have not had direct experience of a miracle, we cannot accept the testimony of others about them.

Third, *it is a moral outrage that God only does some miracles and not others.* Miracles are often claimed that seem trivial at best when compared with the horrors of this world. Miracles make the problem of natural evil more difficult, and some theologians have suggested that God does not act in the world beyond keeping it in existence (Wiles, 1986). Saying that God does no unusual or particular actions in the world allows God to escape the criticism of, for example, not intervening by miracle to prevent the suffering of the Holocaust.

These three concerns led to a questioning of the biblical stories. Rationalists such as Heinrich Paulus (1761–1851) looked for natural explanations of what appeared to be miraculous. So the five thousand were fed, not by a supernatural production of bread and fish, but by the crowd sharing the bread and fish they had been saving for themselves, motivated by the example of a small boy. In this way, the picture of Jesus the great teacher could be maintained, and his 'miracles' restricted to changing the thoughts and actions of human beings.

The other main reinterpretation of the miracle stories was given by David Strauss (1808–1874). This was to see the miracle stories as 'myth': that is, they were stories created by the early church from Old Testament patterns to express their beliefs and convey a theological point about Jesus. Thus the resurrection did not actually happen, but was a story that tells us that what Jesus lived for will continue – a type of 'Jesus' body lies a-mouldering in his grave, but his truth goes marching on.'

Modern scholarship: it may be a little more complicated …

Those who argue for miracles and those who argue against them sometimes reduce the complexity of the biblical, historical, philosophical, scientific and theological discussion.

First, we would be wrong to think that the biblical writers were too simplistic. They had no understanding of modern scientific laws, such as Newton's law of gravitation or Archimedes' principle, but they knew that it was unusual for people to go for a stroll on the surface of the Sea of Galilee. It is this 'wow' factor of a God working in unusual ways in history that is central to the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Contemporary biblical scholarship is less sympathetic to the interpretations of Paulus and Strauss and gives more weight to the view that the biblical writers did believe that they were recording historical events, even if they were presenting these events for the purpose of convincing other people to believe.

Second, science has moved a long way since the Newtonian image of a clockwork universe. Science does not give an exhaustive and perfect description of reality. Scientific laws closely represent but do not exactly correspond to reality, which means that our current scientific picture can improve with time. This is a reminder of the folly of saying that our scientific understanding rules out miracles.

Scientific laws are the regularities that we have discovered about the universe. All are subject to possible modification as more data become available, and if there are exceptions then we look for an explanation in terms of other laws. It may

be that some phenomena appear miraculous not because they are breaking scientific laws but simply because they reflect a deeper, truer reality that our present understanding does not yet reach.

However, our limited knowledge of scientific laws is not the only reason why the Newtonian world-view that sees the universe as a vast clock is wrong. Over the twentieth century two theories of modern physics have transformed our thinking. *Quantum theory* deals with the world at the level of atoms and the subatomic particles that form them, such as protons, neutrons and electrons. It reveals that this world is *inherently* unpredictable. *Chaos theory*, which describes the world at the everyday level, shows that most systems are extremely sensitive to the circumstances around them, so much so that the slightest disturbance will make them act in a radically different way. This means that after a short time a system can become *practically* unpredictable, as reflected in forecasting the weather.

There may not be total agreement over what kind of view of the world these theories lead to, but they both question our ability to predict the future in a fundamental way. Does this give God room for manoeuvre? Seen in this way, God does not have the problem of 'breaking his own laws'. Because these systems are unpredictable, it has been argued that God could work in undetectable ways (Pollard, 1958; Polkinghorne, 1988). This may seem attractive to the defender of miracles. If we go down this road, however, are we saying that God can work *only* (say) in chaotic systems and not in other ways? Furthermore, as we saw earlier, the Bible views miracles as signs of God's activity. If God's work is 'concealed' in chaotic systems, is this really a 'sign'?

Such a perspective has the further danger of falling into the trap of treating scientific law as *prescriptive* rather than *descriptive* (Poole, 1990, pp 68-69). For a number of theologians, the laws of science are an approximate description of the way that God sustains the universe in a regular pattern. Creation is not like a clock that God winds up and allows to run its course independently, occasionally intervening by poking his fingers into the mechanism. *All events* owe their existence to God, by his creating and sustaining matter and energy and the natural laws of their interaction. The question is then whether the God of creation has the freedom to work in unusual ways, alongside God's normal ways of working.

It is this complex question of how God can both sustain the regularities and give himself freedom to work in unusual ways that lies at the heart of the question of miracles (Wilkinson, 2004).

Links

http://www.reasonablefaith.org/the-problem-of-miracles-a-historical-and-philosophical-perspective (William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith*)

http://www.iep.utm.edu/miracles/ (David Corner, *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*)

Discussion points

1. William Temple, a former Archbishop of Canterbury, once said, ‘When I pray coincidences happen, when I don’t they don’t.’ Could a coincidence be seen as a miracle?
2. Charles Darwin wrote in his *Autobiography*, ‘the more we know of the fixed laws of nature the more incredible do miracles become.’ Was this true more for the nineteenth than for the twenty-first century?
3. We must agree with Hume that, if there is absolutely ‘uniform experience’ against miracles (in other words, if they have never happened), why then, they never have. Unfortunately we know the experience against them to be uniform only if we know that all the reports of them are false. And we know the reports to be false only if we know already that miracles have never occurred. In fact, we are arguing in a circle. (Lewis, 1967, p. 102)

   Is this a valid response to the arguments of Hume?

References

Alexander, H.G. (Ed.) (1956). *The Leibniz-Clarke correspondence.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Lewis, C.S. (1967). *Miracles: A preliminary study*. London: Fontana.

Poole, M. (1990). *A guide to science and belief*. Oxford: Lion.

Polkinghorne, J.C. (1988). *Science and providence*. London: SPCK.

Pollard, W.G. (1958). *Chance and providence: God’s action in a world governed by scientific law*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons.

Wiles, M. (1986). *God’s action in the world.* London: SCM Press.

Wilkinson, D. (2004). The activity of God: A Methodist perspective. *In Unmasking Methodist theology* (pp. 142-154). Ed. C. Marsh, B. Beck, A. Shier-Jones, & H. Wareing, London: Continuum.

Wimber, J. (1985). *Power evangelism*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

The Revd Professor David Wilkinson is Principal of St John’s College, Durham University, and teaches in the Department of Theology and Religion. His current work involves the relationship of Christian theology to contemporary culture, from science to pop culture. Recent publications include Science, Religion and the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence, *Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013*.

Challenging Religious Issues
Issue 5 Summer 2014
© Jeff Astley
St Mary's and St Giles' Centre
ISSN 2053-5163

The Development of Faith

Jeff Astley

This article outlines Fowler's theory of faith development, and the criticisms it has provoked.

Specification link: WJEC RS3 CS: Religion in Contemporary Society (A2), 4. Religion and the Individual.

Development and learning

The word 'develop' just means 'to grow or cause to grow'. It is often used in educational contexts to label the increase and deepening of someone's attitudes or knowledge. But it is more helpful to distinguish (a) a change in a person that is brought about by some sort of experience from outside themselves ('learning'), and (b) a change that comes more from within, as an expression of their genes rather than their environment ('development'). In real life these two types of influence interact, of course, but we do make some distinctions that reflect this usage: e.g., between the 'sex education' that you received from parents and teachers (and other sources!), and the 'sexual development' that took place in your body when you passed through puberty.

Psychologists and educationalists sometimes discuss a person's moral, cognitive or religious development – understanding these things mainly in terms of the changes in the way that people *think* about these topics at different stages of their development. We may distinguish this from the attitudes, values, ideals, beliefs and skills that they learn in these different areas.

The idea of faith

Although the word 'faith' is usually applied to the religious beliefs of religious people, it is also employed more generally of our relationship to, and the things in which, we trust and 'believe in': including friends, parents and airline pilots, as well as moral values and political ideals.

According to the practical theologian and psychologist of religion, James Fowler, 'faith' is a very general term indeed. It labels the almost universal human activity of:

- creating or finding meaning in life; and
- knowing, valuing and relating to that which we take to be meaningful, in commitment and trust.

This *human faith* is not necessarily religious. We all believe in something or someone that is of ultimate concern to us. They are part of our world-view – what Fowler calls our 'ultimate environment'. He argues that 'anyone not about to kill himself lives by faith' (Fowler & Keen, 1978, p. 1). For Fowler, *religious* faith differs from other forms of faith primarily in having specifically religious objects as its *faith content*: religious 'centres of value' and 'images of power' (God or the gods, angels, heaven, hell), and religious 'master stories' that underlie religious beliefs about (say) creation or salvation. (Christians often describe their objects of faith as 'The Faith'.) For Fowler, conversion is a change in the contents of faith. It is coming to believe in different things.

But Fowler's focus is on the *form of faith* or *faith-as-a-process*: that is, the ways in which we have faith, the 'how' rather than the 'what' of faith. 'Faith', he wrote, 'is an active or dynamic phenomenon . . . a way-of-being-in-relation – a stance, a way of moving into and giving form and coherence to life' (Fowler & Keen, 1978, p. 24).

Aspects of faith

Fowler identified seven elements within human faith. This framework is rather arbitrary and Fowler allows that there may be more to faith than this. At one point he called these aspects, 'windows or apertures into the structures underlying faith' (Fowler, 1976, p. 186). This suggests that they are specific and incomplete perspectives on a complex phenomenon, as you may see different parts of a large room through different windows while other parts may be always hidden. Fowler's aspects of faith are:

- our reasoning (the way we think),
- our perspective-taking (our ability to adopt another person's perspective),
- our moral judging (the way we make judgements about moral situations),
- our social awareness (where and how we set the limits to our 'community of faith'),
- our relation to authority (who/what influences our faith, and how),
- our forming of a world-view (our way of holding all our experiences together), and
- our relation to symbols (our understanding of, and response to, symbols).

Most of these aspects consist of *cognitive* skills and competencies related to thinking, knowing and understanding. But a number also focus on relationships and the nature of the self, and are therefore more *affective* (related to feeling). Fowler is interested in the development of the whole complex of patterns of thinking, valuing, committing and believing that makes up a person's 'faithing'.

Each of these aspects of faith can change, and Fowler described his faith stages (see below) in terms of these seven aspects. At each developmental stage a person's faith will exemplify a particular form of reasoning, of perspective-taking, of moral decision-making, etc. Fowler writes that 'to be "in" a given stage of faith means to have a characteristic way of finding and giving meaning to everyday life.' It is to have a world-view, 'with a particular "take" on things' (Fowler, 1996, p. 68). The transition from one faith stage to another is marked by a change in one or more of these aspects of faith, as they mutate to

the form that is more characteristic of a later stage. It is only when all our faith aspects have changed in a similar way that we are said to have moved fully to the next stage.

Faith development research

Fowler claimed that this scheme of faith development is supported by several hundred in-depth interviews with children, young people and adults. In these semi-structured interviews, lasting up to 3 hours, people discussed questions such as:

- 'What does death mean to you?'
- 'Are there any beliefs, values or commitments that are important in your life right now?'
- 'If you have a question which you cannot decide, to whom or what would you look for guidance?'

Stages of faith

Working mainly within cognitive developmental psychology, Fowler postulated a sequence of discrete stages. Each stage is an integrated system of mental operations ('structures') of thinking and valuing (the seven aspects). These stages of relative stability alternate with periods of transition during which a person's faith is restructured into a new, stable stage. This process may be thought of as losing (one way of being in) faith in order to gain (another way of) faith.

While Fowler regarded the fixed order of stages as *hierarchical* (with each stage building on its predecessor) and *invariant* (no one 'misses out' a stage), not everyone moves through all the stages. The theory didn't recognise regression, although it seem likely that in illness or old age we may revert to using the structures of an earlier stage. Fowler did not go so far as to claim that his developmental scheme is universal.

Are Fowler's stages merely a *description* of how human faith does develop, or a normative *prescription* of how it should develop? Certainly each stage has its own dignity and integrity, and each person may be the right stage 'at the right time' for their life (Fowler, 1981, p. 274). And those at later stages are not to be regarded as more valuable, nor as more 'religious', 'saintly' or 'saved'; and their faith may be entirely secular. But being in these later stages gives them an increased capacity for understanding complex experiences, and a wider care for others.

Stage 0

Up to about four years old the child's ultimate environment is represented by her primary carer and immediate environment. This is the pre-stage of ***'primal faith'***. Obviously, Fowler has not done interviews with this age group, but he proposes it as a time for laying the foundations of all faith, including our first '*pre-images* of God', mediated through 'recognizing eyes and confirming smiles' (Fowler, 1981, p. 121).

Stage 1

Fowler's first true stage is that of ***'intuitive-projective faith'*** (about 3–7 years). At this stage children perceive reality as an impressionistic scrap-book – a projection of their own perceptions and imaginings, uncontrolled by logical thought. Thinking at this stage is 'preoperational', intuitive and episodic. The particular importance of this faith stage is that it is a time when long-lasting images are laid down that will form the basis of more sophisticated and self-

aware reflections later in life. Symbols are viewed 'magically': they are what they represent.

Stage 2

In ***'mythic-literal faith'*** (about 6–12 years) children have developed real skills of (concrete) reasoning that enable them to order their experience so as to distinguish between true stories and fictions. At this stage they thrive on stories, and understand the world through stories. Now more able to enter into the perspectives of others, they are great 'joiners'. Moral thinking now pays attention to motive. Symbols are often treated in a rather wooden, one-dimensional, literal fashion.

Stage 3

By this stage of ***'synthetic-conventional faith'*** (around 11–18, but also many adults), abstract thinking has fully developed and there is a new capacity for mutual, interpersonal perspective-taking: 'I see you seeing me: I see the me I think you see' (Fowler, 1987, p. 64). Relationships are now all-important. The adolescent is most likely to swim with the 'faith current', to *conform* to what others say. Meaning-making is largely at second hand, derived in bits-and-pieces from the world-views of parents and teachers, but particularly peers. Adolescents 'synthesise' their faith out of these disparate elements, in an unreflective manner. They don't really realise that they *have* a world-view; and have not yet started truly thinking for themselves. This stage is often marked by a naïve moral relativism.

Stage 4

Transition to this more autonomous, self-reflective, *critical* faith is often traumatic and may take several years. People adopt ***'individuative-reflective faith'*** (from about 17 or 18 onwards, or from their thirties or forties onwards) by climbing out of their old faith current to survey other options, and to choose a world-view for themselves. This inevitably involves a psychological 'leaving home': a withdrawal to a vantage point from which they feel that they can make their own decisions in a 'critical distancing from one's previous . . . value system' (Fowler, 1981, p. 179). One's faith is now truly an *owned* faith, as heteronomy gives way to autonomy. But the need to be clear about things, and to have a coherent and consistent, tidy faith, tempts many to resolve difficult issues too quickly. Morality is increasingly a matter of adopting a principle of justice.

Stage 5

Some adults will later change further, as they enter the mid-life stage of ***'conjunctive faith'***. Stage 4 was intensely concerned with independence, conceptual clarity, doctrinal orthodoxy and demythologising symbols; Stage 5 is more open ('porous and permeable': Fowler, 1986, p. 30), and more responsive to others and *their* world-views. This leads to a less tidy, but more realistic and humble faith that is more able to cope with tensions and paradoxes in thought and experience. If Stage 4 is the stage of narrow 'Enlightenment rationality', marked by a sometimes arid over-intellectualism and a lust to explain, Stage 5 reflects a move to a more open, 'post-Enlightenment' approach to meaning and truth that recognizes both the multidimensionality of truth and that reason cannot decide everything on its own (Fowler, 1988). Symbols have now

regained their power, as people feel freed from the compulsion to explain them. Where Stage 4 represents an *Either/Or faith*, Stage 5 is a more 'inclusive', *Both/And* type of faith (Astley *et al.*, 1991, p. 30).

Stage 6

Very few people reach this ***universalising faith***, which is marked by an all-encompassing, selfless, passionate but detached style of relating to the whole of reality.

Criticisms

- Many researchers now prefer to think of different *styles* or *patterns* of faith, which fits better with the influence of people's life story and social context on their way of being in faith. Heinz Streib's five religious styles parallel Fowler's main faith stages, but they are modelled as a series of overlapping curves, rather than a sequence of non-overlapping stages connected by periods of transition. The curves that represent each faith style rise from a low level and 'descend again after a culminating point' (Streib, 2001, p. 149); each then persists at a lower level while succeeding styles come into their own. At any one time, then, an individual may have access to a range of different faith styles, and development is largely seen as a matter of an individual's operating through and coping with his or her integration of a number of faith styles. Thus 'it cannot be excluded that individuals may revert to earlier styles, that elements of different styles are at the disposal of a person at the same time' (Fowler, Streib & Keller, 2004, p. 13).
- The cognitive developmental psychology on which Fowler relied underestimates the cognitive (thinking) capacities of younger children, as did Jean Piaget whose work Fowler uncritically endorsed.
- Data from research interviews may not be specific enough to confirm Fowler's wide-ranging hypothesis. Nevertheless, some argue that there is indeed a general, unified dimension of faith development (Snarey, 1991), and that the faith development interview 'is clearly adequate for research purposes' (Parker, 2006).
- The form and content of faith cannot always be easily distinguished.
- What makes faith religious is more than a difference in content.
- Fowler's scheme fits male development better than that of females (Slee, 1996, pp. 88–92), especially in his account of Stage 4 and the transition towards it.

Glossary

Autonomy: thinking and deciding for yourself.

Demythologise: interpreting symbols and myths as literal facts and doctrines.

Heteronomy: being subject to others' views

Links

http://passingonthefaith.org.uk/docs/Insights%20from%20Faith%20Development%20Theory%20and%20Research.pdf (Jeff Astley, 'Insights from Faith Development Theory and Research')

http://www.faithformationlearningexchange.net/uploads/5/2/4/6/5246709/faith_development__faith_formation_-_keeley.pdf (Robert J. Keeley, 'Faith Development and Faith Formation: More Than Just Ages and Stages')

[Plus a podcast and article by Heinz Streib – but only for those who think they can cope . . . !

http://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/podcast/podcast-heinz-streib-on-faith-development-theory/

and

http://www.academia.edu/259605/Faith_Development_Theory_Revisited_The_Religious_Styles_Perspective (NB diagram on p. 150)]

Discussion points

1. Can you think of examples of how people (including yourself) have changed, not in what they believe so much as *the way they hold* their faith: sometimes even believing in the same things differently?
2. How might development interact with learning in human (including religious) faith?
3. In what other ways is Fowler's theory of faith development open to criticism?

References

Astley, J. *et al.* (1991). *How faith grows*. London: National Society and Church House Publishing.

Fowler, J.W. (1976). Stages in faith: The structural developmental approach. In *Values and moral education* (pp. 173–211). Ed. T.C. Hennessy, New York: Paulist.

Fowler, J.W. (1981). *Stages of faith: The psychology of human development and the quest for meaning*. San Francisco, California: Harper & Row.

Fowler, J.W. (1986). Faith and the structuring of meaning. In *Faith development and Fowler* (pp. 15–42). Ed. C. Dykstra & S. Parks, Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press.

Fowler, J.W. (1987). *Faith development and pastoral care*. Philadelphia: Fortress.

Fowler, J.W. (1988). The Enlightenment and faith development theory. Reprinted in *Christian perspectives on faith development* (pp. 15–28). Ed. J. Astley & L.J. Francis, Leominster, UK: Gracewing; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1992.

Fowler, J.W. (1996). *Faithful change: The personal and public challenges of postmodern life*. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon.

Fowler, J.W. & Keen, S. (1978). *Life maps: Conversations on the journey of faith.* Minneapolis, Minnesota: Winston Press; Waco, Texas: Word.

Fowler, J., Streib, H., & Keller, B. (2004). *Manual for faith development research* (3rd ed.). Bielefeld, Germany: Research Center for Biographical Studies in Contemporary Religion; Atlanta, Georgia: Center for Research in Faith and Moral Development.

Parker, S. (2006). Measuring faith development. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, *34*(4), 337–348.

Slee, N. (1996). Further on from Fowler. In *Research in religious education* (pp. 73–96). Ed. L.J. Francis, W.K. Kay, & W.S. Campbell, Leominster: Gracewing; Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys.

Snarey, J. (1991). Faith development, moral development, and nontheistic Judaism: A construct validity study. In *Handbook of moral behavior and development, Vol 2: Research* (pp. 279–305). Ed. W.M. Kurtines & J.L. Gewirtz, Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Streib, H. (2001). Faith development theory revisited: The religious styles perspective. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, *11*(3), 143–158.

The Revd Professor Jeff Astley, an honorary professor in the universities of Durham, Glyndŵr and York St John, is the editor of three books in faith development studies: How faith grows, *London: National Society and Church House Publishing, 1991,* Christian perspectives on faith development, *Leominster: Gracewing Fowler Wright and Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1992* and *Marion Smith,* Ways of faith, *Durham: NEICE, 2003.*

Challenging Religious Issues
Issue 5 Summer 2014
© Ashley Wilson
St Mary's and St Giles' Centre
ISSN 2053-5163

Situation Ethics: Was Joseph Fletcher Right All Along?

Ashley Wilson

This article discusses the dangers of 'abstract' ethics and argues for a more 'situated' approach. The author suggests that Fletcher's Situation Ethics *provides an accurate account of much moral decision-making, but that his reliance on* agapē *as the sole guide to moral decision-making is open to criticism.*

Specification link: WJEC RS1/2 ETH: Introduction to Religion and Ethics (AS), 2. Situation Ethics: Joseph Fletcher

Abstract ethics?

Ethical decisions affect some of the most important and value-laden areas of our lives and our relationships with others; yet it seems we are denied any affective dimension to our deliberations by many contemporary ethical theories. Ethics is supposed to be an objective, quasi-scientific, discipline: all subjective considerations (feelings, emotion, imagination), all agent-relative deliberations and all context-relative features are to be excluded. This flies in the face of our everyday moral experience. Instinct and common sense tell us that our lives and interrelationships with others are complex and dynamic. It feels inappropriate to deny our feelings and passions in relation to decisions about our lives and relationships when they are often the things that motivate us most strongly. Passions and emotions *matter*. We regularly find ourselves in situations where we feel that a perfectly good rule should not be applied 'on this occasion' or where there seems to be simply no good alternative. Ethics is about concrete choices; it can feel very artificial or heartless to consider moral deliberation 'in the abstract'.

I suggest that the abstraction of moral principles (whether rules, rights, duties, consequences or whatever) from the context of action, and from human experience and emotion, constitutes a serious defect in any system of moral thought. Many modern ethical theories have attempted to describe rules that apply in all cases, or a procedure for determining the 'right' action or the 'right' choice in any given situation. However, in their attempts to turn ethics into a rational scientific discipline, such

theories have abstracted the ethical decision-making process into an objective and dissociated (and, perhaps, dangerously close to irrelevant) method.

Some degree of abstraction may be required in our ethical thinking, but only as a tool of analysis. When faced with a deeply contextual ethical choice with a range of morally relevant factors and a network of relationships one has to begin somewhere, and abstracting certain features of the situation for consideration may be indispensable. However, it is crucial to remember that such abstraction is a means and not an end. John Dewey and James Tufts observed (in 1908):

> Of one thing we may be sure. If inquiries are to have any substantial basis, if they are not to be wholly up in the air, the theorist must take his departure from the problems which men actually meet in their own conduct. He may define and refine these; he may divide and systematize; he may abstract the problems from their concrete contexts in individual lives; he may classify them when he has detached them; but if he gets away from them he is talking about something which his own brain has invented, not about moral realities. (in Fletcher, 1966, p. 159)

The results of ethical reflection on abstracted features, then, must surely be weighed against other possible approaches and fed back into the context to inform an ethical judgement. No single approach, based on the abstraction of particular features, can hope to provide a judgement that is properly relevant even to the situation under consideration – let alone to other, or all, similar situations. In order to achieve their aim of universal (or even just wider) applicability, ethical systems can only be very general in their prescriptions or proscriptions. As the systems become more general, they are of less and less direct practical use. They also lose their purchase on moral agents, becoming less and less able to *motivate* ethical decisions. Where are the strong sources of moral 'something-or-other' that will allow us to draw the kinds of ethical conclusions that carry enough moral weight to inspire people to live accordingly? My sense is that rational persuasion is not enough, and that affective and aesthetic considerations are needed as well as reasonableness. Also, that much greater emphasis should be placed on context, agents and motivation.

The situationist challenge and some criticisms

A crisis in Protestant Christian ethics was precipitated by Joseph Fletcher's *Situation Ethics* (Fletcher, 1966). It is debatable whether Christian ethics has really ever dealt adequately with the challenges that Fletcher presented. Stanley Hauerwas observed (in 1974):

> The situation ethics debate seems to be slowly coming to an end. This may not be due to the fact that the issue has been settled, but as so often happens in intellectual disputes the adversaries simply become bored and begin to turn their interests elsewhere. (Hauerwas, 1981, p. 11)

Hauerwas wished to reopen the debate partly because he believed that there was something essentially right about the main thrust of Fletcher's account of moral decision-making. I, too, think that Fletcher's 'situationism' provides a phenomenology of ethics (a description of how we actually make ethical decisions) that is broadly correct. We would surely be foolish to ignore such

descriptions in our deliberations on ethical theory.

Fletcher outlines three approaches to making moral decisions. (Fletcher, 1966, p. 17). First, legalism:

> with this approach one enters into every decision-making situation encumbered with a whole apparatus of prefabricated rules and regulations. Not just the spirit but the letter of the law reigns. Its principles, codified in rules, are not merely guidelines or maxims to illuminate the situation; they are directives to be followed. Solutions are preset, and you can 'look them up' in a book – a Bible or a confessor's manual.

Second, antinomianism:

> Over against legalism, as a sort of polar opposite, we can put antinomianism. This is the approach with which one enters into the decision-making situation armed with no principles or maxims whatsoever, to say nothing of rules. In every 'existential moment' or 'unique' situation, it declares, one must rely upon the situation of itself, there and then, to provide its ethical solution.

Third, situationism:

> A third approach, in between legalism and antinomian unprincipledness, is situation ethics. (To jump from one polarity to the other would be only to go from the frying pan to the fire.) The situationist enters into every decision-making situation fully armed with the ethical maxims of his community and its heritage, and he treats them with respect as illuminators of his problems. Just the same he is prepared in any situation to compromise them or set them aside in the situation if love seems better served by doing so.

Critiques of Fletcher's approach in *Situation Ethics* actually often represent him as advocating a form of antinomianism while, in fact, he is sharply critical of such unprincipled responses. Indeed, in *Situation Ethics* itself, he is already aware of this potential error:

> There has indeed been a 'misplaced debate' about situation ethics, because so many have too quickly taken it to be antinomian. (Fletcher, 1966, p. 34)

Fletcher is often dismissed for allowing no respect for ethical principles and exclusively emphasising the situation. However, he does allow maxims a role in ethical decision-making. The point he is making is that while such maxims may hold true *generally* they are not to be seen as ultimately decisive: we must be prepared to compromise them if the situation demands. He refers to this as 'principled relativism' (Fletcher, 1966, pp. 43-46) and allows rules a role only as illuminators and not as directors of ethical decision-making. He suggests that the classical rule of moral theology requires us to obey laws and principles as the principal elements of morality but, as far as possible, to temper our behaviour with love and reason. Fletcher, by contrast, suggests that in fact love is the principal consideration, and law should have only a subservient place (p. 31).

Fletcher's situation ethics has been rightly criticised for its dependence on the rather vague, general and subjective principle of *agapē* (the 'giving love' of the New Testament, see Fletcher, 1966, pp. 15, 79-80, 102-7). The formal content of situation ethics in terms of actual moral guidance is notoriously lacking: how are we to know what love requires in complex social situations? While this criticism may be valid, it is not alone sufficient to undermine Fletcher's basic

point that consideration must be given to the particularity of specific situations as well as to general maxims:

> Situationists ask very seriously if there are ever enough cases enough alike to validate a law or to support anything more than a cautious generalization. (Fletcher, 1966, p. 32)

Such criticisms have meant that Fletcher's valid insights about the complexity of moral decision-making have also often been dismissed. The debate peters out not because the issues have been settled but because enough of a smokescreen has been created that people turn their attention elsewhere. Inaccurate characterisations of Fletcher's position, together with justified criticisms of *Situation Ethics,* have allowed other authors to side-line or ignore his important challenges regarding the situation of moral decision-making and the more or less universal human experience that in certain circumstances we would wish to say that certain moral rules should be broken.

Conclusion

In my view, Fletcher's insights represented an important corrective to the oversimplifying and abstracting tendencies of much ethical theory. The drive for abstraction and simplicity in conventional ethics means that it simply fails to address the complexity of the moral life. What is required is an account of moral rationality that takes proper account of the situated-ness (tradition, culture, situation and agent) of moral deliberation and that can accommodate different perspectives without descending into total relativism.

The central focus, and perhaps the main attraction, of the traditional rationalist approaches to ethics is the possibility that *practical reason* can guide our will and control our passions, thus promising moral order and control. Ethics, like science, is to be 'univocal' (unambiguous): dilemmas have one 'right answer', universality removes cultural variables, and the exclusion of agent-relative features such as emotion avoids the spectre of subjectivity. The process of moral deliberation then becomes ordered, rational and predictable, even pedantic.

Arthur Schopenhauer characterises such 'moral pedantry' as a 'form of folly', which:

> arises from a man's having little confidence in his own understanding, and therefore not liking to leave things to its discretion, to recognise what is right directly in the particular case. Accordingly, he puts his understanding entirely under the guardianship of his reason, and makes use thereof on all occasions; in other words, he wants always to start from general concepts, rules and maxims, and to stick strictly to these in life, in art and even in ethical good conduct. (Schopenhauer, 1966, pp. 60-61)

To allow situationism, however, can seem like relinquishing any sense of control over the evaluation of moral choices. This can feel dangerously subjective – different people may reach different conclusions. Defending situationism against this charge is a major undertaking; in this article I want,simply, to suggest a direction from which such a defence might come.

It seems to me that the charge ignores the *tradition* in which the situationist has been formed:

> The situationist enters into every decision-making situation fully armed with the ethical

> maxims of his community and its heritage. (Fletcher, 1966, p. 17)

The constraints of tradition, culture and language, together with the distilled wisdom of years (centuries, even) of moral deliberation by a community, may be able to militate against such a charge of subjectivism or relativism. We will still need to find a criterion (or more likely a set of criteria) with which to replace Fletcher's simple reliance on *agapē*, but it seems it might be worth the effort. The ethical decisions that we need to evaluate are not simply decisions; rather they are decisions made by agents (who are part of a community), with a particular heritage, in particular situations. Neither the decision alone, nor the consequences alone, will enable us to judge the balance and composition of the whole.

Situationism may be complex but it may also be more faithful to the realities of the way real people make real ethical decisions.

Glossary

Affective: concerned with, or arousing, feelings or emotions.

Agapē: selfless love of one person for another (without sexual implications), especially love that is spiritual in nature.

Phenomenology: the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view.

Relativism: a theory that conceptions of truth and moral values are not absolute, but are relative to the persons or groups holding them.

Subjectivism: the (meta-ethical) doctrine that there are no absolute moral values but that these are variable, in the same way that taste is.

Links

http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/introduction/situation_1.shtml#findoutmore (*BBC Ethics, Ethics Guide*, 'Situation ethics').

http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Situational_ethics (*Wikipedia*)

Discussion points

1. Would you agree that situationism represents an accurate phenomenology of ethical decision-making?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the three approaches to moral decision-making described by Fletcher?
3. Is *agapē* an adequate criterion for ethical decision-making? What might you replace it with?

References

Fletcher, J. (1966). *Situation ethics,* London: SCM Press.

Hauerwas, S. (1981). *Vision and virtue: Essays in Christian ethical reflection.* Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press.

Schopenhauer, A. (1966). *The World as Will and Representation, vol. 1,* New York: Dover.

The Revd Dr Ashley Wilson is Chaplain and Postgraduate Director, St Chad's College, Durham University. He has degrees in veterinary medicine and theology, and his doctoral thesis was on the implications of Gadamer's hermeneutics for Christian ethics. His publications include Homosexuality and Christian Congregations, *Stowmarket: Kevin Mayhew, 2011*.