

Morality (Part 3)

INTRODUCTION

Remind the students that they are looking at the question, 'What does it mean to be 'good'?'

Where does our sense of morality come from?

This session is designed to get students to reflect on where our sense of morality comes from. Does our moral sense come from a God? Does it come from our upbringing? Is morality a natural part of being a human being or are there some people who lack even basic morality? These are the crucial questions that this session is based around.

ACTIVITY

Start this session by asking such questions as:

- *Does everybody have a sense of right and wrong?*
- *If so, where do you think that sense comes from?*

This discussion should prove to be hugely fruitful with most groups. Most students I have encountered seem to think that most people do have a sense of right and wrong. It is worth throwing in the example of serial killers or cannibals if you need to play Devil's Advocate here. However, it is also worth ensuring that students are encouraged to question these counter-examples with their own comebacks such as the fact that even most serial killers are kind to *some* people (not their victims unfortunately). Try to ensure that the conversation is steered towards a discussion of the conscience. When this happens ask the students such questions as:

- *What is a conscience?*
- *Where might it come from?*

Explain that there are two basic viewpoints with regard to the conscience.

1. The conscience is innate – it is a sense of right and wrong that we have had since birth and it is an inherent part of being human. Many people who argue for an innate conscience think it is the voice of God inside of us.
2. The conscience develops throughout life – it is the internalisation of rules, laws and norms of behaviour that we are taught as children. Many people who argue for a developed conscience think that everybody has their own unique conscience and that some people

might not have a conscience at all.

ACTIVITY

Ask the students to outline what they consider to be *the strengths and weaknesses* of each view.

In addition, it might be worth asking them to write some responses to this question so they get a real chance to develop their views on this critical issue. Build on their thinking by asking them to consider:

- *If our conscience is innate why don't some people seem to have one?* For example, feral children (children raised by animals or without human contact) don't seem to follow any established rules of human society.
- *If our conscience develops over time why do we all seem to have such similar consciences?* There seem to be massive similarities across all human cultures about what is right and wrong.

Explain that many people who think the conscience develops have argued that human beings have evolved to be social creatures. In other words, the humans that were most prepared to work together and be friendly have been more likely to be successful and have children. Over many generations this has led to a position where human beings are, generally, very social and friendly animals.

ACTIVITY

Ask the students for their responses to such questions as:

- *Does this view that morality evolved make sense to you?*
- *What evidence is there that supports this view?*
- *What evidence goes against it?*

Once this discussion has come to an end get them to consider whether the conscience could be a combination of innate AND developed! For instance, could God have given us a few set rules which are expressed in ALL of our consciences but more specific smaller rules develop as we learn and grow.

CONCLUSION

Finish these lessons with some further points for debate, e.g:

- *Do you think it is important to ask the sort of questions we have been asking over the last three sessions?*
- *Have your views about morality changed?*

- *Are you more likely to discuss these things with friends and family now?*
- *What is the most fascinating thing you have learnt about morality in these sessions?*