

Compare and contrast religious ethics with one other ethical theory

[Sociology](#), [Ethics](#)



How does a Christian decide what is right and wrong? Catholic Christianity has traditionally maintained that there are absolutes that cannot be changed by the circumstances. This deontological theory will contrast with the teleological theory of Utilitarianism, evoking contrast, while coinciding with one another when considering an approach to sexual ethics and in particular focusing on adultery.

Jeremy Bentham's Utilitarian theory is based on 'the greatest good for the greatest number.' It is a theological approach based on consequences; it is not concerned with motives only the outcomes.

Bentham believes that the reasons for having sex are as follows: Value of pleasure, consensual sex creates much good, avoid harm to other persons.

Utilitarian's would want to maximise the good things about sex and minimise the down sides. Using utilitarianism to assess the morality of adultery, we need to go back to the main principle of the theory which is 'the greatest good for the greatest number.' From this angle it would seem that the adulterous relationship would be tolerated as long as the other married partner did not find out and the affair was kept secret. Therefore harm is avoided and pleasure is still gained for most people, representing the 'greatest good for the greatest number.

On the other, the adulterous relationship does not contribute to the shared pleasure and the value of the married relationship. This links in with the harm principle, the short term pleasure is not worth the ultimate pain and

misery that the adulterous relationship will cause. On this basis adultery is wrong.

When looking for direction on the matter of adultery using Christian ethics we turn to the passage from the Sermon on the Mount, 'Treat others as you would like to be treated.' If following this quote and you still participate in the act of adultery you are accepting that it is acceptable for everyone including your own husband/wife to participate in an adulterous relationship. This clearly is denouncing adultery, as no one would find adultery a norm within a marriage.

The Old Testament also condemns adultery comparing it to theft and therefore is punishable by stoning.

When taking the view of a catholic, using natural law, the primary purpose of sex is for procreation and procreation alone. The main aim of the adulterous relationship is clearly personal satisfaction and not the procreation of children, is goes against what is natural therefore from a catholic stand point, the adulterous relationship is not acceptable.

In the New Testament it states that a man may divorce his wife on the grounds of adultery (porneia), thus condemning adultery and brandishing it unacceptable. However a woman may not divorce her husband if he has committed adultery, is this then allowing adultery? Or is it just illustrating the superiority of men over women?

Women in both the Old and New Testament were seen as property of their fathers until they got marriage when they became 'owned' by their husbands. The tenth commandment forbids desiring anything that belongs to a neighbour- and the wife is treated as a possession. Women's only destiny was marriage and producing children. A childless woman saw herself as accursed and she had no status.

Therefore looking at adultery from both Utilitarianism and a Christian stand point, it becomes clear that both theories do not agree that adultery is an acceptable practice. For a Utilitarianist adultery is tolerable initially as long as no one finds out. However when examined more closely, eventually the relationship will cause more harm than good and therefore is ultimately seen as an undesirable practice to be involved with.

Most ethical theories will disregard adultery, labelling it unfair to the innocent husband/wife who is uninformed about what is going on. Some ethical theories take into account people's emotions, others do not. However the purpose of marriage is a union between two people, who want to spend the rest of their lives together, consequently any other relationship other than the married one would be deemed unacceptable by most people, no matter what they believe.