

2.1 Religion and Animal Rights

Animals and humans

Humans are a type of animal but they differ from other animals because of their much greater intellectual capacity, creativity, emotional range and language skills.

Most Christians believe that humans are superior to, more valuable than and above animals.

This is based on the belief that:

- Only humans are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27).
- God gave only humans a soul
- Only humans have the use of reason
- Humans have **dominion** over animals – humans were created by God to 'rule over' the earth and can use animals for their own purposes (Genesis 1:26, 9:2–3)

Christian beliefs about the status of animals



Christian views on animal rights

Animals rights is the belief that animals have certain duties and obligations owed to them, much like humans.

These rights help ensure animals are treated with dignity and care, and are protected from harm.

Most Christians do not believe that animals have rights but that they should be treated with care and never inflicted with unnecessary suffering. There are therefore limits on how humans can use animals. This is based on the belief:

- In the **Sanctity of Life Principle**, which means all life is from God and therefore holy
- In **stewardship** – the notion that humans have a duty from God to protect and preserve the earth
- That Christians lived in harmony with animals in the Garden of Eden

Genesis 2:15: 'The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.'
Luke 12:6: 'Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God.'

Some charities and organisations are dedicated to protecting animals. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (**RSPCA**) does this through:

- Encouraging the public to report cruelty and rescuing animals
- Campaigning to raise public awareness of the care owed to animals and to improve laws protecting animals
- Investigating and prosecuting individuals or organisations involved in animal cruelty

The preservation of species from extinction

Some animals are **endangered** and risk becoming **extinct**. This means their numbers have become very low and they could cease to exist altogether. There are many animals that are endangered, normally due to human behaviour such as destroying habitats. Christians generally believe causing extinction and damage to **wildlife** is wrong because it is damaging God's creation and causing an end to species God deliberately created.

The **World Wildlife Fund (WWF)** works to prevent endangered animals from becoming extinct, such as orang-utans. WWF is working to increase their number by ensuring the environment they live in is protected (conservation), and stopping people from illegally killing them (poaching) or capturing them to sell as pets.



The slaughter of animals, meat, vegetarianism and vegan diets

Contemporary use and abuse of animals



Companionship/work



Animals in sport



Animal experiments/vivisection



Farming of animals



Zoos



Fur and Ivory trades



Genetic modification and cloning

Arguments for and against religious responses

Christianity, like most religions, recognises the importance of companionship for human well-being and how animals, especially pets, can provide this. **Guide dogs** also provide companionship and important support for disabled and blind people to be able to live independently. Christians allow animals to be used for other work, e.g. police dogs, and for pets to be kept as long as they are well cared for.

Christianity and other religions allow animals to be used in sports such as **horse racing** because the horses generally enjoy it. They do, however, condemn other sports where animals are abused, such as **bull fighting** in Spain and **fox hunting** with dogs in England, both of which are now illegal. These sports are seen as unnecessary harm that only serves human entertainment.

Animals are often used by scientists to test out new drugs and develop cures for diseases. **Vivisection** is the cutting up of animals in these experiments. Some Christians believe it is wrong to use animals in this way, because they argue these experiments could be done without animals and therefore cause unnecessary pain. Others believe it is a legitimate use of animals because of the benefits to humans. Using animals to test cosmetics is illegal in the UK.

Most Christians eat meat and so accept the farming of animals for food. Some believe that it is important that animals are well cared for and buy **free-range** products where animals have had more room to move around. Others believe this is unnecessary care and expense and allow **factory farming** (where animals live in very small enclosures).

Some Christians support zoos as ways for the public to enjoy and praise God's creation. Zoos also help prevent extinction of God's creatures. Others, however, argue that God created animals to live in the wild and this is the most natural way for animals to live. They might prefer the animals to be viewed in **wildlife parks** or **safaris**.

Most Christians believe buying fur is wrong because it is generally only for shallow fashion purposes and animals are often ill-treated in fur farms. Farming animals for their fur is illegal in the UK.

Many Christians are also against the ivory trade because rhinos and elephants are killed purely for their tusks. This is threatening them with extinction and serves to make the poachers money.

Genetic modification is when plants or animals have their genetic make-up changed, such as to try to produce organs that could be used by humans. Cloning is the creation of a genetically identical copy. Scientists famously cloned a sheep called Dolly in 1996. Some Christians believe this is acceptable because of the benefits to humans, although others believe it is 'playing God' and changing how God wanted nature to be.

Some people choose not to eat meat (**vegetarians**), or any animal products including meat and all dairy products (**vegans**). This is most often because they believe it is unnecessary and cruel for animals to be killed for human food. They may also argue it is healthier and more environmentally friendly. Most Christians believe that animals should be well treated in farming and killed as painlessly as possible. Most are not vegetarian or vegan because God gave animals for them to eat: 'Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you' (Genesis 9:3).

2.2 Religion and Planet Earth

Religious beliefs about the origins of life

The first book in the Bible, Genesis, describes how God created and designed the world and humans in seven days. The world was created **out of nothing** (ex nihilo) purely through the power of God. It was not the result of chance but a deliberate act by God. This theory is known as **Creationism**.



In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth... (Genesis 1:1)

Modern science argues that the world was created through the **Big Bang**. This is the theory that the universe originated from an infinitely dense and hot point. This point underwent rapid expansion and continues to expand to this day.

Religious views about the nature of Planet Earth

Christians often look at or think about the Earth and experience great **awe** and **wonder**. They are amazed by the intricate design of the world, how beautiful it is and how well it all works together. Christians believe it is this way because God created and designed it. Some people have converted to Christianity or had a religious experience by looking at a part of the world, such as the Grand Canyon or a beautiful flower.

Stewardship

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it (Genesis 2:15).

Christians, like other religions, believe they are **stewards** over the world. This means they have been commanded by God to care for, preserve and protect it – including stopping climate change and destruction of habitats, and ensuring against damage to the environment. Christians believe they may be less likely to go to heaven if they do not look after the Earth because God will judge them for being bad stewards.

Destruction of natural habitat

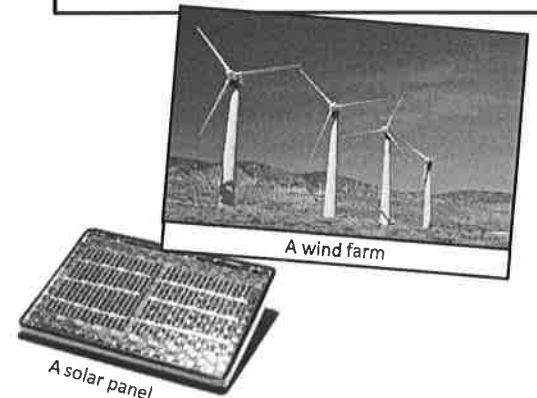
Human activity can destroy natural habitats. This is often through **deforestation** which is large-scale cutting down of trees in order to sell the wood for money. 17% of the Amazon in South America, which holds incredible biodiversity, has been destroyed in the last 50 years. Destruction can threaten animals living there. Pandas, for example, are at risk of extinction because their bamboo is being cut down. Trees and plants also absorb carbon dioxide, so their destruction increases climate change. Organisations such as WWF work to prevent this (see Topic 1).



The use and abuse of natural resources

Natural resources are substances that naturally exist on the planet. They include coal and oil (types of **fossil fuel**) which are relied on to create energy. They are, however, running out. Oil is very important because it is used to create plastic, and as petrol in cars.

The burning of oil to create energy releases greenhouse gases into the atmosphere and therefore increases global warming. Drilling for oil can also cause accidental oil spills. Wind and solar power are environmentally friendly alternative ways to create energy.



Climate change

Climate change is change in the Earth's atmosphere. Most scientists agree this is due to the release of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, due to human activity, especially burning of fossil fuels, which is causing the temperature of the Earth to increase. A few scientists believe the Earth naturally goes through hotter and colder phases over long periods of time.

The increase in temperature causes more severe weather events, such as **droughts, flooding** and **hurricanes**. This can result in the destruction of crops and possible famine. It is also causing the polar ice caps to melt, which means sea levels are rising.

Type of pollution	Definition	Problems caused
Acid rain	Rain made acidic because of contamination through pollution in the atmosphere	Causes soil and water to become more acidic, which harms animals and plants.
Oil spills	When oil leaks into the ocean, e.g. the 2010 BP oil spill from an oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico	Kills and harms marine life, including dolphins, turtles and seabirds. Oil makes it impossible for birds to fly and removes natural insulation.
Toxic chemicals	Poisonous chemicals, e.g. greenhouse gases and ozone-depleting substances	Greenhouse gases contribute to climate change. Depletion of the ozone layer increases the amount of the Sun's UV rays that reach Earth and increases risk of skin cancer.
Pesticides	Poisonous substances used in farming to kill pests that damage crops	Causes disruption and possible poisoning of water supplies, soil and animals using the land.

Work being done to look after the world

Greenhouse gases are natural gases found in the atmosphere that keep the Earth warm. The burning of fossil fuels, such as oil, produces more greenhouse gases. This increase is causing the planet to warm up.



Greenhouse gases include **carbon dioxide**, methane and nitrous oxide.

Solutions to climate change require everyone to act together. Achieving this can be hard and some countries are less committed than others.

The United Nations (UN) organised **Earth Summits** in 1992, 1997, and 2002. They encourage **conservation** of (looking after) the environment and **sustainable development**, which is ensuring we use the planet in a responsible way so it can still be enjoyed by future generations.

Countries have also committed to **targets**. The UK aims to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 80% between 1990 and 2050.

Individuals can also take action to change how common **modern lifestyles** are damaging the environment:

- Reduce, reuse and recycle waste
- Reduce car and flight use, e.g. through public transport or car sharing
- Reduce electricity consumption, e.g. housing insulation, switching off lights
- Install solar panels or wind turbines

2.3 Religion and Prejudice



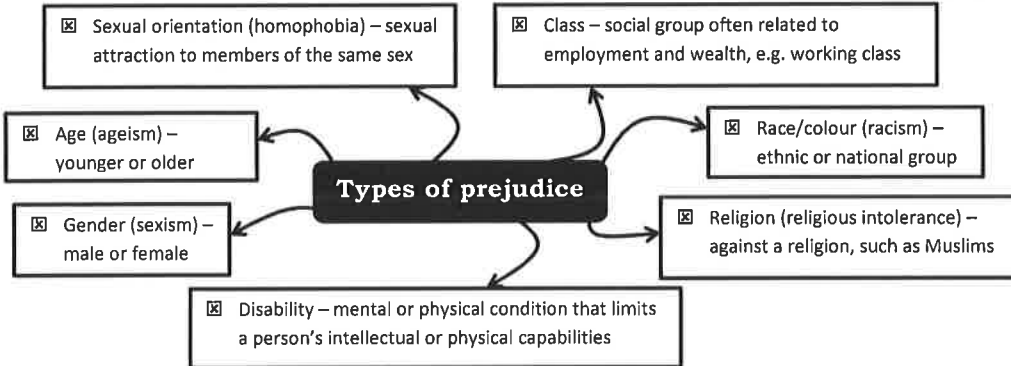
Effects of prejudice and discrimination

Prejudice and discrimination have damaging effects throughout society. It means individuals are not treated fairly and not judged only according to their individual behaviour. It can cause conflict and tensions that make communities less harmonious for everyone. It can reduce the feeling of self-worth of victims of prejudice and mean perpetrators live in fear and ignorance.

Concept	Definition
Tolerance	Being able to accept and respect views you may not necessarily agree with.
Justice	A situation that is right or fair, often brought about through the law courts. It involves making up for wrong actions. E.g. the law punishes individuals for discrimination.
Harmony	Living in peace and agreement with others.
Value of the individual	Belief in the equal importance of every individual person.

Discrimination can have benefits for society when it is **positive discrimination**. This is treating people differently to help ensure equal opportunities, e.g. extra support for disabled people that would not be given to able-bodied people or ensuring 50% of all MPs are

Types of prejudice



Prejudice is having a certain perception/thought of others that is not based on reason or experience. It is judging and making assumptions about someone before you know them. Common forms of prejudice are based on:

Discrimination is acting on prejudice – doing something based on the views you have. It is treating someone differently, for example because of the colour of their skin.

An example of discrimination would be someone not employing a woman because they perceive women to be less suited to a particular job compared to a man, even though, in practice, a woman would be just as able.

Discrimination is **illegal** in the UK. This includes any act that negatively affects someone due to their colour, race, gender, religion, etc., or encourages it. Discrimination still happens, sometimes subconsciously, or goes unnoticed, and many incidents are not reported to the police. People may also hold prejudicial views, which is not illegal as long as those views are not acted upon.



Causes and origins of prejudice	Explanation
Ignorance	Not understanding or having incorrect knowledge about others.
Stereotyping	Making generalisations about a whole group of people based on an extreme or isolated case.
Scapegoating	Inaccurately blaming a group for problems; e.g. the Jews were scapegoated by the Nazis as causing economic problems.
Influence of the media	The media can provide exaggerated or inaccurate portrayals of certain groups.
Influence of parents	The prejudicial views of parents are often passed onto their children and can make these views seem normal to the child.
Victim of prejudice	Experiencing prejudice can make the victims prejudiced against those who perpetrated it.
Experience	Negative incidents involving one person of a certain group might make them prejudiced against the whole group.

Historically, Christianity has been involved in acts of **racism**. This includes the Dutch Reformed Church's support for **apartheid** (racial segregation) in South Africa, and the **Crusades**, which were military action led by the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages against Muslims in Israel.

Genesis 1:27: God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male & female he created them.
Galatians 3:28: There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
Leviticus 19:33: When an alien [foreigner] lives in your land, do not ill treat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born.

Christians believe all people are equal because everyone is created in the **Image of God**, and because Jesus commanded his followers to love their neighbour, which includes everyone.

Christians also condemn sexism, although some believe that women should perform a different role within the household and Church.

This view is also based on the Genesis account where **Eve** was created after Adam as his 'helper'. Eve also sinned in the **Garden of Eden** which caused The Fall, which some Christians interpret as showing women to be the weaker sex.

Less traditional Christians disagree with this view and point to the important role played by women, such as **Mary Magdalen**, in Jesus' life and that Jesus first appeared to women at the Resurrection.

These changes mean women can now become priests in the Anglican and non-conformist Church. In July 2014, the Church of England also voted to allow women to become **bishops**.

Religious attitudes

Christians today, however, condemn prejudice. Jesus, for example, praises a person from Samaria (an outsider at Jesus' time) for helping a Jew in need in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Likewise, Jesus heals the servant of a Roman centurion when Romans were hated by Jews at the time (Luke 7:1–10).

Religious responses



Christians have been leaders in tackling prejudice and discrimination. **Martin Luther King Jr**, a Christian minister, campaigned against segregation, discrimination across society and the Jim Crow laws in America. He achieved this through a bus boycott, non-violent protests, sit-ins and a mass march on Washington DC, where he gave his famous 'I have a dream' speech.

Ephesians 5:22–23: Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord.
1 Timothy 2:11–13: A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve.

2.4 Religion and Early Life

Sanctity of life

The **sanctity of life** principle is the belief that all life is **sacred** because it is a **gift from God**. It is therefore very precious and special.

Christians believe that the sanctity of life means all life should be preserved and never deliberately ended (such as in the case of abortion).

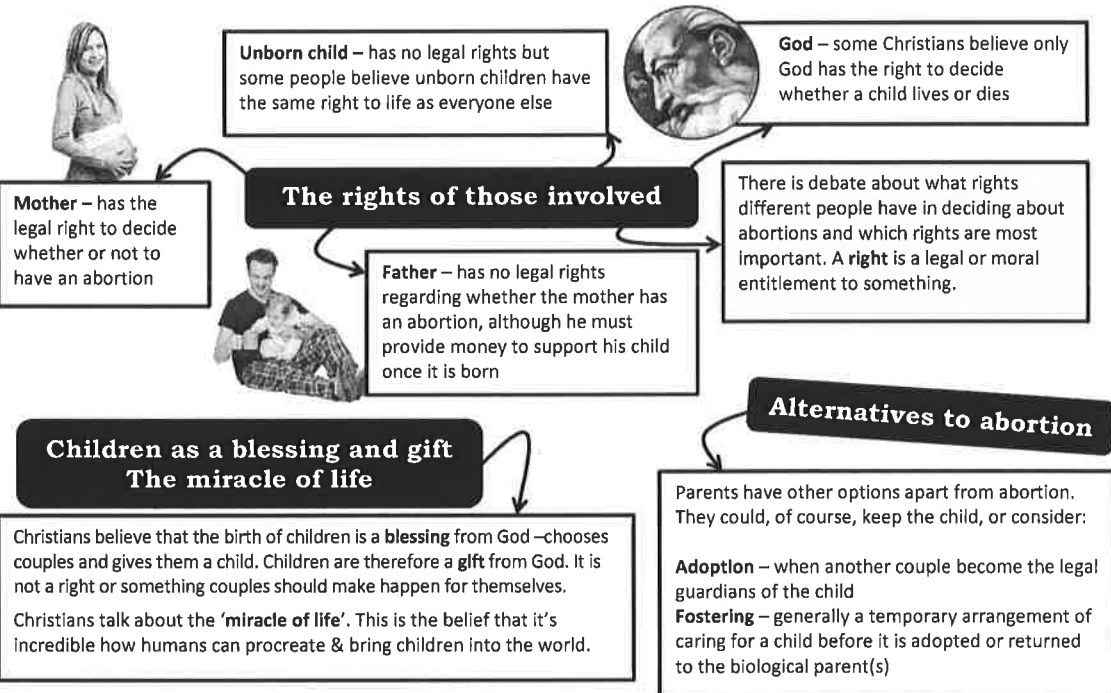
Quality of life

Quality of life is the satisfaction and enjoyment that a person has while being alive. A person's quality of life is generally reduced through emotional, mental or physical suffering, distress, and illness. Quality of life can be used in favour of abortion. It considers that if an unborn child's quality of life would be very low then an abortion might be the most loving action. Factors to consider include:

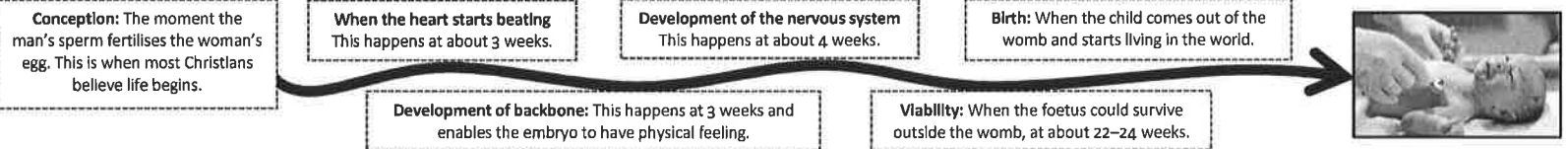
- If the child will be born with a severe **disability** that will cause lifelong suffering
- If the child is not **wanted** by its parents and therefore will not be loved and cherished
- If the child will be born into an **impoverished** family that does not have the money or resources to properly care and provide for it; it might also increase the strain on providing for existing children

People disagree about when the quality of life would be so bad that it would be better not to have that life.

- **Catholics** believe that the potential child's quality of life can never be so low as to justify an abortion. They believe all life is sacred and that quality of life is not relevant.
- **Protestants** believe that quality of life is important and that an abortion may be the most loving thing to do to prevent suffering. The principle of the sanctity of life can therefore sometimes be of less importance.



When does life begin?



The law and abortion

An **abortion** is the terminating and removing of a foetus from the womb. Abortions have been legal in England since **1967** and can be performed up until 28 weeks after conception. This was changed to 24 weeks under the **1990 Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act**. There is no time limit in exceptional circumstances. An abortion is generally permitted if two doctors agree that:

- 1) the pregnancy poses a **risk to the mother's health**
- 2) the child would be born severely **disabled**
- 3) there is a risk to the physical or mental health of her **existing children**

Christian reasons against abortion

- Life begins at conception, which means the embryo has already become a person. The Bible says not to take a life, such as in the Ten Commandments.
- Only God has the right to take away a life.
- The sanctity of life principle means all life is sacred and holy.
- Adoption is an option for mothers who do not want to keep their child.

Christian reasons for abortion

- If it is the result of rape, the child may remind the mother of the attack and mean the mother is unable or unwilling to care for the child.
- The mother has the right to prioritise her own health over that of her unborn child.
- The quality of life of the child is important and abortion is acceptable if the child will suffer greatly.
- The Bible does not give clear teaching against abortion.
- Catholics allow abortion if it is the result of an action that has a different primary purpose – known as the doctrine of double effect.
- Life begins at birth, so arguments about the sanctity of life do not apply.

Pro-life and pro-choice

Arguments for and against abortion are often grouped under two different terms: **pro-life** and **pro-choice**. They are known as **pressure groups** because they pressure others to change their views. They try to do this through campaigning and protesting.

Pro-life – generally Catholics who focus on the importance of the sanctity of life and right to life of the unborn child based on the belief that life begins at conception.

Pro-choice – generally secularists who focus on women's right to choose to have an abortion if that is what they decide. They argue there are important factors that outweigh the right to life, such as the physical and mental health, and quality of life, of the baby and/or the mother.

Bible quotes against abortion:

Psalm 139:13 For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

Jeremiah 1:5 Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart...

Job 1:21 The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away...