

Teacher Resource Bank

GCE Religious Studies

Candidate Exemplar Work

Unit A: *Religion and Ethics 1*

Candidate's Response to *Utilitarianism* (AO1)



CANDIDATE EXEMPLAR WORK

GENERAL CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION ADVANCED SUBSIDIARY



RELIGIOUS STUDIES UNIT A RELIGION AND ETHICS 1

RSS01

EXAMPLE OF CANDIDATE'S RESPONSE

For this paper you must have:

- an 8-page answer book.

Time allowed: 1 hour 15 minutes

Instructions

- Use black ink or black ball-point pen.
- Write the information required on the front of your answer book.
The *Examining Body* for this paper is AQA. The *Paper Reference* is **RSS01**.
- Answer **two** questions.

Information

- The maximum mark for this paper is 90.
- The marks for questions are shown in brackets.
- In each question, part (a) tests your knowledge and understanding, while part (b) tests your skills of reasoning and evaluation.
- You will be marked on your ability to use English, to organise information clearly and to use specialist vocabulary where appropriate.

RSS01: Religion and Ethics 1 – *Utilitarianism*

- 1 (a) Explain the key features of utilitarianism and show how it may be applied to an ethical issue of your choice (do not choose abortion or euthanasia).

(30 marks) AO1

Candidate Response

Utilitarianism argues that an action is right if it creates happiness and wrong if it creates unhappiness. This is the greatest happiness of the greatest number, the motivation of humans is pleasure and little pain. There are two forms of utilitarianism – proposed by Bentham and Mill. They are both Hedonists. However, whereas Bentham's theory was 'greatest good for the greatest number' and was based on quantity, Mill believed that the pleasure should be based on quality. This eliminated the concerns raised over Bentham's theory about 'sadistic guards'. Mill used rule utilitarianism.

When it comes to the issue of the use of embryo's in medical research, Mill would defend their use, as the mother would have made a free informed choice to donate the embryo. He believed that individual liberty was important as long as it didn't cause others harm. He believed that "children and savages" did not count when calculating consequences.

He would see the embryo's as having no worth and therefore the use of embryo's for IVF and to alleviate disease as a good thing. To alleviate disease would be a higher pleasure because it does not just affect someone physically the change would also affect the person mentally and they would be given a better standard of life as a consequence.

He would see the use of embryo's for IVF as acceptable because the consequence of that would be a child so would be a higher pleasure for the parents and as a consequence the child would cause much pleasure for the parents, whose individual liberty to choose to have a child is maintained.

He would also see it as legally acceptable as IVF is legal and so is embryonic research (within a certain time limit) so rules are being respected as they work for the greater good.

There are many problems with Mill's defence of use of the embryo, especially since consequences cannot be calculated. We cannot know the effects of embryonic research to alleviate disease as it is in its early stages and may have long term effects that can cause pain for the person or those around them. The restriction upon embryonic research may be relaxed and as a consequence humans may be cloned, which I feel is unnatural. Mill's theory is also elitist, though having a baby through IVF is a higher pleasure, who can say that it is more important than say for example a sandwich is to a starving person.

Commentary

The candidate is clearly aware of the theory of utilitarianism but the account offered is fairly sketchy. There is no reference to the hedonic calculus or how happiness may be measured and while rule utilitarianism is mentioned it is not explained and contrasted with act utilitarianism. The issue chosen is suitable, but the answer deals exclusively with Mill's utilitarianism – there are hints of a prepared answer here. The length of the answer is satisfactory but the focus is weak in parts.

The candidate shows how positive results on embryo research would be used by Mill to justify it. A number of key points are made. Some ideas are stated rather than explained (e.g. that the embryo would have no worth) and the points made about liberty (the mother's liberty to donate her embryo and to have a child) are superficial.

The final section is not directly relevant, but by implication illustrates the theory of utilitarianism further by considering the consequences of embryo research.

Level 4 (16 marks)