

## Teacher Resource Bank

GCE Religious Studies

Unit RST4A *Topic 1 Life, Death and Beyond*

Candidate Exemplar Work

- Candidate A



## Unit RST4A *Topic I Life, Death and Beyond*

### Example of Candidate's Work on Specimen Questions

- 1 (a) Examine religious and secular perspectives on the nature and value of human life.

(45 marks)

AO1

#### Candidate Response

Almost every one of us appreciates human life, placing some sort of value on it. Most people for example believe that humans are more important and consequently valuable in comparison to animals – they have more intelligence and are more empathetic. Nevertheless, in today's society there are many different views about the nature and value of human life due to all of the different groups within it. The beliefs of these groups are founded upon many different areas such as the existence of a soul, existence of God, mortality and also free will.

One of the main questions which separates individuals beliefs about the nature and value of human life is; "Do humans have a soul?" Although the value rather than the nature of human life is more affected in belief or disbelief of a soul, the nature of life also changes. For example, many who believe that humans are dualistic (have a soul) assume that the existence of that soul will continue after death. Some Christians for example believe that when you die your soul goes up to heaven. Most Christians support this idea of the soul with their beliefs being based upon teachings within both the Old Testament; "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it" (Ecclesiastes 12:7) and also the new testament; "and "And so it is written, the first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam [was made] a quickening spirit." (1 Corinthians 15:45). Nevertheless, the definition of 'soul' is varies from person to person and also in different Christian groups. Catholics for example define the soul as "the innermost aspect of humans, that which is of greatest value in them, that by which they are most especially in God's image ('soul' signifies the *spiritual principle* in humans)", whereas Protestants state that the soul is a combination of spirit (breath of life) and body, disagreeing with the view that the soul has a consciousness or sentient existence of its own. Therefore the existence of a soul is much more necessary to Roman Catholics in determining the value of human life in comparison to that of a Protestant. Yet, belief in a soul still heightens the value of human life and can also affect the nature of life. After all, if it means there is life after death then humans might be more moral and responsible. Existence of a soul also implies that humans are not just physical beings, they are empathetic, caring and above all, spiritual.

Yet not all religions believe that humans are more than just physical beings; Buddhism for example completely contradicts Christian views and rejects the idea of a soul. This is a key concept within Buddhism and is known as 'Anatta,' which means there is no self (there is nothing above/within us that makes us who we are.) Buddhism also teaches Anicca which is the idea that all things in the world are in a constant state of flux: all is changing, and no permanent state exists by itself. Human life is therefore temporary and there is no soul or anything that continues living after you die, consequently, there is no heaven nor hell. Although a Christian might argue that this makes humans seem less valuable than they are, a Buddhist would respond in saying that it make humans more valuable. This is due to their impermanence and limited time on Earth; they need to make the most of it and focus on the now rather than the future. Nevertheless, if humans have no soul then perhaps they will act immorally as there will be no consequences (hell) when they die- changing the nature of human life for the bad.

Different groups of Atheists provide arguments both for and against the existence of the soul. Like Buddhism, naturalism disbelieves in the soul. Naturalists, such as Tom Clark, suggest that there is nothing you or above you that makes you do things. Humans are simply physical beings that have evolved over time, like scientific theories suggest. "The more we learn about how we evolved, and how our brains work, the more certain we are becoming that there is no such extra ingredient [no soul]. We are each *made of* mindless robots and nothing else, no non-physical, non-robotic ingredients at all" Daniel Dennett. Despite this, Naturalists do believe that humans are moral as they are conscious of their actions. This adds value to human life in saying that although they are just physical things, they do have morals. In this sense it could be argued that humans are just as valuable to naturalists as they are to Christians.

Belief in God plays an important role when deciphering the nature and value of human life as it shapes individuals beliefs and ideas. With God's existence being incorporated within personal belief, the meaning of life changes and therefore so does the value and nature of life. Christians for example would believe that the nature of life is to "Love God and enjoy him forever [Westminster Shorter Catechism.]" Consequently they would argue that life is wasted if it is not lived in relation to God as He has created all beings and not only that but he has created them to be good. The bible teaches that "Humans were created in the image of God" supporting the idea that human life is extremely valuable. As humans we should therefore worship him and thank him for what he has done. Many Christians believe we should live for him rather than ourselves.

Evangelical minister Rick Warren supports this idea in saying that in order to find the purpose of your life you cannot just ask; "why am I here" but rather need to consider God. He is who has created us and put us here and "it is He who directs the life of his creatures." Many Evaneical Christians like Rick Warren believe that human life is contingent on God as without his existence, life would not continue existing. Furthermore, Christianity stresses the importance of all life and believers are often against issues such as abortion, euthanasia and even contraception as they kill potential lives. Roman Catholics for example are extremely against euthanasia believing that it is 'a grave violation of the law of God, since it is the deliberate and morally unacceptable killing of a human person [Pope John Paul II *Evangelium Vitae*, 1995]" This demonstrates how all life, embryonic, adolescent and elderly is equal of value to a Catholic and how important life is due to the fact that God exists and has created us. It is something that is considered sacred and never worth throwing away- no matter what the circumstances. As a result of this, Catholics rarely have abortions and when they do they feel sinful and often regret their decision.

However, for atheists the nature and value of human life is extremely different. Non-believers in God might willingly have abortions etc with no real necessity, for example believing that its perfectly fine to have abortions under such guidelines as, 'not having enough money' or 'being too young.' The morals of atheists are different to that of a Christian as they do not believe they were created by God. Essentially this means they have no real rules; they do not have any one superior being to live for, they are just living for themselves. Naturalists agree with this point of view in not believing in God and stating that there are natural causes for everything. This perhaps places less value on human life and it becomes something non-spiritual or sacred. To existentialist atheists, man just appears on Earth and is not put there by anyone to serve a particular purpose. This is not a negative or positive view of humans as again as individuals views vary. Existentialist atheists focus their beliefs on the fact that 'existence precedes essence' [Satre] and that as there is no God that life has no fixed meaning. Some atheists' views are less friendly. The fact that some non-believers can place financial value on a human's life undoubtedly takes away some value and ultimately importance. If a life can be replaced with money then it is obvious that human life itself is not 'irreplaceable' like many believe. Life insurance companies for example value different lives different amounts, but none of these have equivalent worth to that of a Christian.

Although Buddhism is considered a religion it does not involve belief in God. In a sense Buddhism is another alternative atheist view. It has a completely different view on life in comparison to most Christians. As Buddhism doesn't require a God it is in a sense more free- humans were not created by God and are not living for God. Life to a Buddhist is all about 4 Noble Truths, the first being that life means suffering; "I [Buddha] teach one thing and one only: that is, suffering and the end of suffering." This idea is based on the fact that human nature is not perfect and nor is the world we live in. A Buddha would suggest the meaning of life is to accept that there is suffering in the world and that one can do this by detaching themselves from things. After all, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the four noble truths states that the origin of suffering is attachment. In a sense this is opposite to other religions such as Christianity that suggest you should 'love one another' and get married etc. Religions such as Christianity, Hinduism and Islam are based upon this idea of attachment. Although Buddhists focus their beliefs around the idea of suffering it is not necessarily a bad thing as there is a cure [8 noble path]. The aim of life to a Buddhist is to reach enlightenment, wherein there is no suffering whatsoever. The value of humans is high to a Buddha due to Samsara, which is also associated with suffering (this is the wheel of suffering). Buddhists focus more on the individual and aim to reach the state of nirvana - the state where there is no craving or attachment. This places importance on humans as they do have the ability to escape from this suffering. In this sense, they are worthy beings.

Free-will is also something that affects the value and nature of life. There are 2 separate Christian outlooks on free will - one believing that humans do have free will and the other believing that they don't. Calvinists disagree with the idea that humans have free-will and believe that everything is determined by God. This is the idea of predestination and stems from belief in God and faith in his omnipotence and omniscience. They argue that "It was by the evil use of his free will that man destroyed both it and himself" – Augustine. This implies that humans do not make their own choices. This could suggest that humans are insignificant beings that are controlled and consequently not as individual and special as other religions suggest. Yet, it does show the importance of God and that humans are valuable because they have been created by God. It also links in with the idea of election; the theological doctrine of God's predestination of individuals as objects of divine mercy and salvation. To Calvinists, life is important despite the fact that one does not make their own decisions. Like many other Christians this is because God has given each one of us life and has set out certain goals for us all. It is thanks to God that we have this purpose and meaning of life as without his existence and guidance we would not be the good humans we are today. Although Naturalism is not a religious view it is similar to Calvinism in that it does not believe in free will or choices. The bulk of its argument is that everything is fully caused. Human actions for example are caused by the brain and body, not by any superior beings or a soul as these do not exist. Everything a human does is connected to each other, like a chain reaction. Naturalism is the idea that one thing causes another thing to do something.

The other Christian view on free will is supported by groups such as Methodists. Although they believe in God they do believe that humans have free will and thereby the ability to make choices. In this sense humans are seen as more responsible. After all, if humans did not make their own choices they would not be responsible for their actions. This also promotes high human value as it's arguing that humans are able to look after themselves - they are able to make their own decisions without anyone guiding or telling them exactly what to do. To these Christians the nature of life is similar to other denominations except there is more leeway when it comes to what is right as it is something down to personal belief.

Atheists also support the idea of free will. Existentialism is one of 2 secular views which argues that to be human is to be free. Yet, it builds on this to say that we are self-aware; e.g. we know that we will die and are not immortal. It does suggest humans are able to change their nature as it is not set in stone and that in a way “There is no human nature since there is no God to conceive it.” This suggests that we aren’t perhaps that valuable nor important, as God doesn’t exist. Life is essentially absurd and there is no real meaning. It focuses on the idea that while we are here on Earth we need to prove ourselves. This portrays a substantial low value of human life as we are not here for any fixed purpose and there is no real nature of life. Each individual should live life how they want to and accept that there’s no fixed reason for our existence.

In conclusion, the ideas about the nature and value of human life do not only vary between different groups in society but also on an individual basis. Some place extremely high importance on human lives, believing that even the killing of an embryonic life is not right whilst others suggest embryonic life is not important or as valuable. Belief in God definitely helps humans to find purpose in their life and can guide them on how to live their lives but it can also be restricting and take away some of the value of humans that other groups offer, such as the ability to make choices. Whichever way it is looked at, overall human life is valued considerably high no matter what the nature of life is. Everyone one of us as an individual is somewhat empathetic and understanding of other human beings which provides the basic ingredients to valuing one another.

### Commentary

AO1 (45 marks)

A good section (a) answer. The candidate provides a lot of detailed information. Sometimes the point being made gets lost in the depth of details. The second paragraph would have been better had it kept fully focused upon nature. This would have allowed a separate, and fuller, consideration of value. The next paragraph, which again is nature focused, loses some focus by the later link into Christianity and value. The following paragraph works well with its clear nature focus.

The next paragraph about belief in God does not seem to fit particularly well and the following material which appears to be looking at value would benefit from some clearer ideas about what religious/secular views of value are. The paragraph on Buddhism tends to lose focus on value.

There is occasionally a confusion between nature and meaning of life, for example the paragraph on free-will. There is a slight imbalance between nature and value, although it is not essential that there is a complete balance, nevertheless in this case it would have made the answer excellent had there been.

**Level 6 (39 marks)**