



Teacher Resource Bank

GCE Religious Studies

Unit RST4C Section B Ways of Moral Decision-Making

June 2011 Examination Candidate Exemplar Work



2011 (June) Unit RST4C Section B Ways of Moral Decision-Making

Example of Candidate's Work from the Examination

Grade B

- 07 Examine the major ethical issues which arise from either medical research and medical developments or business practice and economics. (45 marks) AO1

Candidate Response

There are many major ethical issues that arise from medical research and medical developments. Kant would suggest that it can only be deemed ethically correct if we have followed the categorical imperative. Kant would say we need to add to every decision whether we could rationalise it and also universalise it. He does not let emotion get in the way of moral decision making so in the case of medical trials on humans he would reject it on the grounds that it is not rational to test on humans and it can definitely not be universalised. Therefore showing how ethical issues arise from medical research.

A support for this from a religious perspective would be one from Aquinas. He would argue that it is not a humans primary precept to be tested on, in that it is their duty to defend humans, this would be deliberately inflicting pain, and like Kant would agree would be irrational. Also from the catholic point of view they would point out that our body is not our own, it is in fact a gift from God that we should treat with respect therefore to test on it would be unethical, especially in the case when people offer themselves to gain money. Kant would support this as it would be treating that person as a means to an end. However for the utilitarian they would see it as a loving thing to do, to offer yourself to achieve happiness for the greatest number. Also as Jesus said, the most loving thing to do would be to lay down your life for another. However the question is asked like in the situation which 82 people were purposely exposed to radiation, how is that ethically correct when from a religious point of view it is intentionally causing pain on those people for the benefit of others and hurting God's creation. Even from a non religious view it would be treating those people as a means to an end.

Another area of where ethical issues arise is Embryology. This is a major ethical issue, as for Catholics they would see the view that if life begins at conception and therefore anything getting in the way and stopping the foetus gestate would in fact be murder. From an Anglican view they would argue 'cautious acceptance' as they see the enormous benefits that could come from the tests, however can see the problems as to how long until people were playing God. They accept it as they do not give the foetus the same rights as a child. For Peter Singer, he would accept up to 14 days that it could be tested on, anytime after that would be murder as it would be regarded as a life. Kant would agree that it was not rational to interrupt the primary precept of a foetus.

Another ethical issue that arises is humans above animals. This debate would be brought into light when animal testing started. The Christian tradition have a bit of a contradiction when it comes to this as taken from Genesis 1 it says that we have dominance over animals and we can use them as we wish, where as Genesis 2 states we are stewards of the world and should treat them with respect and care for them. The conclusion drawn would be the pragmatic dismissal argument which would allow us to test on animals when it would benefit us but then must give anaesthetic as the intentional infliction of pain would be irrational. The utilitarian would agree with it as it is producing the greatest number. For Michael Fox, who uses the absolute dismissal argument, placing them out of the realm of morality would not see a problem with it as we have a domination over them whereas for Pythagoreans, they would be

against it as they had belief in reincarnation and would therefore have respect for animals as if our human souls can go into them, they must be special. In the case of when US generals used monkeys in vigorous training exercise, made them run and if they stopped electrocuted them and then hit them with a high dose of radiation and made them continue running until they dropped dead, many people would see a highly drastic ethical issue, as would not be acting as stewards of the world and seen as inhumane. They justified their actions in a utilitarian way suggesting they had a right as it would test how much their soldiers could handle after an attack, however it would be treating them as a means to an end and highlights a big ethical issue when it comes to saying is animal testing wrong or right. Aristotle says as we can reason than is a big enough distinction between us and them to know what is right however Peter Singer would show that it was wrong as they still suffer, like humans do and as we are stewards of the world we are supposed to care, as we would certainly not treat humans like that.

A final issue I am discussing that occurs when medical research is carried out is how our resources are allocated ethically. The utilitarian would argue it would give the greatest good to the greatest good so if a case came up to treat the millions of exma sufferers or thousands of people suffering with motor neurone disease, they would allocate the resources to the exma sufferers. This can be seen as an ethical issue as surely the people with motor neurone disease have a greater need. The catholic response would be equality and people with the greatest need. Another way would be John Stuart Mills qualitative approach, this soft rule utilitarian can be seen as the hybrid approach. It would recognise the ethical question of who has the greatest need when it comes to allocating resources and what would be the best way of not letting the minority lose. Mills qualitative approach would recognise that the suffers with motor neurone were in greatest need and it should go to them as exma can be lived with showing another ethical issue as whether the quality of life is high in profile or whether when allocating resources it is given a more utilitarian approach at as long as the number is big, that is all that matters. This could be seen that the company NICE handles the allocation, on a utilitarian thinking.

Commentary

This essay demonstrates reasonable understanding through the use of evidence and examples. The language is occasionally disjointed, for example at the end of paragraph 2, where the reference to “the situation which 82 people were purposely exposed to radiation” is left unexplained. Also, the amount of information offered is sometimes inconsequential, as in the final paragraph, where the essay has no conclusion as such. Nevertheless the treatment is in general satisfactory and mainly relevant.

Level 5 – 31 marks

**08 'These ethical issues can never be solved by any ethical system.'
How far do you agree?**

(30 marks) AO2

To argue for this statement that ethical issues can never be solved by an ethical system it can be seen as true. As from a religious response, the Catholics base most of their decision-making on natural law which is set rules and a more deontological approach, this is seen as a weakness as it does not move forward with the times in line with the Zeitgeist, and therefore our decisions on new technology such as medical research will be outdated and reject it straight away, on the other hand however a major advantage of religious response would be that it is also largely based on conscience which is respected by many to be the only thing that counts when it comes down to making moral decisions to overcome the ethical issues, Butler suggests it is 'the word of God' Cardinal Newman would even choose that over the popes infallibility, 'I toast the pope but I toast conscience first' and St Paul would suggest it was God words 'woven into the fabric of our design' arguing that we can trust we have given the correct response that is up to date with the zeitgeist as it is known within us. However this is countered by Freud who suggests our conscience is nothing more than guilt and therefore decisions like in the medical issue of whether to turn off life support is countered as what we think our conscience to be the word of God guiding us is in fact our battle between super ego and identity with the result of guilt and therefore in fact doesn't give us the word of God, it is merely our emotion on and experience telling us what to do. And if applied to Kant, he would reject as he feels emotions should not be counted.

Kants more deontological and absolute way of approaching ethics can seem to prove this statement wrong as it provides us with definite rules which would remove the chance of human error in the heat of the moment decision and would give us comfort in the fact that we know we have done the right thing, which can be applied to any area of medical research, showing that ethical systems can solve ethical issues.

A weakness however of Kant would be the fact that deontology is not how humans naturally respond, it would be more like Aristotle's argument that our god given gift to reason and in religious Anglican response, come to a consensus can allow us to be sure we have come to the right conclusion. So in the case of medical trials on humans, they accept the need for development and still take into the value and sanctity of life. So by the time a compromise came, although takes a long time, would be sure that they had reached a conclusion and the right one as they would not finish until they had, showing they still took a view of their rules through the guidance of scripture but also took into consideration more modern views and for some people the most important thing, what their conscience said.

Overall, this statement can be partly but not fully true as people are challenged by these issues most days and use their beliefs, be that rules or feelings and come out with an answer to what they believe to be right. So they do pose a challenge however ethical systems such as Kants deontology approach, the utilitarian approach and various religious responses give answers to the issues, the reason they still remain is due to the fact every situation is different and with developing technologies it can be seen that some ethical systems methods such as Catholics response to natural law can be seen to be outdated, however are also seen as a positive as can ensure that technology does not go too far and forget about ethics, to raise questions to stop getting to the stage of designer babies.

Commentary

Despite the somewhat 'tidal' style of writing, the candidate does engage critically with the question, not least, for example, in the opening sentence of the concluding paragraph. The conclusion as a whole is coherent, and the essay merits a top-end Level 5.

Level 5 – 23 marks

Grade A

- 05 Examine the role of religious institutions and the religious conscience in moral decision-making. (45 marks) AO1**

Candidate Response

In Christianity, there are seen to be four sources of authority which influence moral decision-making. These are the Church, with its traditions and teachings, scripture, in the form of the Bible, conscience, as given to us by God, and the ultimate source, God's will. All Christian institutions accept these authorities, but what divides them is their considered importance.

Catholicism follows a regimented concept, whereby the ultimate authority is God's will, which is presented to us through Jesus Christ, written and recorded in the New Testament, interpreted with reason by the Catholic Church, and followed by our God-given religious conscience. For Catholics, the church has a greater weight than scripture, as it recognises the Bible as an incomplete moral guide, since it offers no obvious guidance on modern ethical issues such as IVF. Catholicism sees it as the role of the church and the Pope, to interpret the Bible as an illustration of God's will as shown to us by Jesus, in order to provide Catholics with a reliable, theonomous guideline, which enables them to apply their developing religious conscience and reason in their everyday lives, preventing any moral confusion.

The Catholic Church uses its importance to influence moral decision-making through its traditions and teachings, the latter which in terms of ethics, tend to present themselves in the form of encyclical letters from the pope. Tradition suggests that in times of ethical in-clarity, the past and normal should be used as a reference to deal with an issue. For example, if the issue of brain death was raised, the church would be bound by duty to refer to previous traditions as to decide what to do. Teachings are more effective as they are a direct reference to a current issue troubling Catholics, and can be seen as a preferred authority as the Pope is trusted to explore his relationship with God and his reason in order to make a moral ethical decision.

Protestants have an alternative Christian view, where scripture is considered a greater authority than the religious institution to which they belong, as they accept the Bible in accordance with Divine Command Theory, which says that the Bible is the word of God and therefore it is good. However, the Euthyphro Dilemma calls this into question by asking whether something is good because God wills it or if it is willed by God because it is good. Due to the more relaxed view of the Church's authority, Protestants look towards a more community-based ethic, based on discussion. For example, in the case of making a moral decision or statement on the use of genetic engineering to use stem cells to help another person, a debate amongst the Protestants would have to be had and the Bible, referenced to.

All Christians are urged to 'let their conscience be your guide'. It is seen as given to humanity by God and is wholly good as a result. The generally accepted view is that if people followed their religious conscience all the time, they would only act according to God's plan and carry out his will. However, the other religious authorities should be used as a reference point, when Christians find it difficult to define their religious conscience. For example, if a Christian failed to see that their use of animal-tested products was unethical according to their religious conscience, which many believe, according to their denomination, that animals are part of God's creation, thus should be treated with respect; the Christian would have to turn to tradition and teachings of the church or to the Bible for further aid and guidance.

In conclusion, the role of religious institutions varies due to the amount of authority it is given, however regardless of this, religious conscience continues to be the driving force behind religious ethics, as it is this which is depended on to re-enforce any other authority or moral decision-making guidance which is offered.

Commentary

The essay is generally articulate, and offers a clear explanation of the relationship between the ethical role of religious institutions and that of the conscience. In order to merit more than the top of Level 5 or the bottom of Level 6, the treatment of the conscience would need to be more detailed, since its nature and role is expressed differently in the institutions the candidate refers to.

Level 6 – 36 marks

06 'When making moral decisions, the authority of the conscience should be accepted above any other authority.' Evaluate this claim. (30 marks) AO2

Candidate Response

To say that the conscience should be valued above any other authority, is bold and in my opinion fails to address the significance and importance of the other authorities. God's will is the ultimate authority, accepted by all Christian denominations. However it presents itself, in three other ways; through the church, conscience and scripture.

Conscience, undoubtedly plays an important role in the lives of Christians when it comes to religious decision making. As it's intrinsic and God given, it can claim to be a near perfect illustration of God's will and his plan for the world. By 'letting the conscience be your guide', the authority of the conscience should allow for only the right acts to be carried out when followed. However, judging from the quantity of immorality in the world at present, the clarity of this intrinsic ethical guide can be questioned, thus due to its failure to be clear, it calls upon alternative authorities for assistance. There is also an argument which states that although it could be said that it should be accepted above any other authority, it is often not, especially in personal circumstances. If a mother is faced with the choice of having a saviour sibling, through IVF, for her dying child, it is unsurprising that one would choose this over her religious conscience if it were to advise her otherwise. In this example, she would be more likely to turn to the church and human compassion for guidance.

Scripture, like conscience, is also considered intrinsically valued as 'the word of God'. According to Divine Command Theory, this therefore means that any guidance thus given in the Bible should be adhered to as it good as it comes from God. For example, as the Bible claims that agape is the best love which should be aimed for in all circumstances, divine command theory claims it is agape for which we should seek in ethical situations. Therefore, in a situation where medical resources are called into question, the solution to this is to distribute resources to examples where it would be the most loving thing to do, such as if turning off a life support machine was the most loving thing to do for the patient and its family then that should be the motivation. Eurythphro questions the goodness of the word of God and asks if something is good because God wills it or did it have a good value originally which is why God wills it.

There is also an argument to claim that the Bible is an incomplete source of moral guidance as it fails to account for modern ethics such as genetic engineering, therefore it cannot be depended on entirely.

In order for the Bible to be used in accordance with modern ethical issues, many will stress the importance of the authority of the church. Through its tradition and teachings, the church aims to bring all aspects, conscience and scripture, together to create an ethical guidance based on faith. An example of this would be the catholic view of genetic engineering, which in general condemns its use as it considers it to be unnatural in the eyes of God, a conclusion reached as a result of consulting the Bible, and against the best interest of this conscience. Regardless of public opinion on this view, it remains to be an attempt by the church to adapt the Bible to current times and encourage the use of reason to interpret the Bible in a responsible and religious minded way.

In conclusion, I find the claim to be false and at the very least inaccurate. The authority of conscience cannot possibly be considered or accepted above any other authority when the authority of scripture and the church are critical to the interpretation of the conscience. If there is an authority which is to be valued above all others, the church should be victorious due to its influence and guidance on all ethical aspects, however I accept the view that there is no authority more important than God's will. God's will is the glue of Christian ethical decision making as it provides the fundamental basics, a goal and an aspiration which cannot be bettered or replaced.

Commentary

The rather narrow consideration of the conscience given in the response to 05 affects the achievement in 06 also. The candidate demonstrates good critical ability, and the conclusion is very articulate, particularly the first five lines; but the authority given to God's will is not related to the conscience or differentiated from it.

Level 5 – 23 marks.

Grade A*

- 07 Examine the major ethical issues which arise from either medical research and medical developments or business practice and economics. (45 marks) AO1**

Candidate Response

There are several major issues that can arise from medical research and development, which pose significant ethical problems, especially when applied to deontological and teleological systems. In this essay I will examine the problems that such systems might have when confronted with Reproductive Cloning, Therapeutic Cloning and Embryo Research.

Reproductive cloning of humans is so controversial that it has suffered a near universal ban from most modern societies. It is the process of taking a fertilised zygote before it has developed into an embryo and replacing its genetically unique nucleus with that of an already existing human. The zygote will then be allowed to grow into a full human being. It is designed to aid couples unable to have children through natural reproduction.

Utilitarian problems that may arise from this process will be primarily practical, as utilitarianism is an empirically-based system that is purely teleological so no action is bad in itself. Although this means that Reproductive Cloning could not be considered intrinsically wrong, there are many ways in which it can be seen to violate Bentham's Utility Principle – that is, the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. The first utilitarian problem arising from reproductive cloning is its high risk. Dolly the sheep, the first cloned mammal, was the first out of 29 embryos to survive until adulthood, and even then she suffered severe complications and died. Therefore reproductive cloning as it is is a very high-risk procedure, and this could be a utilitarian problem as the unhappiness caused by a failed birth or a child dying early, would definitely be intense, and have high propinquity. If we also consider that there are other alternatives to Reproductive Cloning available, such as IVF or even adoption, a utilitarian may oppose it on the basis that it is an imperfect procedure and too high a risk.

Further problems arise when considering Rule Utilitarianism; firstly, a sick clone offspring dying early would be less adept at experiencing high pleasures, meaning its quality of life would be severely diminished, something very important to Mill. Furthermore there is the fact that the majority of people are extremely opposed to cloning. As Rule Utilitarianism creates rules that serve the collective will, even if Reproductive Cloning was considered right on an individual basis, it would not be allowed because of the majority of people's dislike for it. Singer's preference utilitarianism also throws up a problem in that we must consider the preferences of the potential child: would it prefer to be genetically unique, or a clone? Many would agree, using this preference basis, that IVF or adoption would most certainly be better.

Reproductive Cloning also throws up the issues for the deontological Natural Law system, which bases ethical action around the holy scripture and 'Practical Reason'.

The primary problem that Reproductive Cloning would create would be a violation of Aquinas' 'Five Primary Precepts', which state that we must preserve the innocent and procreate through sexual reproduction. The 'presentation' precept can be considered to be broken by the fact that a reproductive clone is highly likely to die; therefore Natural Law would deem it immoral and irresponsible to bring a clone into the world. Furthermore Reproductive Cloning is a clear aberration of the principle of procreation only through reproduction – this process involves making an embryo outside of the womb, altering and then implanting it – something held as a clear violation. As the moral precepts are meant to be followed as goods 'in themselves', any violation would be unacceptable, and, Aquinas would argue, takes us further from God, which is incongruous to man's, 'Supernatural End' with God. Another violation of Natural Law that is caused by Reproductive Cloning is that it clearly violates the dogma of

religious scripture, which condemns artificial life as an aberration and would consider it 'playing God'. Therefore, Aquinas' Natural Law would most certainly find too many ethical issues with Reproductive Cloning for it to be considered viable.

Even further developments in Natural Law, like those of John Finnis would find a levy of problems with Reproductive Cloning. For example, Reproductive Cloning clearly violates the 'Basic Good' of Religion, by going against scriptural law. Furthermore, it can be seen to violate several principles of practical reasonableness – for example the principle of being efficient; if you need to artificially produce children, you could use IVF as it is less of an aberration, and lower risk. Furthermore many would argue that it violates "use your conscience" – as many would intuitively disagree with Reproductive Cloning.

Another medical issue that would cause considerable problems for ethicists is that of Therapeutic Cloning and Embryo Research. In both cases, Embryos are artificially produced either to examine the stem cells of clones of those with degenerative diseases, so as to find the root cause of these diseases, or stem cells are harvested and applied to regrowing lost specialist tissue, or research into regrowing tissue and stem cell manufacturing.

A Kantian ethicist may see a whole lot of ethical problems with Embryo Research. As a deontological system Kantian ethics works on a system of natural duties that people must determine for themselves via a 'Categorical Imperative' and then carry out actions which are good-in-themselves.

An immediate problem of Kantian ethics with Embryo Research is the one created by the principle 'never treat humans as a means to an end'. Kant believes that humans have an intrinsic worth that precludes them from being 'used' as a commodity or tool. It is entirely arguable that embryos used for research, despite only being kept up to their 'primitive' streak, have this intrinsic value as they are potential humans. This perspective would immediately make Embryo Research wrong in itself, as it is essentially – if you hold that embryos are potential people and have value as such – manufacturing human beings, then terminating them as cadavers used for scientific progress. A further 'categorical' principle that is arguably violated by Embryo Research is that of universalisation. Kant believes that an action is only right if it would be acceptable for everyone to do it mandatorily. This can be seen to make embryo research extremely problematic as if everyone 'manipulated and used human beings in the name of progress', which is how a Kantian may see Embryo Research, not only would society be immoral and unjust, but the very concept of man's intrinsic worth would be lost. Therefore for a Kantian, the issues created by Embryo Research make it wholly illogical.

Even Situation Ethics, a system which is inherently relativistic and 'liberal', would find problems with Embryo Research and Therapeutic Cloning. Basing itself on the principle of the "most loving action", it can be considered that Embryo Research is not loving at all.

While Fletcher condones processes such as IVF as using human creativity to create life, Embryo Research is using human creativity to satisfy human curiosity. This might fit in with the Agape Love of the principle of 'Love Thy Neighbour' due to the scientific progress made, but what if the embryos themselves are considered to be our neighbours? The situationist principle of personalism, may suggest that embryos should indeed be considered as such, which would make Embryo Research a very unloving action.

Furthermore, Contextual Ethics, which encourages decisions made in the context of the church, may condemn Embryo Research on the grounds that it violates religious dogma. Therefore Embryo research is seen to create problems even for Situation Ethics, a liberal teleological system.

Commentary

This is a thorough, in-depth treatment of the question, meeting the criteria for Level 7.

Level 7 – 41 marks

**08 'These ethical issues can never be solved by any ethical system.'
How far do you agree?**

(30 marks) AO2

Commentary

The argument that medical issues of Reproductive Cloning and Embryo Research cannot be solved by ethical systems can be seen as valid due to inherent problems with nearly all systems, as well as the quagmire of contradictions that they can fall into. In this essay, however, I will argue some practical conceptions of ethical systems will most certainly help us to make decisions around medical ethics.

Kant's ethics can be seen to fail at providing a solution for many medical ethical problems due to the idea of 'conflicting duties'. While some may argue the problem of embryo research is indisputably wrong by Kantian standards due to our duty to protect humans, surely we also have an innate duty to progress science, which would arguably protect more humans. Embryo Research may have implications that would save thousands of lives and thus contrast to approved duties. For an orthodox Kantian this is a clear problem, and leads to self contradiction or a solution not entirely founded on 'reason'.

However such ethical contradictions can arguably be avoided by the relativistic system of Situation Ethics – this system can be seen as adept at solving medical ethical problems because it, unlike Kantian ethics, does not rely on universal duties which may at some point clash. Instead it makes decisions situationally rather than prescriptively. This is arguably an excellent way to solving the problems of medical ethics, as there are many different views of Embryo Research, and maybe it's only by looking at the specifics of each that we can come to a conclusion on what would best serve love – undoubtedly a first principle to follow.

While the situational methodology of situation ethics can be seen as sound, it arguably fails to solve medical ethical problems due to its adherence to Agape Love, 'Love thy neighbour'. This principle is definitely first and reasonable, but problems arise from different conceptions of it. One situationist may take agape love to mean we should carry out Embryo Research for the good of mankind; another may use it to say we must preserve the life of embryos and therefore it's wrong. As everyone has a different way of thinking, and Agape Love is not internally objective to every human, situation ethics can be seen to fail by creating contradictions from different interpretations of its key principle.

It can be argued that utilitarianism overcomes this problem by not adhering to an abstract principle that can lead to separate conceptualising in people's minds. Utilitarianism is empirical and situational, meaning it can arguably be effective at solving problems by empirically and objectively measuring the pros and cons of each situation using a hedonic calculus. This is then taking the advantages of the situational methodology of situation ethics and combining it with more objective empirical principles, thereby meaning that every utilitarian would come to the same conclusion on each situation despite being unable to make general conclusions.

However the criticisms of Utilitarianism point to the fact that while it claims to be empirical, in reality it is still highly subjective. It measures pain and pleasure as if they were units of energy, but in reality there is no way of measuring completely another human being's feelings. Furthermore, utilitarianism relies on the belief that we can all make reasonable predictions of what the consequences of our decisions will be, but this can be considered false. It might be likely that Embryo Research will cure diseases, or a Reproductive Clone will die early, but it is impossible to empirically know. Therefore utilitarianism can be seen to give objective solutions in principle, but not in practice. Combine this with the relativism of utilitarianism and you have a principle-less system that only masquerades as objective.

However, a level of objectivity may not be an overall bad thing. MacIntyre suggests that in fact a pursuit of objectivity in ethics is why most systems fail, but that ethics can still be useful by recognising its limits and then working round them. By using MacIntyre's principle of devising ethical principles through history, and making them based subjectively round a specific society, we may be able to create naturally ethical people that use a system to develop the skills themselves to solve problems. Therefore virtue theories practically can be seen to create people who can naturally solve these problems.

In conclusion, while Kantian ethics may fail due to contradictions of duty, situation ethics may fail due to different conceptions of its principle and utilitarianism can fail because it is not truly objective, an historically based virtue ethics can be used to solve these problems by proxy, as it will create interpretations, pragmatic people who will be able to solve problems independently not by applying an ethical system, but by living through their societies' ethical virtue system.

Commentary

This is a very well-focussed response. It makes use of different views / schools of thought, and evaluates perceptively. It sustains an argument that while there are intrinsic problems with all ethical systems, ethical issues can to some extent be solved by developing people with the pragmatic skills to apply the virtues of their societies' ethical systems, and not by the simple application of any ethical system.

Level 7 – 30 marks