

Teacher Resource Bank

GCE Religious Studies

Unit 4A Topic I *Life, Death and Beyond*

Example of Candidate's Response



**GENERAL CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION
ADVANCED LEVEL**



**RELIGIOUS STUDIES UNIT 4A
Life, Death and Beyond**

RST4A

EXAMPLE OF CANDIDATE'S RESPONSE

For this paper you must have:

- a 12 page answer book.

Time allowed: 1 hour 30 minutes

Instructions

- Use black ink or 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 **RST4A**.
- Choose **one Section** only.
- Answer **one** question.

Information

- The maximum mark for this paper is 75.
- 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.

RST4A Topic I *Life, Death and Beyond*

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

(45 marks)

AO1

Candidate Response

Christians would tend to turn to their scriptures when they are considering the nature of human life. Many will first consider Genesis and the accounts in chapters one and two which refer to creation. In the case of Genesis one the account suggests that mankind was created in the image of God and that the creation of mankind was to put mankind in charge of the rest of the creation. A similar idea occurs in Genesis two but there is an additional idea that man and woman are to be united as husband and wife. Genesis three suggests that the nature of mankind is such that humans will by nature disobey God and the consequence of this disobedience is that mankind is thus separated from God, and also other features are established, like man must work for a living and women must suffer at child birth, these features also seem to have become part of mankind's nature. In the specifically Christian material, the New Testament, other aspects of human nature are expressed. Perhaps the most significant being that mankind does not seem to be able to recognise God and his work very easily, since Jesus is not recognised for who he really is. There is also a clear idea that whilst humans are not immortal nevertheless they have the capacity to survive bodily death, resurrection is introduced in the gospels and then developed in Paul's letters.

By contrast neither Judaism nor Islam see humans as being sinful by nature in the way that Christians do, and thus neither religion has any need to develop ideas about salvation in the way that Christianity does. In other religious traditions Buddhism is perhaps a good example of a different approach to the nature of humankind. In this case it seems that the human being by nature finds it difficult to realise and understand reality and thus often lives under illusions about the real circumstances and it is not until the human being begins to understand this and to find how to understand reality that the true human nature can be developed finally eliminating suffering by the denial of the self.

The secular world seems to have a variety of views about the nature of humankind, ranging from the idea that human beings are mortal and are not able to survive bodily death to the idea that there is indeed an element of the human being which can survive death, often referred to as the spirit. Many ideas in society seem to see that the human being is by nature selfish and that they must be taught and encouraged not to be. This selfishness is often related to the belief that humankind evolved from primitive life forms and that, like other elements of the world, the survival of the fittest according to the environment has led to the nature of the human being as we see it in the twenty-first century.

In many cases there is a relationship between what is regarded as the nature of humankind and the value of human life. Thus Christians regard human beings as created by God and human life as God's gift and thus they place high value on human life, murder is prohibited in the Ten Commandments. In some Christian traditions this has been extended to prohibit even legitimate killing like war and state execution. In some instances it has helped to inform Christians about ethical issues like abortion and euthanasia in both cases the view being that these too are murder and thus wrong. Both Judaism and Islam have a similar view of the significance of human life and in the case of the former this can extend as far as even any thing which has the potential for human life. Many other religions have a similar approach and thus, whilst not regarding human life as sacred, Buddhism does place high value on human life and indeed some aspects of Buddhism extend the value into all sentient beings all have this value since they are the vehicles for eventually realising true reality.

The secular world often also places an high value on the human life and similarly protects against murder, although it may often adopt a more utilitarian view towards those who threaten other lives allowing one death to be accepted for the sake of many others being prevented. In the western world the value of the individual is highly regarded whereas there are some eastern societies where this is not the case and it is rather the value of the whole, nation or population, which is significant and thus one might see this as a more explicit expression of the utilitarianism principle of the greatest good for the greatest number.

Commentary

An example of a candidate adopting a breadth approach to the question. The candidate is quite articulate and appears to be well informed. The material is tightly related to the question almost all the time, dealing with both nature and value, as demanded by the question. The fact that the response is not balanced across these two aspects does not matter. However, the examples and supporting material is not always sufficiently well developed to merit Level 7. For example, 'neither Judaism nor Islam see humans as being sinful...' this needs some supporting evidence, similarly later, 'Both Islam and Judaism have a similar view of the significance of human life...' once again there needs to be some reference to evidence for this statement.

Level 6 (38 marks)

- (b) **Assess how far it may be argued that religious perspectives on the nature and value of human life are outdated and outmoded, whereas the secular is a true reflection of the views the 21st century.**

(30 marks)

AO2

Candidate Response

There are two aspects to this assessment, the first being religious perspectives and whether they are outdated and outmoded and the second being whether the secular ideas really are a true reflection of the 21st century or whether, for example, religious perspectives are still very significant for people in the 21st century. For most religious people it is not very likely that they would regard the religious perspectives on either nature or the value of human life as either outdated or outmoded since they would often claim that the ideas about both are to be found in the scriptures. The scriptures are regarded as some form of revelation from God and since they are concerned with human nature this surely would not change no matter how much time passes between the revelation and the consideration. Thus to claim that the revelation is as true now as it was at the time of the revelation seems to be entirely justifiable. Many religious people will also adopt a similar approach when it comes to the value of human life, they will also see the religious perspective as rooted in some form of revelation from God. Issues which arise here for the religious person are more to do with understanding how the values set in the revelation can best be understood when faced with a present day dilemma. Thus there are no major religions which have any statement about what one should do with someone on a life support machine. This means that the religious person has to extrapolate from the revelation to determine whether turning off the life support system is, for example, murder or not. For many if it is murder then it cannot happen. Often a religion then in its teachings seek to redefine the human being almost reassessing some ideas about the nature of the human being and so we see some claiming that there is such a thing as brain dead by which they understand that there is no traceable brain activity and thus although the body is kept going the person is dead and so turning off the life support system is not murder and thus can be permitted. Thus we can see that there are certain underlying principles which most religions will adhere to and then they will apply these to new circumstances not envisaged at the time the principles were established. The authority of the principles almost always based upon revelation from God. Of course there may be different understandings, in Christianity there are certainly very different ideas about what exactly it means to say the humankind is in God's image. Some see this as meaning that human kind is according to God's intention, whereas others argue for the divine spark being alive in each human being. Others seek to embrace the concept of evolution and thus see the human being having evolved and not being specially created at all but even here there are ideas that evolution can be seen as an unfolding of God's intentions.

Secular views clearly cannot be said to be a true reflection of views of the 21st century since they do not take into account religious perspectives and we know that there are a large number of people through the 21st century who practise religion. Many would also want to maintain that secular ideas about both the nature and the value, but more especially the value of human life are strongly founded upon religious perspectives. The most obvious would be not to murder which exists in almost all societies, even the most secular. Even where we can see the secular society developing new concepts they often appear to have some foundation in a religious idea. Thus evolutionary theories have led some to claim that man is simply another animal and thus all creatures should be treated with the same respect, hence the vegetarian movement. It is possible to see that the principle of this easily sits within Buddhism. Of course where religion is rejected it is not unreasonable to argue that the secular views are a true reflection of the 21st century whether these views arise from religion or not is largely irrelevant.

Perhaps the greatest contrast between the secular and the religious views of the nature of the human being is the issue of immortality and life after death. Whilst there may be some secular thinkers who accept some concept of immortality the majority do not and thus they do indeed have an entirely different view of the nature of the human being from the religious perspective. On this particular issue the question about truth becomes impossible to resolve and thus one might be forced to adopt Pascal's wager.

In conclusion the picture is far more complex than implied by the question, for religious people there are few doubts that any revelation from God about mankind and its nature and value holds today the same truth as it did at the time of the revelation. For those in the secular world whether the ideas might be rooted in religion or not is largely irrelevant those who have thought about the nature and the value of human life clearly do believe that whatever view they hold is true since the majority of people like to maintain that whatever they believe is true and if not for all at least for themselves.

Commentary

Again, a well written response which is carefully focused upon the question and there is a sound discussion about religious perspectives and whether they are outdated / moded. The candidate seeks to deal with both nature and with value and demonstrates a sound understanding of the relationship between the two.

However, the more difficult 'secular' is not so well established before the debate about whether the secular is a true reflection of the views of the 21st century. Thus, the conclusion has not been well established earlier in the essay and would need more depth to it in this case to merit a higher level.

Level 5 (23 marks)