

Religious studies

Answers and commentaries A-level (7062)

Component 1: Philosophy of religion and ethics

Marked answers from students for questions from the June 2022 exams. Supporting commentary is provided to help you understand how marks are awarded and how students can improve performance.

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Answers and commentaries

This resource is to be used alongside the A-level Religious Studies Paper 1 Philosophy of Religion and Ethics June 2022 Question paper.

10 mark question (AO1) mark scheme

Levels of response: 10 marks A-level – AO1	
Level 5 9-10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge and critical understanding is accurate, relevant and fully developed in breadth and depth with very good use of detailed and relevant evidence which may include textual/scriptural reference where appropriate. Where appropriate, good knowledge and understanding of the diversity of views and/or scholarly opinion is demonstrated. Clear and coherent presentation of ideas with precise use of the appropriate subject vocabulary.
Level 4 7-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge and critical understanding is accurate and mostly relevant with good development in breadth and depth shown through good use of relevant evidence which may include textual/scriptural references where appropriate. Where appropriate, alternative views and/or scholarly opinion are explained. Mostly clear and coherent presentation of ideas with good use of the appropriate subject vocabulary.
Level 3 5-6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge and critical understanding is generally accurate and relevant with development in breadth and/or depth shown through some use of evidence and/or examples which may include textual/scriptural references where appropriate. Where appropriate, there is some familiarity with the diversity of views and/or scholarly opinion. Some organisation of ideas and coherence with reasonable use of the appropriate subject vocabulary.
Level 2 3-4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge and critical understanding is limited, with limited development in breadth and/or depth shown through limited use of evidence and/or examples which may include textual/scriptural references where appropriate. Where appropriate, limited reference may be made to alternative views and/or scholarly opinion. Limited organisation of ideas and coherence and use of subject vocabulary.

Level 1 1-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge and critical understanding is basic with little or no development. There may be a basic awareness of alternative views and/or scholarly opinion. • Isolated elements of accurate and relevant information and basic use of appropriate subject vocabulary.
0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No accurate or relevant material to credit.

15 mark question (AO2) mark scheme

Levels of response: 15 marks A-level – AO2	
Level 5 13-15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A very well-focused response to the issue(s) raised. • Perspective discussion of different views, including, where appropriate, those of scholars or schools of thought with critical analysis. • There is an appropriate evaluation fully supported by the reasoning. • Precise use of the appropriate subject vocabulary.
Level 4 10-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A well-focused response to the issues(s) raised. • Different views are discussed, including, where appropriate, those of scholars or schools of thought, with some critical analysis. • There is an appropriate evaluation supported by the reasoning. • Good use of the appropriate subject vocabulary.
Level 3 7-9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A general response to the issue(s) raised. • Different views are discussed, including, where appropriate, those of scholars or schools of thought. • An evaluation is made that is consistent with some of the reasoning. • Reasonable use of the appropriate subject vocabulary.
Level 2 4-6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A limited response to the issue(s) raised. • Presentation of a point of view relevant to the issue with some supporting evidence and argument. • Limited attempt at the appropriate use of subject vocabulary.
Level 1 1-3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A basic response to the issue(s) raised. • A point of view is stated, with some evidence or reason(s) in support. • Some attempt at the appropriate use of subject vocabulary.
0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No accurate or relevant material to credit.

Philosophy of Religion

10 mark question (AO1)

Question 2.1

Examine both realist and anti-realist understandings of miracles.

[10 marks]

Mark scheme

Please refer to mark scheme on [page 3 for levels of response](#).

Target: AO1.1: Knowledge and understanding of religion and belief including religious, philosophical and ethical thought and teaching.

Note: This content is indicative rather than prescriptive and students are not obliged to refer to all the material contained in the mark scheme. Any legitimate answer will be assessed on its merits according to the generic levels of response.

Realist understandings of miracles hold that miracles are a real part of what happens in the world. They are brought about by God, or somebody empowered by God, such as great religious figures in history. Miracles are seen as evidence of God's existence and of God's care for the world. Further, a realist holds that these things are true despite the fact that people do not understand everything about miracles, such as how they relate to the laws of nature.

Anti-realist understandings of miracles reject realist understandings on the grounds that people can have no knowledge of a world that is independent of their minds, so what some class as a miracle by God is just their interpretation of what has happened. Miracles are events that lift the spirit or transform a community of people. When anti-realists talk about miracles, they are saying something about the state of their minds, and are not making a claim about the event itself.

Realists may, for example, understand extraordinary coincidences of a beneficial nature as miracles brought about by God. Realists often see such acts as violations of natural law. David Hume takes a realist approach to miracles and uses it to insist that miracles do not happen. The anti-realist approach of Maurice Wiles understands miracles as being about the fight against evil: miracles are events from which people learn something about God's intentions for the world.

Maximum Level 3 if only one aspect is covered.

Student responses

Response A

Realists understand miracles to be events which violate natural laws. Hume, a realist, suggested that a miracle should be defined as "a violation of a natural law by a particular deity". This means that miracles can be understood as occurrences which break the laws of nature and are willed by God. A miracle that can be seen to meet this definition would be in Exodus 14, in which the Red Sea is parted so that the Israelites can escape the Egyptian. Swinburne builds upon this with a similar definition, with the addition that the miracle must have a religious impact. He argued that a feather landing in a specific spot on the ground that was willed by God is not a miracle as there is no religious impact. ~~And~~ furthermore, Aquinas goes into depth by outlining 3 ways in which God is able to intervene and break laws of nature: doing something that naturally could not be done, something against the order of nature and something against the speed.

Anti-realists understand miracles to be natural events. Holland argued that miracles are coincidences taken to have deeper meaning, which is similar to Tillich's definition: "a sign taken to have religious significance". Holland uses an analogy to explain his definition. The analogy tells of a woman who watches her son playing on train tracks with a train coming towards him. She is not close enough to reach him and fears for his life, however, the train driver as a heart attack which leads to an emergency stop. Although this was likely a coincidence, the mother interprets it as a miracle due to the heightened emotions she felt.

Religious realists understand miracles to reveal information about God's character. For example, miraculous healings show God to be interventionist and loving. This also offers

them support for the faith as prayers are answered and biblical miracles can be recognised as truth. Anti-realists, on the other hand, do not hold the same objective understanding of God so believe the qualities revealed supposedly from God, like benevolence, are actually qualities religious people should strive towards having in themselves.

This is a Level 5 response

This is a well-focused response to the question asked. The answer provides a clear and coherent examination of realist and anti-realist understandings of miracles. Knowledge and critical understanding is accurate, relevant and developed. The development is supported by appropriate use of exemplification and clear reference to scholarly opinion. With further development of either the realist views of Hume against miracles, and/or the anti-realist views of Wiles, the answer could be awarded full marks. As it stands, the answer meets the criteria for the threshold of Level 5 = 9 marks, rather than sitting at the top of Level 4.

9 marks

Response B

Realists and anti-Realists both have different understandings of miracles. Realists believe that miracles are real events and are God's way of interacting with the world, they believe Biblical miracles such as the virgin birth are literal events. Whereas, anti-Realists believe miracles should be seen as symbolic and not be taken literal as they're not real events.

Hume was an anti-realist, he rejected the idea that miracles are real events and there is no way God would intervene with the world. He believes that Biblical miracles such as the virgin birth should be seen as symbolic and not to be taken literally.

Hume was a realist, who understood miracles to be real events, Hume's definition of a miracle involves 'a transgression of the law of nature, a violation by the ~~the~~ deity or by the interposition of an invisible agent. Therefore, for Hume, a miracle is beyond and violates the natural law, caused by God (the deity) or by an invisible agent, which would involve an angel. Hume believes miracles are real, however, he rejects the idea one has happened yet, this is because he believes there are no number of witnesses that would be able to confirm a miracle. This is because it is always more likely the witness is lying, additionally if the witness experience contradicts one another, this is likely as miracles are subjective.

This is a Level 3 response

This is a typical example of a midrange response to the question asked. Knowledge and critical understanding is generally accurate and relevant and there is an attempt at some development of realist and anti-realist views. The opening paragraph correctly identifies the two differing understandings of miracles in a general way. The second paragraph attempts some development to explain the anti-realist position with reference to Maurice Wiles. The final paragraph focuses on Hume's realist approach against miracles again with some development. To get into the next level, Level 4, there would need to be greater development of both understandings of miracles, and greater exemplification. As it stands the response constitutes more than a limited response, the criteria for Level 2, and thus sits at Level 3.

6 marks

Response C

Miracles are things that are impossible which are made possible as a one off feat for example Jesus feeding of the 5000 or even him walking on water. Both realist and anti realist have opposing views.

To start realists believe in miracles, miracles don't happen often but they do happen thousands and thousands of miracles happened since start of earth, miracles could even include somebody being told they would never

walk again next thing you know they are walking again.

However anti realist do not believe in miracles they just think it's luck or they have an outrageous definition of a miracle that cannot be lived up to expectation.

In conclusion both realists and anti realists understand miracles just in very different ways one believes in miracles as the other does not.

This is a Level 1 response

This is a basic response to the question set. Knowledge and critical understanding is basic and there is no relevant development. The answer does not provide an 'examination' of either understanding of miracles. The concept of miracle is stated in the opening paragraph as is the idea of differing understandings from realist and anti-realist positions. Subsequent paragraphs provide little more than a basic summary of these positions. The final paragraph merely repeats the simple points that have already been made. The response is a statement of two simple summary points and therefore Level 1.

2 marks

15 mark question (AO2)

Question 2.2

'The falsification principle shows that religious language is meaningless.'

Evaluate this claim.

[15 marks]

Mark scheme

Please refer to mark scheme on [page 4 for levels of response](#).

Target: AO2: Analyse and evaluate aspects of, and approaches to, religion and belief, including their significance, influence and study.

Note: This content is indicative rather than prescriptive and students are not obliged to refer to all the material contained in the mark scheme. Any legitimate answer will be assessed on its merits according to the generic levels of response.

Note that answers may, but need not, be limited to the consideration of the following specification content: The challenge of the falsification principle to the meaningfulness of religious language; responses to these challenges.

The falsification principle claims that meaningful language must be falsifiable in principle. Since religious statements are about a metaphysical/heavenly realm there can be no evidence against them, so they are in principle unfalsifiable and therefore meaningless. However, a religious believer can argue that all claims about the universe are metaphysical, including scientific claims, so falsificationism fails its own test because there is no evidence to count against it.

Falsificationists claim that religious believers will allow nothing to falsify their beliefs: they ignore or qualify every factual challenge to their claim that 'God is love', for example, by saying that God's love is different to human love, but in effect this makes such claims meaningless. However, Hare rejects this by arguing that religious claims are non-cognitive 'Bliks'; Bliks are deeply meaningful to those who have them but are not factual claims, so the falsificationist challenge is irrelevant.

Falsificationists may argue that unless religion ultimately asserts something factual, then its claims are meaningless. For example, the Parable of the Gardener illustrates this: an invisible, intangible, eternally elusive God is in effect no different from no God at all. However, believers can reply with reference to Wittgenstein's language game theory that meaning is governed by use, and religious statements are ultimately meaningful for those who adopt the religious language game.

Student responses

Response A

For the falsification principle^(FP) to show religious language to be meaningless, both religious language and meaningless must be defined. For religious language, it must be examined if the FP can remove meaning from both cognitive and non-cognitive language and for meaningless, it should be determined if meaning is understood from a scientific or emotional sense. From this, it should be determined that the FP is not successful in showing religious language to be meaningless.

The falsification principle attacks statements such as "God is loving" for being unfalsifiable, meaning that there is never a hypothesis provided for what may disprove God's existence. This is because, as Flew argued, religious people reshape their understanding of God in the face of contrasting evidence, leading their belief to die a "death of a thousand qualifications". However, this is because Flew misunderstands religious language to be cognitive and objective, whilst Hare argues it is non-cognitive. Hare argues that religious language is an expression of a *blik*, meaning a deeply held worldview which shapes our perception of events. This means that religion becomes subjective, as what one person may perceive as God, another may not. This means that the FP can only target cognitive statements as meaningless, which does not cover the wide scope of religious language.

The FP's misunderstanding of religious language is

best understood through the fact that he takes a scientific approach to religious language. Using Popper's understanding of how the inability to ~~code~~ ~~hypothesise~~ contradictory evidence makes something a science, Flew criticises religious language. However, this is a misplaced criticism for something so emotionally charged, as illustrated by the parable of the Partisan. The partisan tells of a partisan who reveals himself to be part of a rebel force, yet after his actions contradicts his claims. However, due to the emotion of the situation, any contrasting evidence is ignored in favour of trust. This emotional connection is also present in religious language. Tillich argued that religious language should be understood as symbolic, meaning that it points to a reality it participates in. This can be found in baptism as the submergence in water is a symbol for the cleansing of sin and joining in the Kingdom of God. Thus, the power of language is shown to be highly emotionally charged. However, as Flew attacks it through the need for hypothesis testing, it is clear that Flew misunderstands religious language and cannot make it meaningless. Presence of new interpretations of religious language like Tillich's also suggests that people have failed to take note of Flew's criticisms of "the death of a thousand qualifications", further weakening his argument.

To conclude, the falsification principle is not able to show that religious language is meaningless. This is because Flew has a poor understanding of religious language. He fails to recognise that the language goes beyond cognitive statements and the emotional connection required, meaning that his criticisms fall short of having any impact on those who use religious language and the continued use of religious language shows it to have retained its meaning despite the falsification principle.

This is a Level 5 response

This is a very well-focused response to the issue raised in the question. It provides a perceptive discussion of differing views and accurate reference to a variety of scholarship with good development. There is evidence of critical analysis throughout the answer. The evaluation made is also fully supported by the reasoning evident throughout the answer. There is also precise and mature use of appropriate subject vocabulary. The answer meets all the criteria for a top Level 5.

15 marks

Response B

Falsification principle by Anthony Flew is aimed at trying to explain if a statement or experience is meaningful or meaningless. One argument against this is that the idea of a 'blik' world. Mary argues that religious language means different to everyone, so to some it would be meaningful and to others it wouldn't. One principle couldn't ~~decide~~ decide if something is meaningful or not.

Similarly, John Hick argued that religious language doesn't have one meaning and is universal. This would argue against Flew's falsification principle because RL is different to everyone.

Falsification principle argues that as long as we can understand the errors within RL we can recognise its meaning. For example, the parable of the gardener argues that religious people struggle to recognise the errors within their arguments which make it meaningless because they won't entertain any idea besides God, this links to the idea of death by a thousand qualifications, you have to recognise the wrong elements to the statement otherwise you're giving your response already.

Wittgenstein would argue that to be able to falsify or verify a statement you must understand what the statement means. He talks about language games and the idea of RL being a game, like any game you must be able to understand it to use it. Without it being understood it becomes meaningless. However, many ~~religious~~ evangelical Christians would argue that what the Bible says goes, that is the truth

to them so they wouldn't see it as a game.

A similar idea to Wittgenstein is Tillich. Tillich argues that religious language is meaningful because it is symbolic. He argued that like Hice says there is one meaning, he argues that it's simply symbolic for religious people. However some would argue that the idea of the strong and weak principle makes it easier to ~~verify~~ justify a religious statement. They break it down and look at it from different perspectives.

In conclusion, it's difficult to say if the falsification principle can show religious language is meaningless because religious language means different things to different people. Tillich has the best response because it can be symbolic for people for different reasons.

This is a Level 3 response

This is a general response to the issue raised by the question. The answer provides some accurate evidence of differing views and there is some discussion of various scholarship which is mostly relevant and accurate. This makes the answer more than a 'limited response' and places it above the criteria for Level 2. There is an attempt at an evaluation consistent with some of the reasoning. However, the response lacks any critical analysis and is not 'a well-focused response to the issue raised,' so it does not meet the criteria required for Level 4. The answer is therefore a Level 3 response and it sits at the lower end of that level.

7 marks

Response C

The falsification theory shows that religious language is meaningless. In this essay I will try to explain religious language and maybe why it's meaningless.

~~to~~ ~~say~~ On one hand religious language may be viewed as meaningless. This is because language as a whole doesn't mean too much. For example in the English language words can have multiple spellings or meanings like here, their, or here, hear therefore language could be seen as meaningless. This is seen as ball game theory. There are lots of ball games but all have different rules, they are all called ball games. So how do you determine

which is which. Symbols and pictures are way more important as with language you picture what people say but what you picture could be completely different to what they picture, this is why there are fights and arguments because language can be misinterpreted and while symbols and pictures can't. This is the argument for religious language is meaningless.

On the other hand religious language may also be useful as religious language creates pictures or symbols for example if somebody said the cross or Jesus, pretty much everybody would imagine the same picture in their heads, this is caused by religious language.

In conclusion religious language is on the both useful and also not, I think it sways more to the fact of it being meaningless therefore agreeing with the statement as language is always being misinterpreted leading to unnecessary conflict.

This is a Level 1 response

This is a basic response to the issue raised by the question; a point of view is made with some basic evidence in support. No understanding of the falsification principle is evident and there is no attempt to engage with it or make an evaluation of it. What is here is very general and basic. The opening paragraph merely restates the statement about the falsification principle and adds nothing to the answer. The second and longest paragraph is confused. There is some evidence of vaguely relevant and creditable material in the penultimate paragraph by way of general reference to symbols as a form of language with meaning.

2 marks

Ethics

10 mark question (AO1)

Question 4.1

Examine the approaches of libertarianism and hard determinism to free will.

[10 marks]

Mark scheme

Please refer to mark scheme on [page 3 for levels of response](#).

Target: AO1.4: Knowledge and understanding of religion and belief, including approaches to the study of religion and belief.

Note: This content is indicative rather than prescriptive and students are not obliged to refer to all the material contained in the mark scheme. Any legitimate answer will be assessed on its merits according to the generic levels of response.

Libertarianism is the view that human beings are free moral agents. This approach is usually taken by mind-body dualists who hold the Cartesian view that the mind is a separate substance which interacts with the brain to enable free decisions for thought, action and morality. By contrast, hard determinists generally agree that there is only one substance, and this substance is material: the brain is a physical structure which produces the mind, so all thought must be physically determined.

Libertarians do not assume that humans are completely free, since heredity, social situation and the physical environment incline people to act in some ways rather than in others. Nevertheless, behaviour is not compelled by external causes, and humans are essentially free. Scientific hard determinism assumes the opposite: free will is an illusion produced by brain processes. Psychological hard determinism holds that all behaviour is conditioned by genetic and environmental conditions.

Libertarians generally hold that free will is necessary for society to function, since if determinism is true, then it would seem pointless to punish or reward people for what they cannot avoid doing. Psychological determinists may argue that free will is an illusion, so people should be conditioned to avoid behaviours that have bad consequences, and to repeat behaviour where the results are beneficial.

Maximum Level 3 if only one aspect is covered.

Student responses

Response A

Libertarianism holds that humans are rational beings that do not have determined forces acting upon us, subsequently we do have free will and have moral responsibility. Libertarians are often Descartian in their views where by the body and the soul are separate substances. Morality and free will are non-causal according to libertarians. Henceforth all humans are moral agents with ability of rational deliberation which exemplify that we have free will. This belief is exemplified by our emotions of guilt that show we are rational and capable of reason. The libertarian does accept there are limitations to our free will such as our psychology or social limitations. We also have physical limitations such as running a mile in 3 seconds. However, outside of these limitations we are completely free to decide our actions and must be held accountable for such. Kant was a believer in libertarianism in his famous account "Ought implies can". As we feel we ought to do something it implies we are free will tells us we have the ability to do something.

On the contrary, hard determinism is the belief that humans have no free will as everything is determined by forces that are out of our control. Reductionism, a form of hard determinism, holds that to understand a complex identity, it must be reduced to its most basic components. In the case of humans then, actions are due to emotions which is controlled by the chemical reactions in the brain which are then influenced by electrical impulses. As a result, if we are reduced to only our electrical impulses we are then ^{accountable} a ~~total~~ of nothing. Spinoza suggested that determinism means the 'feeling of free will' is just ignorance as we are unaware of the forces acting against us. Theological determinism holds that God predetermined the destiny of us all, therefore as he has the foreknowledge,

no human has free will but are going through the missions God established for us. This is seen in the quote from Calvin that some of us are "eternally ordained for glory" whilst others ~~are~~ "ordained for eternal torment". This demonstrates that we do not have free will. Scientific determinism holds that there is a chain of causality that goes back to the Big Bang which means we have no sense of free will. Psychological determinism was formulated by B.F. Skinner to illustrate that we have no free will and are the products of our genetics and the environment we grew up around. Henceforth we have no free will as we have no influence on either. Subsequently humans do not have free will. This contradicts libertarianist and other views of free will in all aspects.

This is a Level 5 response

This answer deals with both aspects of the question in a clear and developed way. The knowledge and critical understanding shown is relevant, accurate and well developed with clear and accurate reference to a diversity of views and scholarly opinion (for example the references to Descartes, Spinoza and Calvin). This answer provides a good examination of both aspects of the question. It is, for the most part, fully developed in breadth and depth and supported by accurate use of relevant evidence and exemplification.

9 marks

Response B

One form of hard determinism is that of scientific determinism. Like all forms of hard determinism, scientific determinism centres around the idea that we do not have free will due to previous events determining our future. Scientific determinism uses the example of the Cosmic Microwave Background to suggest that the universe itself is a long string of causes and their effects. The CMB was a discovery that allowed scientists to see radiation left over from the Big Bang which in turn allowed scientists to deduce that the radiation from the universe ~~is~~ could be reversed and then restarted again but would ultimately result in the exact same events occurring. Thus, if the universe itself is a reasonable string of causes and effect then our determinism must be too, meaning there is no way we can have free will.

Theological determinism is another form of hard determinism which centres around the idea of predestination. This

theory was made by St. Augustine and centred on the idea that God has already decided who is going to be damned and who will be saved. This was linked to the belief of the God of Classical Theism, who was omniscient which meant he could know everything, supposedly that he could see all time at once. If God can see all time at once then we can not truly be free as He already knows what's going to happen to us because he can see it all. There is no free will if God already knows what will

happen to us,
 * Psychological determinism – Pavlov's dogs – operant and classical conditioning
 Libertarianism is the belief that we are truly free. Even if our free will is a mere illusion created by our subconscious, it is such a complex illusion that we might as well be as free as we believe ourselves to be. The ability to say we would have made a different choice if we could go back to that decision proves we have free will.

This is a Level 3 response

The answer is generally accurate and relevant. However, there is greater understanding of hard determinism shown compared to libertarianism. There is some valid development of both scientific and theological determinism. The section on libertarianism is weaker and would require more development for the answer to reach the next level. Both aspects of the question are covered thus the answer is more than a limited response and goes above Level 2.

6 marks

Response C

Free Will is talked about a lot in religion some believe we have it while others don't.

Libertarianism are open to believe that every single one of us has free will, they believe God gave us our own free will, we can make choices how we want an example of this is when Adam and Eve choose to eat the fruit off the tree previously told not to eat off. This shows we have free will because if we didn't then why did God let it happen or punish them if he knows they can't help it.

Hard determinism on the other hand believe against free will arguing for that everybody is controlled, an example of this is God's all knowing therefore he knows what we will do next. If God knows our future how do we have free will to make a choice.

In conclusion both arguments work however they both rely on the existence of God.

This is a Level 2 response

This answer just meets the criteria for limited rather than a basic response, so goes beyond Level 1. It is an example of an answer that sits on the borderline of Level 1 and Level 2. The lower mark of Level 2 was awarded. Both aspects of the question are dealt with but in a very limited and superficial way. There is only limited knowledge and critical understanding evident and a very limited development of either aspect.

3 marks

15 mark question (AO2)

Question 4.2

'Virtue ethics is not a good way of making moral decisions.'

Evaluate this claim.

[15 marks]

Mark scheme

Please refer to mark scheme on [page 4 for levels of response](#).

Target: AO2: Analyse and evaluate aspects of, and approaches to, religion and belief, including their significance, influence and study.

Note: This content is indicative rather than prescriptive and students are not obliged to refer to all the material contained in the mark scheme. Any legitimate answer will be assessed on its merits according to the generic levels of response.

Note that answers may, but need not, be limited to the consideration of the following specification content: virtue ethics with reference to Aristotle.

Some argue that virtue ethics gives no real guidance on matters of right and wrong. Other ethical theories, such as natural moral law, have clear rules and principles to follow. Those who prefer this type of ethics are left in no doubt as to what they should do. However, virtue ethics does have helpful guidelines of a different kind. For example, people can copy the behaviour of the wisest people in a community. People can also follow the doctrine of the mean.

Some argue that virtue ethics is not good at dealing with modern moral issues, particularly those to do with medicine. For example, virtue ethics finds it difficult to decide what is virtuous in relation to voluntary euthanasia and assisted suicide. However, some moral theories may give advice that could be inappropriate, for example by forbidding voluntary euthanasia, whereas virtue ethics could allow voluntary euthanasia in some situations.

Virtue ethics can be criticised on the grounds that the virtues can conflict with each other. For example, situations often arise in which it is not clear whether it is better to be honest with somebody or to be kind. Also, virtues can differ between societies. However, others think that it is possible to develop a broad set of virtues to include all people, for example a concept of what makes all humans flourish. A set of virtues of this kind may be seen as absolute, giving clear guidance.

Student responses

Response A

Virtue ethics was established by philosopher Aristotle who formulated the argument as a guide of sorts to make just moral decisions and develop virtuous character.

Many who take a Thomist approach to ethics may agree with the statement as they believe that a deontological system for moral behaviour is the most suitable for making moral decisions. Natural Moral Law was formulated by St Aquinas as a way to reach telos - union with God while also achieving ~~a sense~~ of eudaimonia. Aquinas established 5 primary precepts to ensure self-preservation is fulfilled which allows an individual to achieve eudaimonia. One of which includes the "Preservation of Life" as a result, the secondary precepts - what to do to fulfil the primary precept - include the prohibition of abortion, contraception or masturbation. On the contrary a virtue ethicist may agree that this system is too rigid and lacks the application of key virtues to a situation. One virtue that Aquinas speaks

of is wisdom or prudence. To apply wisdom to this situation would allow the secondary laws to be broken. For instance, using contraception is a vital preventative method against AIDS and HIV in ~~Africa~~ sub-Saharan Africa. Aristotle believed that application of the 4 cardinal virtues is vital in moral decision making. These include temperance, prudence, fortitude and justice. Without these, a virtuous character is difficult to develop, hence moral decision making becomes vague and unswable.

~~Contrary~~ Contrary to the statement, many virtue ethicists may disagree with the statement as virtue ethics is a good way of making moral dilemmas. Virtue ethics is a holistic approach to decision making, evident in the quote "We are what we repeatedly do, excellence then, is not an act but a habit". Therefore a virtue ethicist would look at a situation holistically to decide what the best method is. To decide morality, Aristotle proposed the "Function Argument" whereby something is 'good' if it fulfils a function. With reference to the hierarchy of souls, humans are rational, reasoning beings with rational and non rational souls. Therefore, the best virtue is that of contemplation. Theoria is the virtue of scientific contemplation that allows an agent to make reasoned decisions based on rationality. Henceforth, virtue ethics is a good way of making moral decisions, as it allows an individual to contemplate what the best moral decision is based on the most virtuous outcome. Phronimos are people in a community that are considered highly virtuous. Therefore seeking advice from them is the most virtuous thing to do.

However, the question arises; What is virtue? Who decides what is virtuous? How do they decide in a moral dilemma. In Nazi Germany, many Nazi's believed they were virtuous because they did their duty, regardless of the abhorrent atrocities they inflicted. As a result, virtue ethics is too vague in its understanding of morality. This goes back to the argument for deontological systems as the best form. Maybe deontological systems provide clearer understanding for moral decisions such as Kant's categorical imperative that deals in absolutes is a better alternative to subjective virtue ethics.

Virtue ethics

In saying that, Aristotle may point to ~~be~~ the system Aristotle established to clarify what is truly virtuous. Aristotle formulated the "Doctrine of the Mean" to highlight the best approach to ~~ethics~~ virtue to ensure people have a clear guide on how to act when faced with moral dilemmas. The Doctrine of the Mean holds that every virtue has a "Vice of Excess [...]" and Vice of Deficiency" as stated in his book *Nicomachean Ethics*. In this, agents are able a golden mean that ~~is~~ representative virtuous behaviour. This is seen in the case where Aristotle uses Courage. The vice of courage in deficiency is cowardice and recklessness in excess. Aristotle refers to the case of courage in a burning building. It would be reckless to charge in with no help to save someone and cowardice to walk away and do nothing. To truly be virtuous would be to call for assistance and then see what would be of best help.

However
 In saying that, not everyone is equipped with an innate sense of perfect morality so it would be difficult to decide what is just or right in every situation. Therefore regardless of how useful the doctrine of the mean is, it may be useless to some individuals.

In conclusion, I believe that virtue ethics is a good way of making moral decisions as it encourages individuals to take an introspective look at the moral dilemma and what best way to act whilst developing character to reach eudaimonia. In doing this, Aristotle has exemplified key cardinal virtues that should lead to the best outcome in a given moral dilemma, henceforth I disagree with the Statement.

This is a Level 5 response

This answer provides a very well-focussed response to the issues raised. There is a perceptive discussion of a variety of views and there is clear evidence of critical analysis. The answer provides an accurate discussion of virtue ethics and makes valid and relevant comparisons with other ethical systems. There is good exemplification of ideas which are used appropriately. The evaluation made is fully supported by the reasoning evident throughout the answer.

14 marks

Response B

Virtue ethics is not a good way of making moral decisions. Aristotle believed that achieving eudaimonia was the final telos (goal) he believed eudaimonia was which is ultimate happiness was the best outcome for every decision. Whilst this may be seen as a strong argument in some moral dilemmas this can be seen as a bad way of making moral decisions. Let's use an example of stealing. If you really wanted a car and you stole a car Aristotle would deem this acceptable as having a car would be on the way to achieving eudaimonia for you - forgetting that it had been stolen. This can conclude the fact that virtue ethics is not a good way of making moral decisions as it focuses primarily on the person and not on the actual action itself.

Natural moral law can be seen as a good way for making moral decisions and in particular the primary and secondary precepts. The primary precepts are to preserve life, keep an ordered society, worship God, educate offspring and also reproduce they tell us what our God given purposes are in life and therefore tell us how to make moral decisions. The secondary precepts are derived from the primary precepts and they give us in more detail what is right and wrong - examples of secondary precepts can be do not murder as it goes against the primary precept of preserving life and another example of ~~the~~ a secondary precept can be having an abortion as it goes against Aquinas' primary precept of reproduction. Aquinas' Natural moral law can be seen as a good way of making moral decisions as it is very easy to understand it has a ~~clear~~ simpler approach to how we should deal with moral decisions. Another feature of Aquinas' Natural Moral Law ~~is~~ ^{is} the

Syncretism which is to 'do good and avoid evil' this is also very easy to follow and therefore a good way of making moral decisions.

However, you could also say that virtue ethics is a good way of making moral decisions. With Aristotle having virtues it shows that in some circumstances there are extremes. You can also look at the virtues and the 12 ^{cardinal virtues} ~~main ones~~ e.g. faithfulness, truth, trust etc.. If you are to follow these virtues then it could be seen as a good way of making moral decisions as following the virtues would make you a good person and that would therefore make you a better at making moral decisions. However, it is extremely rare that someone would possess all 12 cardinal virtues so trying to follow all of the virtues may not be the best approach.

In conclusion I agree that virtue ethics isn't a good way of making moral decisions. This is primarily because the end goal of eudaimonia would just mean that it's acceptable to do whatever makes you happy. Also virtue ethics doesn't focus on making moral decisions. Its focus is more to do with your character not how to approach moral decisions.

This is a Level 3 response

This is a general response to the issue raised by the question. Different views about the issue are discussed, contrasting virtue ethics with natural moral law. There is an attempt at some development of each of these views. There is a vagueness about the understanding of virtue ethics compared to the contrasting understanding of natural moral law. The answer also lacks any critical analysis. The evaluation in the final paragraph is consistent with some of the reasoning shown in the answer. This is a typical example of a low mid-range response to an AO2 question, there are different views stated and there is some attempt at developing them.

7 marks

Response C

In this essay I am going to write about both virtue and situation ethics arguing for and against the statement that virtue ethics is not a good way of making moral decisions.

In virtue ethics it is difficult to make a rule set as it is based on individuals and everybody has different morals and rules that they follow for example one person might think killing someone is right while another doesn't but virtue ethics means that's okay because that's what they thought was morally correct.

However virtue ethics could ~~not~~ however be good because it can make you a better person therefore making better decisions and ultimately becoming a better human being.

However a good rulebook to follow for moral decision making could be either situation or natural moral law. Situation ethics is based off the situation you're in and what brings the most loving outcome (AGAPE). Natural moral law is also very good as it has the precepts and specific rules to follow.

In conclusion I think that the best ethical route to follow would be natural moral law as you get a straightforward rub book to follow.

This is a Level 2 response

This answer is best described as a limited, rather than a basic response to the issue raised by the question, therefore goes above Level 1. The knowledge and understanding demonstrated is weak but there is some creditable material. The first paragraph makes a simplistic presentation of a point of view relevant to the question asked. The second paragraph is extremely confused but there is some very limited relevance to the point of view stated. There is very limited attempt to offer some contrasting evidence in the third paragraph; "... because it can make you a better person...". The penultimate and final paragraphs return to the point of view expressed at the start.

4 marks

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