

My Revision Notes: AQA A2 Religious Studies: Religion and Ethics and Philosophy of Religion**Unit 3A Religion and Ethics****1 Libertarianism, free will and determinism**

(a) Explain the idea that human beings have free will. (30 marks)

Free will is about having the individual freedom to decide one's destiny. Are we really responsible for our own choices in life or is there a causally dependent destiny for us that we cannot escape?

If we do not have freedom of choice, then how can we be to blame for our actions and the decisions that we make? This leads many thinkers to assume that if we blame or praise people for actions they freely and knowingly undertake, then it is vital for human beings to have freedom to act. The very basis of morality is dependent upon freedom. As Kant (1724–1804) suggested, if there is an 'ought' to our behaviour then there also needs to be a 'can do' to it. A moral obligation or duty implies that this is possible to exercise.

There are three positions to consider in the debate about free will. Firstly, hard determinism argues that every event has a cause or many causes and therefore the idea of freedom of the will is impossible. We only think that we have free will because we are not aware of all the causes of our actions. Soft determinism or compatibilism, however, argues that although we may be determined by some factors such as our genes and environment we can still function as free moral agents. This position proposes that true free will needs an element of determinism otherwise everything would be too random or down to chance. Finally, it is with libertarianism that we see the true idea that human beings are totally free. It argues that we cannot really establish any truth to determinism because our own experiences dictate that we make free choices. It is only this freedom that can make sense of moral responsibility. It is reason and the will that supersede the physical element of causality and belong to the metaphysical realm.

Christians have often disagreed about the role of free will. St Augustine, whose thought influenced much of later theology, maintained the absolute rule of God over human will. He suggests that God does this by creating an infinite store of motives and the correlating foreknowledge of those to which the will of each human being would freely consent. According to Roman Catholic teaching, human beings cannot have total freedom due to their lack of knowledge of the whole; freedom is simply an elective power of the will through reason.

Martin Luther believed that sin has so clouded the human mind that our free will is severely restricted and that only by grace can we turn to God. He frankly stated that free will is a fiction, as humanity is bound to helplessness and slavery.

John Calvin (1509–1564) proposed we are totally predestined. For Calvin, God's preordination destroys the idea of free will, since human beings can perform no good act unless it is decreed by God's grace, which is impossible to resist. It is both illogical and blasphemous to speak of the human will 'co-operating' with God's grace, for this would imply that human beings could resist God. The will of God, according to Calvin, is the very necessity of things.

The views of both Luther and Calvin are heavily dependent on the interpretation of certain elements of the writings of St Paul, which for some Christians is an unbalanced interpretation. The basic criticism is that there must be some autonomy of the will, otherwise reward and punishment would be unjust and this would contradict God's attributes.

(b) 'Modern science clearly demonstrates that the idea of free will is an illusion.' Assess this view. (20 marks)

It can be seen how this statement could be made because libertarianism does not recognise the scientific view that everything is determined and interconnected. For example, it does not allow for conditioning of behaviour when scientific experiments demonstrate that this occurs. This is clearly demonstrated by what we know from biology and genetics. In addition, libertarianism cannot explain why actions and behaviour are chaotic if uncaused and there is also the problem of conflict arising when one person's liberty opposes the freedom of another person, meaning that no one can be said to have true liberty. In terms of morality, responsibility is recognised in soft determinism and it is in accordance with what we know from behavioural science and what we know from psychology.

Nonetheless, libertarianism recognises moral responsibility and this also encourages people to seek behaviour that is constructive and meaningful to society. For example, the belief in free will justifies reward and punishment sanctions and 'makes sense' of things, justifying the parameters of our societies and legal systems. This is quite a 'scientific' approach to take. There are problems with determinism as it is too inflexible a system to be true and it is not always in accordance with what we actually experience. In addition, determinism cannot explain human nature and behaviour effectively enough and denies all moral responsibility. Surely this would be devastating for society?

It could be argued that a libertarian approach best explains the moral diversity of our world given the fact that different people will make different decisions.

Overall, it appears that a purist approach via either libertarianism or determinism will have its problems when standing alone. Soft determinists or Kant's approach which recognises deterministic features of life, but also the autonomy of the will, appear ultimately more balanced and are possibly the best explanations whilst not being without criticism.

2 Virtue ethics

- (a) Examine one theory of virtue ethics and apply it to any ethical issue apart from science and technology. (30 marks)**

Virtue ethics is all about how an individual can develop the correct 'character' (ethos) so as to behave virtuously and, accordingly, in a way that is morally correct. The earliest systematic version of this method of ethics is associated with Aristotle.

The Greek word 'eudaimonia' is key to understanding virtue ethics. For Aristotle (384–322 BC), the word meant happiness or well-being in the sense of being successful or fulfilled. However, it is not a disposition like a virtue but rather an activity of the virtuous person. Eudaimonia is the end product generated; the outcome of being virtuous. The goal of virtue ethics, then, is to create the good life, to be happy and fulfilled through cultivating virtues (arete). It is sometimes known as aretaic ethics.

Virtue ethics is grounded in Aristotle's book *Nichomachean Ethics* (NE). However, the origins of virtue ethics tie in with Aristotle's whole view about the universe, the four causes and idea of teleology (an ultimate goal). Eudaimonia, then, incorporates the idea of well-being, peace and goodwill to all, but it also incorporates the physical good life. Aristotle's virtue ethics is a holistic philosophy that must have a social context and the end result of enabling people to live together.

Overall, there are three aspects to happiness according to Aristotle: a life of enjoyment; a life with freedom; and, being a philosopher (a life of reflection and contemplation). The most important virtue of all, wisdom, is the overall characteristic of a person who can maintain all three. Such wisdom is not easily gained and the good life is not easily or quickly achieved. As Aristotle says, 'But we must add "in a complete life". For one swallow does not make a summer, nor does one day; and so too one day, or a short time, does not make a man blessed and happy' (NE, Book 1, Chapter 7).

The Greek term arete means 'virtue' but it also conveys the meaning of moral excellence, intellectual excellence and also physical excellence. Virtue is the idea of being how we are meant to be or being 'fit for purpose'. According to Aristotle, there are two kinds of virtue: moral and intellectual. The moral virtues are acquired through habit and developed through practice. In contrast, the intellectual virtues are developed by education. Moral virtues include things like courage, generosity, patience and truthfulness. Intellectual virtues include things such as intelligence, practical and theoretical reason and also common sense.

Once again, it is important to note that such virtues are not easily learned but instead are cultivated carefully. Aristotle compares the development of such virtues with at first a ‘sketch’ that gradually develops into a picture. For Aristotle, cultivating virtues was to balance the two extremes of excess and deficiency. This is often referred to as the ‘doctrine of the mean’ although some writers also give it the title of the ‘golden mean’. Each extreme brought with it an associated vice. Balancing the virtues and achieving the mean is no easy feat: ‘Hence also it is no easy task to be good. For in everything it is no easy task to find the middle’ (NE, Book 2, Chapter 9).

Aristotle’s doctrine of the mean produces three types of person: the sophron who naturally lives in the mean without effort; the enkrates who is tempted but has strong enough will power to live in the mean; and the akrites (a ‘person without will or weak-willed person’) who cannot live in the mean by overcoming temptation of the vices. Such a character, according to Aristotle, is said to be incontinent (*akrasia*). Examples of the mean include courage as the mean between the excess of rashness and the deficiency of cowardice and truthfulness as the mean between the excess of boastfulness and the deficiency of understatement.

Out of all the virtues, there are, according to Aristotle, four cardinal virtues: temperance (moderation) and courage, which are both moral virtues, together with justice and wisdom, which are both intellectual virtues. These virtues were seen to be the most important for a character to develop, with wisdom being the virtue that manages and drives them all.

The best moral issue for virtue ethics to deal with is probably one that Aristotle deals with himself in *Nichomachean Ethics* – the use of wealth. Aristotle’s approach to ethics is grounded in virtue, and how one responds to the materialistic context is crucial in developing such virtue. The two significant virtues for dealing with the use of wealth are liberality and magnificence. The development and adoption of such virtues by peoples and governments around the world would have massive implications for world poverty and suffering.

Several factors are important in dealing with wealth and addressing poverty in the modern world, according to virtue ethics. Governments and individuals have to be generous but their actions must not be tainted with the vices of meanness or wastefulness. This response to the issue is once again seen as a balancing act between extremes of vices – for example, the famous response of Christian Aid to world poverty can be found in the quote ‘give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach a man to fish and you feed him for life’. The ideal is to balance needs through the highest virtue of wisdom by considering the point at which human aid shifts from allowing dependence (short-term emergency aid) to encouraging independence (long-term aid strategies to help people survive in the future). At the heart of this example is Aristotle’s principle to use money freely but wisely. To allow total dependence would be wasteful of resources; to ignore poverty would be mean. To

encourage independence as well as providing immediate short-term aid is the action of a virtuous person or government.

(b) ‘Virtue ethics has too many weaknesses to be taken seriously as an ethical approach to the problems of the modern world.’

Assess this view.

(20 marks)

There have been many criticisms of, and hence many weaknesses attributed to, virtue ethics. For example, it has been argued that virtue ethics is self-centred, for example, the idea of well-being can be understood as self-interest or, at the very least, as having the potential for this. In addition, as a system, virtue ethics can be argued to be arbitrary, imprecise and vague because it lacks a focus on real behaviour connected to real-life situations. More guidance is required. As a system, virtue ethics can also be contradictory. If there are different ways to express a virtue then which is the right one to choose? It is very subjective. Some have argued that virtue ethics is too individualistic because it deals primarily with the individual but at the same time it is also too intellectual for the simple human being; even Aristotle recognised that not everyone has the same ability when resisting vice. Others have pointed out that in virtue ethics there is too much dependence on the potential goodness of others. It is almost naïve, with no quality control. Finally, virtue ethics can be seen to exhibit speciesism with its focus on humanity as the supreme being. Philosophers like Peter Singer would take issue with this.

Despite all the weaknesses, however, virtue ethics has proven popular and has indeed been taken seriously. Although the virtues are self-focused they are in fact ‘other regarding’ and despite virtue ethics beginning with the self, it then moves on to develop a character that responds best to others and hence builds an ideal community.

One of the attractions of virtue ethics is that there is a social context for it and in this way virtue ethics is a very practical system. It focuses on the way we behave and not simply on what we believe should be the case! As the virtuous person is an ‘exemplar’, it therefore has clear guiding principles and also acknowledges the fact that such exemplars (philosophers) can serve as good role models. In response to the criticism of subjectivity, the wisdom in application and the delivery of justice for society ensure that it works and is not subjective.

Virtue ethics also appeals to feminist thinkers as an alternative to rules/duties which, some argue, is a stereotypically male way of approaching life. Most of the systems in place have been devised by men for men. Overall, virtue ethics is a naturalistic system and is not dependent on religion.

In summary, one could ask how an ethical system that enables people to learn to become moral and also promotes change that will last could be considered superficial. It is clear that

whether or not it is the best approach to ethics, it certainly has done enough to be taken seriously as an ethical system.

3 Religious views on sexual behaviour and human relationships

(a) Explain a religious view about relationships. (30 marks)

This essay could cover many areas of human relationships including sexual behaviour and marriage, perspectives on the significance of gender and also relationships based on different types of love. Each could be outlined or explored in depth but for the purpose of this answer I will choose to focus on a Christian viewpoint about the significance of marriage.

Marriage is a demonstration of love and companionship. The procreation of children is seen to be a way of completing this union. Marriage avoids illegitimacy; it channels sexual instinct into a healthy relationship and gives it meaning.

The Bible teaches marriage as a good way of life. There are many examples of this teaching throughout both the Old and New Testaments. There are, however, no details of wedding ceremonies given within the Bible. Although Genesis seems to condone polygamy and the use of concubines for reproduction, this is seen to be a matter of social context and is not pursued as an ideal, although the Mormon Church today still allows polygamy. Polyandry is not really a feature of Christianity, the Bible or of any Hebrew culture. The closest to this is when a woman has a relationship outside of marriage but this is technically superseded by the sin of adultery.

Church of England clergy are obliged to marry people if at least one partner in the couple belongs to their parish, even if they are not practising Christians. For a ceremony outside a person's parish, special permission needs to be granted. Marriage is a gift from God. It is one of the sacraments in Roman Catholicism and is for the purpose of procreation. It is a covenant in Protestantism and a mystical union in the Anglican Church. The Bible teaches marriage as a good way of life; the family unit promotes social stability.

The importance of the institution of marriage can be seen from the ceremony and its symbolic representations. The vows in marriage have an emphasis on marriage for life ('until death') and also faithfulness ('to love and cherish ... in sickness ... until death').

During the ceremony the bride wears white as a symbol of chastity. The vicar advises the congregation as to the purpose of the gathering, in the presence of God. Before the couple takes their vows, they and the congregation are asked if there is any reason why they should not be lawfully married. The bride and groom exchange vows that are spoken before God. The marriage is affirmed in the statement: 'That which God has joined together let no one separate'. Hymns and a brief sermon about love underline the seriousness of marriage. Sometimes the Eucharist is celebrated. Usually a meal of celebration follows.

It is now common, given the changing nature of relationships, family and ideas about marriage, to have individual practising Christians opting to live together and seeing the bonds of marriage as more spiritual than legal. Such Christians would argue that they do not need secular recognition of their relationship. Likewise, there are people who are non-

practising Christians who make their vows before God in church. Some Christian churches may ask that such a couple attend a course to understand the Christian faith before they get married.

Regarding remarriage, the Roman Catholic Church does not recognise divorce and the Pope has to annul a marriage. The Church of England allows its ministers to decide for themselves whether or not they will allow a remarriage ceremony to take place, with some only allowing an official ‘blessing’.

(b) ‘Religion can have no role in the modern world regarding relationships.’

Assess this view.

(20 marks)

How far is religion seen to be relevant today when it comes to matters of relationships? The above statement is very pessimistic and dismissive of the value of the role of religion. Such a view may argue that marriage ceremonies are ancient and custom- or culture-based and they are being adapted into neutral, secular ceremonies. In this way, the religious teaching about children and the purpose of marriage is outdated today on the grounds of an individual’s right to choose. Moreover, the view of a large part of the Church with regard to the issue of homosexuality is very outdated.

There is also confusion within religion as many of the ideas and teachings about sexuality and human relationships are open to interpretation by individual Christians and are up for debate between denominations. There are also matters beyond religion that make it irrelevant, for example, as people are living longer, it could be argued that it is impractical to commit to a lifelong relationship.

Finally, there is the dubious basis upon which the religious views are based. Some Scriptural teachings are impossible to apply universally today because of the law and human rights, for example, the teaching that practising homosexuals should be put to death. In the same way, some ideas within religion are sexist, for example, the exclusion of women from key roles in the Church. Despite this it is always important to consider exactly what we are rejecting and not to make the mistake of rejecting the whole when just one part may be faulty.

Firstly, the importance and popularity of tradition cannot be underestimated and traditional teachings offered by religion are often seen as a vehicle to create stability for society. Also, religious teaching is not set in stone – it has adapted over the years in dealing with issues, for example, divorce, remarriage and homosexuality, without losing a sense of identity or continuity.

If religion were totally irrelevant then one would expect traditions such as religious marriage to be rejected. Far from this, the desire of many for religious ceremonies shows that not only is religion still popular but also that its role is seen as significant.

There is an argument that as there is a natural law and an order to the world and nature, and because this was established by God, it is just as relevant today as it was when the Bible was written. Traditionalists would adhere to this argument.

Whatever an individual may think about the extent of religion's role in relationships in the modern world, it cannot be denied that religion is still influential whether that is a good thing or not!

4 Science and technology

(a) Explain arguments for and against the use of human beings or animals in experiments.

(30 marks)

This answer will focus on animals and look at both religious and non-religious arguments for and against the use of animals in experiments.

In the modern, secular world animals are used mainly in medical and cosmetic research. Medical research covers many areas: behaviour, dissection, the testing of new drugs and the investigation of cures. Cosmetic testing involves testing the safety of chemical-based components in toiletries and beauty products.

Animal Aid, an organisation against animal experimentation, was founded in 1977 and 'the society campaigns against all animal abuse but particularly the use of animals in experiments and the cruel treatment of farm animals'. One of the issues it has with animal research is the lack of accuracy in results. Even apes, which can be as little as one per cent genetically different to human beings, can produce significantly different results to them. It also claims that much medical research, including research into diseases like cancer, is repetitive and pointless, that we have enough drugs, it is better to prevent cancer than to treat it, and finally that computers can now be used to screen potential drugs at an early stage in their development.

Despite such protests, there have been major breakthroughs in medical history that could not have been achieved without animal experimentation such as the use of insulin for diabetics, modern anaesthetics, the whooping cough vaccine, kidney transplants, cardiac pacemakers, the polio vaccine, drugs for viral disease and even life-support systems for premature babies. Indeed it is for such reasons that animal research centres, such as Huntingdon Life Sciences Centre, established in 1951, have continued to this day despite being the victims of crimes of terrorism from extreme animal rights campaigners.

It was the philosopher Jeremy Bentham who observed about animals, 'The question is not, can they reason? Nor, can they talk? But can they suffer?' Although they cannot 'talk' this does not mean animals cannot suffer or communicate their suffering. Animals do not and cannot give their consent and it is because of this that they are not given the same rights as a human being. Often the argument of 'the greater good' or 'the lesser of two evils' is presented, such as the case when depriving chimpanzees of their newborns helped outlaw the practice of separation of human babies from their mothers at birth. However, this is not morally convincing.

Peter Singer, philosopher and renowned animal rights campaigner, has long fought for equal rights for animals on the grounds that to deny them such rights is speciesism. To disregard animal suffering while concerning oneself with human suffering, is, according to Singer, a

form of racism: ‘To discriminate against beings solely on account of their species is a form of prejudice.’

Religion has much to say about the way in which we should treat animals. According to Genesis, animals were created before human beings and it is part of human beings’ responsibility as stewards to look after and care for them. Some Christians become vegetarians because of this responsibility; others (whether vegetarian or not) feel it is important to prevent the loss of animal habitats, unnecessary killing and cosmetic testing on animals.

Unfortunately, throughout history human beings have been cruel towards the animals and Earth God created. Even the Christian Church has not always cared about animal rights in the past. Genesis 1:26 describes human beings as ruling over all creatures that inhabit the Earth. An alternative rendering for ‘rule’ is ‘dominion’, used in some Bible translations. Whichever translation is used, some Christians use this to argue that animals are under our control. That they are not believed to have souls has a major influence on beliefs concerning animal research and vegetarianism. The soul is seen as a divine spark, often the connection between a person and God, and unique and distinct to human beings. Human beings can therefore make decisions about animals and their lives.

While Christians could not possibly advocate torture or cruelty, they could perhaps use these ideas to justify domesticating animals, zoos, the meat industry and the use of animals in medical research. Indeed, it was God who first slaughtered animals: ‘The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them’ (Genesis 3:21). It was also God who demanded sacrifice throughout the Old Testament, for example, a ram instead of Isaac (Genesis 22:8). Some Christians argue that medical testing which benefits human beings is acceptable as its results are the lesser of two evils.

The Roman Catholic Church believes that animals are below human beings, but its teaching focuses on the duties human beings have towards animals. It therefore would always put human rights above those of animals.

Quakers believe they should show consideration to all of God’s creatures. They try to balance the rights of human beings with kindness towards animals, and attempt to bring about the good of both.

(b) ‘Without experiments science would never advance and the human race would suffer.’ Assess this claim. (20 marks)

Despite arguments from such movements as Animal Aid, it is clear that there are some aspects of science that require animal experimentation in order to ‘advance’. The issue here is therefore one of priority. Do humans supersede animals? Should ‘dominion’ be taken as given?

On another level, an open door to all advancements in technology per se could mean the creation of weapons of mass destruction that could fall into very dangerous hands. It is therefore not just the issue of animal experimentation that needs consideration.

In addition, it could be argued that the converse of the statement is also true. Too much uncontrolled advancement in the field of science and technology could indeed result in the human race suffering.

On the one hand, history teaches us that science and technology do need controlling, for example, the terrible experimentation carried out by the Nazis. We need to protect society from any further abuse. No control over the use of science and technology would mean ‘anything goes’ and could lead to chaos and immoral activity. We must think about the future of our planet.

On the other hand, control just creates a strict ‘Big Brother’ society in which there can be no real advancement. How can ethics guide science anyway when ethical theories conflict with each other? Natural law is very strict whereas situation ethics is more open and adaptable to new ideas.

It is clear that people fear the unknown and the new. If we are too cautious, science and technology cannot advance and it is quite clear from this that the human race will suffer. However, the issue is really one of optimising the development while restricting and minimising the extent to which animals suffer pain and are used in experiments. Likewise, the ethical implications of advances in science and technology must be considered if we are to avoid mistakes made in the past in relation to humanity. As one writer once stated, ‘those who have not learned from history are doomed to repeat it’.