Teacher Resource Bank

GCE Religious Studies

Unit 4C  Topic I  Religious Authority
Topic II  Ways of Moral Decision-Making
Topic III  Ways of Reading and Understanding Scripture

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers
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A2 Unit 4C Topic I Religious Authority
Topic II Ways of Moral Decision-Making
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Topic I Religious Authority

No questions have been received on this topic.
Topic II  Ways of Moral Decision-Making

Question
Our intention is to study MacIntyre’s Virtue Ethics, which can be regarded as a hybrid theory: he accepts the precepts of natural law (deontological approach) as well as the virtues and the telos, which suggests a teleological approach. Is this acceptable?

Answer
Yes, this approach is acceptable.

Question
Should I counter Aquinas, Butler and Newman with Freud and Piaget when looking at conscience?

Answer
The reference to conscience is directly linked to a religious conscience and thus Aquinas, Butler and Newman are good examples of these ideas. It might be valuable to briefly consider Freud and Piaget as scholars who suggest these traditional religious views might be wrong, but neither could be used as examples of champions of religious conscience.

Question
Is Virtue Ethics being used as Christian Ethics or in its own right?

Answer
Virtue Ethics is best treated as not specifically Christian. Some scholars claim that modern versions are a good example of hybrid styles of ethical systems.

Question
What is meant by ‘Hybrid styles of ethical systems other than Rule Utilitarian’?

Answer
Hybrid is usually understood to mean styles of ethical thinking / systems which are either a mixture of teleological or deontological or neither.

Question
In the medical research section, should we cover euthanasia when looking at life support?

Answer
Some debates around the issue of active euthanasia and what might be regarded as passive are clearly related to life support, whereas voluntary euthanasia is largely not related to the issue.
Question
Is there any more detail available for the bullet points in this section:

- The use of embryos, human cells
- Medical trials on humans
- The use of animals for medical research
- Brain death, life support systems
- Limitations of the availability of drugs / medical services for people

For instance, with the first bullet point, could this include stem cell research, AI, IVF, cloning and genetic engineering? Could the second bullet point be any trials? Can we use case studies as well as applying religious and ethical teachings? And is brain death, life support systems simply euthanasia?

Answer
Please bear in mind the broad context of this part of the Specification. As suggested in the Teacher’s Guide, it is about Ways of Moral Decision-Making. Medical research is one of the areas to provide a focus for candidates. The first section here is about the use of humans for medical research and development and thus the ethical and moral issues which arise from this. Students should be able to example from this area as they respond to questions which will be about moral decision-making. Case studies can be a very useful way of giving students exemplar material and could well deal with illustrative details like stem cell research or genetic engineering. Each of the areas has been kept sufficiently broad and open to allow centres to determine where to develop their material. Thus, in the area of medical trials on humans, any particular example of this is perfect for the debate which should then arise about the ethical and moral issues of medial trials. The reference to brain death and life support systems is concerned with the need to make decisions about who can receive what is a limited resource, thus the only aspect of euthanasia which is part of the moral focus is active non-voluntary. Please refer to the Teacher’s Guide, to the specimen questions and sample candidate answers to questions published on the Religious Studies web page (www.aqa.org.uk).

Question
The Specification says that there are three styles of decision-making but seems to neglect the (very different) Virtue Ethics understanding. Is this intentional? Is Virtue Ethics not meant to be included?

Answer
Virtue ethics is seen to fit within the broader term ‘hybrid’ as for many it is seen to be neither deontological nor teleological. In the next Specification revision it will certainly help to add it specifically too.

Question
There is a strong distinction between religious and ‘secular’ systems. I would have expected to see a ‘religious’ system (e.g. Natural Law) as one of the styles, too.

Answer
Natural Law is used by both religious and non-religious decision-making, thus it is quite acceptable for candidates to refer to it providing that they can refer to how Natural Law is used by, for example, Aquinas in the case of Christianity.
Question
The implicit implication of the sample answer to part (b) in the Examples of Candidates’ Responses is that religious perspectives do not figure in ‘different ethical systems’ since there is no mention of a religious perspective in the (highly scored) exemplar and no observation of any such lack in the commentary. Is the answer not actually too narrow in that it doesn't at all embrace Virtue Ethics or a religious perspective?

Answer
This is only a sample answer. It demonstrates one possible approach to the question, there are, of course, many to ‘assess the strengths and weaknesses of different ethical systems...’ With broad questions like this there is the issue of depth and breadth. In this case, the candidate has chosen a depth approach, thus not referring to hybrid approaches at all. The inevitable narrowing caused by this decision is met by the depth achieved through references to Kant, Mill and Bentham. Clearly a breadth approach could have looked at a much wider range of ethical systems including Virtue Ethics, Natural Law, etc.

Question
In the Teacher's Guide, under the section of Influence of religious experience as a source for religious practice and good religious behaviour, it says that the students are “expected to comment upon similarities and differences”. Can you give some clarification on what you expect the students to be comparing, e.g. the actual practices, an understanding of how they have adapted?

Answer
The reference in the Teacher’s Guide is to the fact the Specification asks for a study of Eastern and Western traditions and thus there could a question asking for comparison between the religious experiences themselves and also the subsequent practice / behaviour.

Question
The Specification talks about hybrid styles of ethical systems, can you give me a few examples of what systems you mean?

Answer
Systems which are either both deontological and teleological in parts, some would say Rule Utilitarianism is an example of this or the opposite that is have neither deontological nor teleological elements to them, for example Virtue Ethics.

Question
Is there any value in students learning about areas like virtue ethics, libertarianism, free will and determinism?

Answer
Yes it would help students’ understanding of how different responses will arise to issues from the topic they are studying. Utilitarianism would produce a very different response to Kantian thinking, for example.

Question
In the exam will students have to refer to religion if the question asks about ethical systems?

Answer
Students will not be expected to raise religious issues unless the questions ask for it, which of course they may well do.
Question
What Medical & Business Issues should be covered?

Answer
These could include a wide range of issues, and these have deliberately not been specified so that candidates/centres can have a high degree of autonomy in the kind of thing they research.

Questions would not be set on specific issues that are not referred to directly in the specification, so candidates have the opportunity to illustrate broad themes by their own research, which is a large part of the aim of Paper 4.

Medical Ethics
Among others, issues might include:

- genetic control / eugenics
- reproductive control
- HIV/AIDS
- use and allocation of resources
- paying for health care / private medical insurance
- abortion
- impaired infants
- voluntary euthanasia
- physician-assisted suicide
- animal experimentation

Business Ethics
The list could be huge: e.g.

- Ethics of production – e.g. pollution, environmental ethics, GM food, mobile telephone health, dangerous products (such as alcohol, tobacco, cars, weapons)
- Ethics of sales and marketing, e.g. price-fixing, anti-competitive practices, subliminal advertising, marketing in schools
- International Business Ethics, e.g. universal values / (cultural) relativism, fair trade, free trade, globalization, child labour, contracting business to LEDCs
- Ethics of intellectual property, e.g. patent infringement, copyright infringement, industrial espionage.

Again, the selection of issues and their range and development are a matter of choice. Candidates should be able to write articulately for the time of the exam on the kind of broad-based questions shown in the specimen question papers.
Topic III  *Ways of Reading and Understanding Scripture*

**Question**
Is it possible to use Islam as the world religion in this Topic? The Specification refers only to Judaism and Christianity.

**Answer**
Islam can be used for this topic. The examples are simply to illustrate certain points not to indicate exclusivity.