UTILITARIANISM (2)

(a) Explain what is meant by ‘Act’ and ‘Rule’ Utilitarianism. (25 marks)

(b) ‘Mill improved upon the ethical system of Bentham.’ Discuss. (10 marks)
PART (a)

This question is aimed at Assessment Objective 1, which means that it tests your skills in demonstrating knowledge and understanding. For high marks in this question, you need to describe and explain, but you do not need to give your opinion. The examiners are looking for your abilities to select and demonstrate accurate and relevant knowledge and understanding through the use of evidence, examples and appropriate key terms.

Selection For high marks you need to make sure that you read the question carefully and select relevant material. The question asks you to explain Act and Rule Utilitarianism, so you need to give as full an account of them as you can. As time in the exam is limited, however, you should stay focused on the title and resist the temptation to include everything you know about Utilitarianism.

PART (b)

This question is aimed at Assessment Objective 2, which means that it tests your skills in evaluation. For high marks, you need to show that you understand the demands of the question (which means that you address your answer to the specific question set, which is about whether Mill made Bentham’s ethics better). You need to use a range of evidence and provide a critical analysis with a sustained point of view.

Range of evidence Here, you need to show that you understand different possible responses to the question you were asked. Rather than simply giving your own opinion in a one-sided way, show that you realize others may think differently, and explain this. You should consider carefully some reasons why it might be thought that Mill did improve on Bentham’s ethics, for example, by making it quicker to reach a decision; and some reasons why someone might hold a different view, for example they might think that serious weaknesses in the system still remain.

Critical analysis Just listing ‘arguments for’ and ‘arguments against’ is not the same as critical analysis. You need to show what you think of these arguments – are they strong or weak, in your view, and why? For high marks you should say why you hold your views. Avoid saying simply ‘this is what I believe’ as though your opinion has no firm basis other than a vague emotional attachment to it; add ‘because’ and give a reason.

Sustaining an argument Your conclusion should not come as a surprise to your reader; it should be clear throughout your answer which position you are taking. You might find it helpful to start with the view that is furthest from your own, and say why you think it is a weak argument; then follow this with a view you support and say why you find it stronger, so that you arrive at a well-supported conclusion.

Accuracy Make sure you get your facts right and that you are clear which are the features of Act Utilitarianism and which of Rule Utilitarianism.

Evidence, examples and key terms For this question, you could use examples of different ethical dilemmas to show how the approach might be slightly different for Act or for Rule Utilitarians. You can demonstrate your confidence in the subject matter by using key terms such as ‘hedonic calculus’.

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