UTILITARIANISM (2)

(a) Explain what is meant by ‘Act’ and ‘Rule’ Utilitarianism. (30 marks)

(b) ‘Increasing human happiness and minimizing pain should be the main aim of any system of ethics.’ Assess this claim. (15 marks)
Utilitarianism (2)

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. Here, you are being asked to distinguish between Act and Rule Utilitarianism, so you should focus on this, rather than talking too much about Utilitarianism in general.

Part (b)
This question is aimed at Assessment Objective 2, which means that it tests your skills in evaluation. For high marks in this question, you need to show that you understand the demands of the question by focusing explicitly on a discussion of whether happiness is the best goal for human ethics. 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. Some people might argue that we all recognize and want happiness for ourselves and for the people we love, and this is therefore the best aim for ethics; others might argue that there are other more important goals such as doing one’s duty or trying to do the will of God.

Critical analysis In order to score well for critical analysis, it is not enough to outline some different points of view; in addition, you need to weigh them up and explain why you are more inclined towards one side than another. You will need to consider the reasoning put forward by people who support different positions, and argue which you consider to be the most convincing.

Evidence, examples and key terms Key terms for Utilitarianism might include ‘consequentialism’, ‘hedonic calculus’ and ‘greatest happiness principle’.

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.