

## Candidate 1

### **Evaluate religious and non-religious view points to the use of human embryos for stem cell research.**

Stem cell research uses stem cells from both adult tissue and embryos to research the use of stem cells to cure and heal injuries or diseases. Stem cells have the ability to become any human cell in the body. Embryonic stem cells are preferred as they can become over 220 different cell types while adult stem cells have a more limited range. However, when embryos are used they need to be destroyed before they are 14 days old according to UK law as this is where embryos are seen as having a right to life. Furthermore, stem cell research must be authorised by the Human Fertilisation and Embryo Authority to check all use of embryos is absolutely necessary for research. This causes a large moral debate over the use of embryos for stem cell research regarding their status as humans and ethics of destroying life.

One moral issue regards the inevitable destruction of human embryos during stem cell research. During IVF more embryos are created than implanted. This gives the couple the options to freeze and store any remaining embryos or to destroy them or donate them to stem cell research. Embryos donated to stem cell research can be used to examine stem cells before they specialise to potentially advance modern medicine through developing new therapies and curing disease. There is a law that all embryos donated must be destroyed by 14 days old before the primitive streak when the cells start to differentiate and specialise. This causes debates about the use of human embryos for stem cell research and if it is morally right.

A religious viewpoint would be that the destruction of embryos is wrong as all life is a sacred gift from God. God created humans in his image and everyone is unique so God knows us from the point of conception. Many religious people believe this as their holy book tells the word of God and it says; "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you."

This shows how God has created all life and knows everyone before they are born. Due to God creating life it shows how embryos are already human lives and should have a right to life. This leads most religious people to believe that all life is sacred and should be protected, so they disagree with stem cell research due to the destruction of life.

However, some non-religious viewpoints make moral decisions based on what option would create the most happiness. They believe that to be human you must be able to feel emotions such as happiness. Due to this they would argue that embryos cannot be classed as human life as they do not have these capacities before 14 days old. Peter Singer, a moral philosopher, asks; "...what characteristics or capacities does a being have to have in order to make it a case that that being has a serious right to life?"

Singer is asking about what defines a human being and that embryos do not have any human characteristics when it is able to be used for stem cell research. This means that their destruction is not the murder of a human life. Through stem cell research, people will be happier as more advanced medicine such as the use of stem cells to cure burns and corneal disorders, will be available to minimise pain and illness, creating more happiness through helping people than through destroying unwanted embryos.

I agree with this as when embryos are still a cluster of stem cells they are not yet a human life as the primitive streak when the cells specialise has not occurred. With embryos being destroyed before they are fourteen days old it means that the cells have not yet differentiated and cannot be classed as a human life until after this cut off point. This means that Stem Cell Research does not destroy human life as embryos are not yet classed as being a human life; they only have the potential to be so. If people can be happier and healthier as a result of using embryos then it is a good thing to help people who are already alive instead of protecting potential lives.

Another moral issue is that through stem cell research, scientists are researching how to change genetic coding in the DNA to correct gene mutations, and thus devalues the lives of people living with genetic conditions. Through stem cell research, embryos that contain a genetic condition can have certain genes removed to correct the DNA and prevent the embryos from developing the condition.

Some Christians would have the view that would be that this is wrong as God willed all life to be created and loves everyone. People who have genetic conditions were created that way by God and their life doesn't have any less value than healthy lives. All life has meaning and if someone has a condition then it is for a reason. By changing the way someone was meant to be, scientists are going against Gods plans. It sends out a message to people who live with such conditions that they should not exist with their condition and need to be 'fixed' as they aren't normal. This means they believe there is no reason to change someone's DNA as they were created the way they were by God for a special reason.

However, non-religious responses would be that the quality of life is more important than the sanctity of life. If a healthy baby can be born instead of an unhealthy baby then we should value the healthy life and be compassionate by preventing the unhealthy baby suffering a painful life. Women have the right to make their own choices of conception as it affects their body and this involves them deciding to have a healthy or unhealthy baby. It goes against human nature to let someone suffer instead of helping them and by changing genetic code, scientists could change someone's life and give them more opportunities to be happier and healthier. I agree with the non-religious point of view that quality of life is more important than sanctity of life.

To conclude, there are lots of different opinions people may have regarding the use of human embryos for stem cell research depending on their religious stance. Most religious people disagree with it as God created all life making life

sacred so they value sanctity of life, while most non-religious people agree with the use of embryonic stem cells to improve already living humans lives and create more happiness than pain, valuing quality of life over sanctity of life. There are many advantages of using embryos but the morality of destroying life can deter people from supporting it.

## Candidate 2

### **‘Voluntary euthanasia can never be morally justified.’ How far would you agree with this statement?**

Euthanasia is the act of deliberately ending a person's life to relieve suffering. For example, a doctor who gives a patient with terminal cancer an overdose of muscle relaxants to end their life would be considered to have carried out euthanasia. There are many reasons why a person may request help to die, but the most common reason is that they have an illness which is incurable, is causing them unbearable suffering and is terminal. This type of euthanasia is illegal in the UK, although some would argue that it still takes place in different forms. There are many reasons why people would regard voluntary euthanasia to be morally unjustifiable.

The first argument people may put forward in support of the above statement is that, while we all arguably have a right to life, we do not necessarily have the right to die when we choose. This argument is commonly put forward by those with religious faith, such as Christians, who believe that life is sacred gift from God, and should be preserved, not destroyed. They believe this due to biblical teachings such as:

“No man has power to retain the spirit, or power over the day of death.”  
(Ecclesiastes 8:7-8)

This biblical quotation means that God is the source of all life, and only God should decide when people die. It is not for human beings to take God's role into their own hands and end their, or someone else's, life. However, there are weaknesses to this viewpoint. Humans interfere in matters of life and death all the time – surely the very act of saving someone's life with medical intervention could be classed as retaining ‘power over the day of death.’ However, religious people may argue that in this case good is coming out of the interference – a person's life is being saved. This is not comparable to the ending of a life.

Humanists would respond to this religious viewpoint by arguing that life is not ‘sacred’ – instead, it should be viewed as precious and valuable. This is because they do not believe that life originates from God, or that there is an afterlife. The quality of life is the most important aspect to consider for humanists, as this is the only life we have. If someone is suffering from a terminal illness and is in extreme pain, then they should be allowed to make the decision of whether or not to keep living. I agree with this because sanctity of life is a religious belief, and as we live in a secular society I do not believe that this should influence decisions over the right to die. People with terminal conditions undergo inevitable suffering which impacts on their quality of life. It is far more important that they are given the choice to end their life than it is to follow outdated religious teachings about life being sacred. Someone who is experiencing unbearable suffering would question how precious/holy their life is.

Another argument that many would put forward to support the statement is that voluntary euthanasia is open to abuse. While the expectation is that it would be carried out for compassionate reasons, we cannot be sure of this. How can we possibly know if there was a voluntary request? Family members, struggling with the burden of taking care of a sick relative, may coerce the person into 'requesting' euthanasia, while doctors might be more concerned with bed shortages and waiting lists than keeping elderly or sick patients alive. Legalising voluntary euthanasia could put more pressure on already vulnerable people. This view is shared by the Church of Scotland, who have stated:

"The situation must never arise where the terminally-ill or the very elderly feel pressurised by society to end their lives."

This shows that many Christians share the belief that those who are vulnerable in society should be protected and treated with compassion, not made to feel like a burden or a drain on resources. While I agree with the Church of Scotland's position, I do think that if voluntary euthanasia was in place there would be safeguard to ensure that such abuses do not take place. In fact, I would agree with Jenny Saunders from the Voluntary Euthanasia Society, who states that:

"The current law doesn't prevent assisted dying, it (forces) it to happen behind closed doors where there are no safeguards....It is vitally important assisted dying is brought into the open, so that parliament can introduce regulation to better protect the terminally ill, medical staff and vulnerable people."

Currently, there are alternatives to euthanasia, such as the Liverpool Care Pathway, which deprive people of food and water at the end of their lives, and are far crueller. It can sometimes take weeks for someone to pass away. Voluntary euthanasia can ensure that people die quickly, and painlessly, and this, in my opinion, makes it morally justifiable.

One final argument that people may put forward to support the statement is that voluntary euthanasia cannot be justified due to the effective modern pain relief and end of life care that is available to people. They would argue that palliative care helps people to live as well as possible until they die, and to die with dignity with holistic care and pain management. Palliative care includes support for family or carers, such as counselling or financial advice. Therefore, people no longer have to be suffering in their final days/hours of life. This view would be echoed by the Roman Catholic Church, who stated that:

"True compassion leads to sharing another's pain; it does not kill the person whose suffering we cannot bear."

Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 1995

This means that it is far better to support people in their final days and to show them love, than simply speed up their death. Christianity teaches loving kindness, and this is what society should practice towards people in pain. However, I would argue that pain relief is unlikely to take all suffering away – there is still the emotional and psychological pain involved in waiting to die. Furthermore, family

members suffer by watching their loved one going through the dying process, which can be long and drawn-out.

In conclusion, I strongly disagree with this statement. Voluntary euthanasia is morally justifiable – it is an act of mercy and compassion, not some cold-blooded killing. We live in an age where we have the medical technology to diagnose terminal illnesses and give people realistic information about treatments and life expectancy. We also have the drugs required to end someone's life painlessly. Hospice care is expensive and poorly funded, it can often be down to your postcode whether or not this is available to you. Also, I would argue that money would be better spent helping those who have a reasonable chance of survival, rather than on people who have expressed a wish to die. For these reasons, I disagree with the statement.

## Candidate 3

### How significant is Jesus in today's society?

Throughout history, Jesus Christ has had a major impact on culture, laws and how people believe they should act in the world. People looked to Jesus's example on how they should live their lives, they looked to him when they were struggling and when they just needed a little pick-me-up, but the real question is, how significant is Jesus today? What impact does his ways have on the world now and how does he influence people's lives?

Jesus's life was a short but influential one. He began spreading the words of God at the age of 30 he did this until he was 33. When he was tried for treason by Pontius Pilate because people were claiming he was like the king of the Jews as he was the son of God. Jesus was nailed to a wooden cross, and a crown of thorns was placed upon his head. Jesus stayed on this cross until he died. His corpse was then placed in a tomb. Three days later, Jesus's friend, Mary Magdalene went to visit the tomb, which she discovered was open and empty. Jesus who was newly resurrected presented himself to many of his friends, most notably, Doubting Thomas, who had doubted the rumours that Jesus was alive, when he encountered Jesus, Jesus said to him, 'Reach here your finger and see my hands. Reach here your hand and put it into my side.' (John 20:27). This then proved to his followers that he truly had been risen from the dead by God. He then met with his disciples for one last time before he ascended to heaven to be with God. This is a vital part of the story of Jesus for Christians because if Jesus had not been resurrected and ascended then he would have been just a normal man, who claimed to speak the word of God, but he was not a normal man because he did rise from the dead and he did ascend into heaven. The impact of this in today's society is as of 2010, there was 2.2 billion Christians in the world and Christianity is now the world's largest religion in the world and it thought to remain so for the next four decades. Jesus is still a central figure in the lives of millions of Christians. I feel that his message of love and forgiveness is seen everywhere from schools, where the idea of a second chance and being able to say sorry and move on without severe punishment and in society in general, where our laws, rehabilitation – all of this comes from the Christian understanding of forgiveness.

As previously mentioned, the teachings of Jesus influenced many figures throughout history. Most notably, Martin Luther King. MLK was an American Baptist minister and an activist who was a leader in the civil rights movement. He is most known for his helping hand in the advancement of civil rights using non-violent disobedience reflecting his Christian views. MLK used his Christian practices to help make a massive impact on the battle for getting rights for African-Americans. Jesus said, you know the commandment, you must not kill... (Mark 10:18) and that is exactly what MLK did, he followed those commandments and the words of Jesus, he fought with peace and with love to get the results that the world needed.

In the modern world, many famous musicians around the world promote the teachings of Jesus through their music, for example, the Black Eyed Peas song, where is the love. It talks about issues to do with terrorism, racism, pollution and war. They use lyrics such as, 'can you practice what you teach? Or would you

turn the other cheek. Father Father Father help me send some guidance from above.' Meaning that there are people in the world ignoring the teachings of Jesus and not helping those who are suffering, the lyrics go on to ask God for help and guidance in getting people to realise they can no longer 'turn the other cheek' and they have to allow themselves to follow the example of Jesus and help others. Denzel Washington is another celebrity who is not shy from talking about his faith here is a quote from him on what he sees is the fundamental message of the Bible, "My father was a Pentecostal minister for 50 years. We would say prayers for everything and end with, 'Amen, God is love.' I thought 'God is love' was like one word, 'Godislove.' I didn't really realise what it meant. I'm still learning. But the fundamental message is in the Bible, which I've read three times from front to back, along with some of the Koran and the Torah. If you don't practice love, you're missing the point. I believe in love thy neighbour." Showing that no matter what you should love everyone we are all human beings and are all equal which is similar to what Denzel said if you do not follow this teaching and practice love then you are doing it wrong and not following Jesus. Celebrities like this can have a positive impact on society as they do not hide their faith and use their voice to spread the word of God just as Jesus did. They use their fame and influence they have their fans to spread the teachings of Jesus and make a greater impact on the world. Christianity is the largest religion on the planet so how can someone say that Jesus is not significant in today's society? The fact that there is over 7 billion human beings in the world and approximately 1/3 of them are Christians then Jesus must have made some sort of impact on the world or else Christianity would not be the most widely practised religion in the world. The fact that our public holidays such as Christmas and Easter are based on Christian principles prove that Jesus obviously influenced people greatly.

## Candidate 4

### **'God is responsible for all the suffering and evil in the world.' To what extent do you agree?**

It can be said that evil and suffering is a direct result of human beings misusing their freewill. C.S Lewis describes freewill as 'the evil that comes from its abuse'. This means that freewill is the main reason behind most of the world suffering. This is an effective quote by Lewis as we are able to see the negative consequences that come from the misuse of freewill.

The theistic God is represented as being omnipotent, omnibenevolent and omniscient. This means that God is supposed to be and all-powerful, all-loving and all-knowing being. However, people struggle to understand how the mere existence of evil can co-exist with an all-powerful and all-loving God. This then stems to the argument of the Inconsistent Triad, a set of three propositions that cannot be true at the one time. This is because if God is omnipotent and omniscient, he is aware of evil and suffering and knows how to stop it. However, if he is still omnibenevolent and wants to stop this suffering, why does it still exist? This shows that God being omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent while evil is present in the world is logically inconsistent. However, there are many theodicies which try to defend the nature of God by making the existence of evil compatible with an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being.

Freewill is the human ability to make choices and decisions without constraint by a divine supernatural force. While some use freewill to make morally right decisions, others do not. True freedom includes the possibility of causing evil and suffering. Some would argue that evil, both moral and natural, derives from our freewill. Natural evil refers to the suffering caused by natural events such as earthquakes, hurricanes and floods. However, moral evil refers to suffering directly caused by human action. Both of which –religious people claim- God has nothing to do with. Since it is claimed that moral evil comes from people misusing their freewill, it is said that God has no control of whether people will use their freewill for good, otherwise we wouldn't be free agents that can make their own decisions. Natural evil is also claimed to be no fault of God's as it is the apparent punishment for Adam and Eve's misuse of their freewill. Natural evil is described by some as the punishment for sin. This shows that religious people exempt God from all blame and that God takes no responsibility for the evil that is present in the world. This is weak as the mere existence of evil could not exist in a world that was made by an all-loving and all-powerful God. This is demonstrated in a quote by David Hume that's asks, 'If God is omnipotent and omniscient, whence evil? If God wills to prevent evil but cannot, then he is not omnipotent. If he can prevent evil but does not, then he is not good. In either case, he is not God' This is an effective argument against God as the nature of a Christian God requires him to be benevolent, omnipotent and omniscient. If evil is present in the world, it disproves him of being all these things, therefore humans are to blame.

The Augustinian theodicy tries to make evil compatible with the existence of an all-loving, all-knowing and all-powerful God. The philosopher argued that at the

time God created the world, 'He was pleased with what he saw' and that it was good and there was no evil. St Augustine argued that evil came from the angels that turned against God and abused their freewill to tempt Adam and Eve into eating the forbidden fruit. Thus, evil is punishment for the original sin caused by humans. However, this is logically contradictory as he implies evil created itself. This means that the world was either not perfect to begin with, or God made things go wrong, this meaning that God is to blame for the existence of evil. Despite that, Saint Augustine states, 'God is not the parent of evils, evils exist by the wrongs that we do; and the sin that is caused by the soul to which God gave free choice'. This reiterates the claim that God has no responsibility over any moral evil, he just simply gave humans the gift of freewill. Augustine defines evil as the privation of goodness, as blindness is a privation of sight. This then means that like blindness, evil is not an entity in itself, therefore God cannot have created it. He also claims humans were created in the image of God. However, humans are the underdeveloped version of God and for humans to become more like God, they must use their freewill to develop throughout their lives. St Augustine argues that the existence of evil and suffering are absolutely vital as some virtues are impossible to gain without them. Although the idea that evil is caused by humans using their freewill incorrectly currently fits what currently happens in the world, Augustine claims God is responsible for the system by which the natural world works. This means that God should be held accountable for the suffering his system causes. This is weak because Augustine's argument places blame on the very first humans and that all future people should suffer because of this. It is also weak as God, if he were omniscient, would have known Adam and Eve were going to choose wrong, so why tempt them? This begs the question of whether the idea of evil came from God in the first place. In which case God would then have responsibility over the evil and suffering in the world, not just humans.

The Irenaen Theodicy also makes evil compatible with the existence of God and ultimately says that the suffering humans endure is worthwhile. He defends God by arguing that humans must experience suffering to become good and moral people. He claims that compassion and generosity are obtained by people having to go through hardships so that they can truly understand what these traits mean. He doesn't exempt God from all blame, however claims that God allows evil to exist for good reason. Irenaeus claims that suffering has a purpose. This purpose is to allow human beings to improve morally. However, the argument is weak as there is no justification as to why some humans must go through extreme suffering while others don't. David Hume adds to this point with the statement, 'Could not our world be a little more hospitable and still teach us what we have to know? Does the suffering have to be so extreme?'. This is a strong quote to counter Irenaeus' beliefs as it begs the question if events such as the holocaust were necessary for the soul-making process. If God intended for the quantity and extremity of some suffering just to let humans develop positive traits. While both Irenaeus and Augustine agree that evil is the result of freewill and disobedience, Irenaeus never believed God created a perfect world filled with perfect beings. This is reinforced by the story of Adam and Eve as it shows humans are flawed and must work to re-establish their relationship with God. He claims that God created imperfect beings so that humans could develop through a soul-making process into a 'child of God' likeness. This is because God could not have

created humans in perfect likeness of himself as that would require humans' willing cooperation, hence why he gave humans the gift of freewill. By giving humans this freewill in the hopes they would make morally good decisions, he also had to permit the possibility of evil and suffering. John Hicks further adds to Irenaen Theodicy that God allowing humans to develop themselves is important as He wanted people to be genuinely loving, not automatically and without deliberation. Irenaeus sees evil as a necessary part of life, needed to aid us into becoming better people. Ultimately, this theodicy places some blame on God which again, wouldn't make humans solely responsible.

Another argument that defends the existence of God is the Process Theodicy founded by Alfred Whitehead and developed further by David Griffin. This radical theodicy doesn't claim God to be either omnipotent or omniscient. The theodicy also states that God didn't create the universe, but that the universe however is an uncreated process of which God himself is a part of. This theodicy states that God is a 'fellow sufferer who understands'. Whitehead also believes that God's central quality is his goodness. He also doesn't dismiss God being powerful or knowledgeable, he just states that he isn't all-powerful or all-knowing to the extent that he could eradicate evil completely. Whitehead states that evil is something that is interwoven into the fabric of the universe as well as goodness, and that God wants to transform this evil into good. The Process Theodicy mainly believes that God is constantly working against evil and trying to improve the universe as this is his primary reason for being. Whitehead believes Gods role was to start off the evolutionary process that would lead to creation of humans, however God didn't have the power to have total control and so lacks the power to stop or intervene with the natural process he created as he is bound to the natural laws of the universe. This argument doesn't hold much weight as a God that isn't either omniscient or omnipotent shouldn't be worshipped as a God at all. This theodicy allows religious people to believe that God suffers alongside them when they suffer, which makes them believe God shares a personal experience with them. The theodicy also suggests God would share some of the blame as to why evil and suffering exists as he started the evolutionary process knowing he wouldn't be able to control it, allowing for the possibility of evil and suffering. However, this theodicy is immediately discredited as a real theodicy as it denies God of being omniscient and omnipotent.

The tale of the 12 Officers is an analogy of the arguments used in defense of God. The first officer describes not helping a woman being murdered as a chance to let the murderer exercise his freewill. He says he thought about intervening, but it occurred to him that it 'was obviously better to let the murderer exercise his freewill than to have it restricted.' This means that God thinks about stopping the moral evil in the world, but in doing so, would compromise humans' freewill; which was God's gift after all. This argument proves that God is all-knowing and all-powerful, but it shows that he is not all-loving as an all-loving God would end evil and suffering. This portrays a God that is punishing humans for not using freewill to his standards, therefore conditioning humans to act as he wants them to. This makes a supposed 'all-loving' God look malicious and manipulative. Another defense comes from that of the second officer. He states that his reason for not intervening in every morally wrong action was so other people had the opportunity to step in and take the role of a hero. He argues that if

he had been the hero in every occasion, humanity wouldn't have the chance to grow and learn from these heroic acts. This is a weak argument as it is not the responsibility of humanity to step in and potentially put their own lives in danger, so if God has the power to intervene and stop evil, he should do so. The fourth officer agrees with Irenaeus' argument that humans endure suffering to appreciate goodness. He says 'we all know there cannot be good without evil'. This demonstrates the belief that human beings cannot experience goodness and happiness with full gratitude without first experiencing pain and suffering. That's without bad and evil, we will never be able to understand or appreciate the good that is essential in the development of humanity. This is an effective justification as we do need opposites in order to balance each other out but some would argue that humans would still know what goodness looked like without the existence of evil and suffering. However, this is again ineffective in the defense of God as it disproves the notion that he is all-loving and wants people to experience pain for a greater cause. Therefore, he is responsible for suffering and evil alongside humans.

In conclusion, it would appear that holding God responsible for suffering and evil is quite challenging due to the many attempts by many philosophers and thinkers to defend him. It can easily be said that humans can be held far more accountable for evil and suffering in the world. Most evil is a result of human action and inaction. Moral evil is the direct result of humans using their freewill and natural evil has been worsened by the emission of fossil fuels and greenhouse gasses that humans have released. However, humans are not solely at blame if God exists. If God is omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent, evil would not exist. Since evil exists, either God does not exist, or he shares blame alongside human beings. Or maybe we have to reevaluate our understanding of God and be more realistic in our beliefs by saying that he isn't an all loving and powerful being but in fact has created a world and allowed humans to live freely which is possibly the most loving thing that he could do.