9.7 The Death Penalty: 30-minute Pack

AQA 8062 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

1 Explain two contrasting religious teachings that could be used against the death penalty. Refer to a source of wisdom and authority in your answer.

(Total for Question 1 is 5 marks)

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2 This question is about religious and non-religious perspectives on the death penalty. It is the AQA-style 24-mark, five-part question: parts (a) to (d) are worth 12 marks; part (e) is the 12-mark evaluation.

(a) State one country, other than the UK, that still retains the death penalty today. **(1)**

(b) Give two reasons why the UK abolished the death penalty. **(2)**

(c) Explain two religious teachings relevant to the state's right to punish serious crime severely. Refer to a source of wisdom and authority in your answer. **(4)**

(d) Explain two contrasting views, religious and/or non-religious, on whether the death penalty is ever justified. Refer to a source of wisdom and authority or another source in your answer. **(5)**

(e) Evaluate this statement: 'The death penalty can never be justified.' In your answer you should: refer to religious teaching, refer to different points of view, reach a justified conclusion. **(12)**

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(Total for Question 2 is 24 marks)

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Mark scheme · 9.7 The Death Penalty: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

teaching 1: some Christians argue Jesus's teaching and example show mercy should outweigh strict retribution, even for serious wrongdoing, oe **B1**

development: when a crowd wanted to stone a woman, Jesus said 'Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her' (John 8:7), and no one did, oe **B1**

teaching 2: some Muslims argue Qur'anic teaching on the value of life urges extreme caution about ever taking a life, even where the law permits it, oe **B1**

development: 'whoever kills a soul unjustly... it is as if he had slain mankind entirely' (Qur'an 5:32) is used by some to stress the seriousness of taking any life, oe **B1**

reference to a source of wisdom and authority made accurately, oe **B1**

Answer: Contrast: mercy shown in John 8:7 vs the extreme caution about taking life drawn from Qur'an 5:32.

Question 2

(a) any country that currently retains the death penalty, e.g. the United States (in some states), China, Saudi Arabia, Iran, oe **B1**

(a) Answer: E.g. the United States (in some states) (also accept: China, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and other retentionist countries).

(b) concern about the risk of executing an innocent person, since a wrongful execution can never be undone, oe **B1**

(b) changing attitudes towards human rights and the value of human life in the UK over the twentieth century, oe **B1**

(b) Answer: E.g. concern about wrongful convictions being irreversible; changing UK attitudes towards human rights.

(c) point 1: some Christians believe governing authorities are given a genuine right to punish serious wrongdoing, oe **B1**

(c) development: the ruling authority 'does not bear the sword for no reason. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer' (Romans 13:4), oe **B1**

(c) point 2: Islamic teaching sets out qisas as a recognised right of a murder victim's family, prescribed in law, oe **B1**

(c) development: 'O you who have believed, prescribed for you is legal retribution for those murdered' (Qur'an 2:178), oe **B1**

(c) Answer: E.g. the state's authority to punish wrongdoing (Romans 13:4); the qisas law of retribution (Qur'an 2:178).

(d) view 1: some, both religious and non-religious, argue the death penalty is justified for the very worst crimes, as the only fully proportionate response and a permanent guarantee against reoffending, oe **B1**

(d) development: this can draw on the qisas principle recognised in Qur'an 2:178, alongside secular arguments that the punishment should match the severity of the crime, oe **B1**

(d) view 2: others, both religious and non-religious, argue it can never be justified because the risk of executing an innocent person can never be fully removed, oe **B1**

(d) development: this can draw on Jesus's example of mercy in John 8:7, alongside secular human-rights arguments that an irreversible punishment is too dangerous to use in a justice system that is not infallible, oe **B1**

(d) reference to a source of wisdom and authority or another appropriate source made accurately, oe **B1**

(d) Answer: Contrast: justified for the worst crimes (Qur'an 2:178, plus secular proportionality arguments) vs never justified because of the risk of irreversible error (John 8:7, plus secular human-rights arguments).

(e) **L4** A well-argued, balanced answer that considers more than one point of view in a developed way, using accurate and detailed references to religious teaching and/or scripture to support each point, and reaches a clear, justified conclusion. Either conclusion (that the death penalty is, or is not, ever justified) is equally creditable at this level, provided it is well supported. **10-12**

(e) **L3** A clear and reasoned answer that considers more than one point of view, supported by relevant references to religious teaching and/or scripture, though the justification of the conclusion may be less developed. **7-9**

(e) **L2** A reasoned answer that considers at least one point of view, with some relevant supporting evidence, but with limited or no consideration of an alternative view. **4-6**

(e) **L1** One or more relevant points are made, but with little or no supporting evidence and no reasoned conclusion. **1-3**

(e) **L0** No relevant content. **0**

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(e) Indicative content:

- Note for markers: this is the most contested question in the theme. No conclusion is intrinsically right or wrong. Credit a well-argued agree, disagree, or nuanced conclusion equally, provided it is supported by accurate evidence and engages with an opposing view.
- Agree (never justified) - religious: some Christians point to Jesus's intervention in John 8:7 ('let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone') as teaching that judgement should be tempered with mercy, and that no human is in a position to demand another's death.
- Agree (never justified) - religious: some Muslims argue that although the Qur'an permits qisas (Qur'an 2:178), it also strongly commends forgoing it in favour of compensation or forgiveness (Qur'an 5:45), showing mercy is presented as the better path even where retribution is technically allowed.
- Agree (never justified) - non-religious: a strong secular argument is that no justice system is error-free; wrongful convictions happen, and unlike imprisonment, an execution cannot be reversed once carried out.
- Agree (never justified) - non-religious: many human-rights organisations argue the state taking a life undermines the very principle, that killing is wrong, that the punishment is meant to uphold; research into deterrence is also inconsistent, with many studies finding no reliable evidence that the death penalty deters murder more effectively than long imprisonment.
- Disagree (can be justified) - religious: some Christians cite Genesis 9:6 ('whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed') as showing that judicial execution for murder can be religiously justified.
- Disagree (can be justified) - religious: qisas in Islam (Qur'an 2:178, 17:33) gives a murder victim's family a recognised right to seek equal retribution, which some Muslims argue is a legitimate form of justice that should be respected.
- Disagree (can be justified) - non-religious: some argue the death penalty is the only punishment that permanently and completely removes any risk that a convicted murderer could kill again, and that for the very worst crimes only it offers a proportionate response and full acknowledgement of a victim's family's loss.
- Disagree (can be justified) - non-religious: many countries, including the United States (in some states), China and Saudi Arabia, continue to retain and use the death penalty, showing it remains a live, seriously held legal and political position rather than a settled question; some argue wrongful convictions should be addressed through rigorous appeal processes rather than requiring total abolition.
- A balanced conclusion might note that the UK's abolition (1965 for murder, complete in 1998) reflects one legal and moral judgement, arrived at over time, but not a universally shared one, since other countries continue to retain the death penalty; the strongest single point in the debate on either side is arguably the tension between the demand for proportionate justice and the risk of an irreversible error.

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