



## Ethics – An introduction to utilitarianism

### Instructions and answers for teachers

These instructions should accompany the OCR resource 'Ethics – An introduction to utilitarianism' activity which supports OCR A Level Religious Studies



A Level Religious Studies  
Lesson Element

**Ethics – An introduction to utilitarianism**

Case: R. v. Dudley and Stephens 1884

Prosecution – Dudley and Stephens should be found GUILTY  
Please list below your arguments why it was morally wrong for them to kill and eat Richard Parker

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OCR  
Oxford Cambridge and RSA

#### The Activity:



This activity offers an opportunity for English skills development.

#### Associated materials:

'Ethics – An introduction to utilitarianism' Lesson Element learner activity sheet.



This resource is an exemplar of the types of materials that will be provided to assist in the teaching of the new qualifications being developed for first teaching in 2016. It can be used to teach existing qualifications but may be updated in the future to reflect changes in the new qualifications. Please check the OCR website for updates and additional resources being released. We would welcome your feedback so please get in touch.





### Introduction to the task

These resources and activities are designed to introduce students to the theory of utilitarianism.

The ethics course could be started by covering the concepts of absolutist and relative morality. The first normative theory to be taught could be utilitarianism. It is accessible to students at the start of year 12 and provides an excellent way into ethical debates using case studies such as the one in the suggested below activity.

### Case: R. v. Dudley and Stephens 1884

This famous case of cannibalism at sea in the late nineteenth century is still studied at law schools and in university philosophy departments to this day. In this YouTube video Professor of Government at Harvard University Michael Sandel introduces students to the facts of the case and poses the key question asked of those involved: Were their actions morally permissible?

### Task instructions – How to run activity (1 side of A4 max)

Watch this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xOwr4tibvzM>

Captain – Thomas Dudley

First Mate – Edward Stephens

Sailor – Brookes

Cabin Boy – Richard Parker

1. Initial vote – Ask your learners whether based on the facts they have just heard they believe that the actions of Dudley and Stephens were morally permissible. Make a note of the result.
2. Split class into two. One side are the prosecution while the other will act for the defence. Using the worksheets provided in Utilitarianism: Learners' Activity Sheets, learners work in pairs or individually to write a list of arguments as to why Dudley and Stephens should be held responsible or why their actions can be excused. Learners should be encouraged to make links to prior learning on absolutist and relative morality and how these ideas might influence our judgements in this case.

Each point should be written on an A4 sheet of coloured paper (choose a separate colour for each side of the argument). I prefer to use A4 rather than post-it notes as you can't write enough on a post-it!





## A Level Religious Studies

### Lesson Element

3. Learners stick their arguments up on the classroom wall/board. Teacher selects some of the common points and asks learners to justify and develop their answer verbally. The teacher then selects a point from the other side of the argument which rebuts the previous point and again selects a student to develop and justify their position. The length of this discussion is at the teacher's discretion
4. Final vote – Repeat vote from earlier. Have the numbers changed? If so why?

### Homework – Extension

Set the teaching group three pieces of work to further their knowledge and understanding from this activity.

1. Watch the whole of the episode from Harvard Justice and make notes on the key arguments presented  
<http://www.justiceharvard.org/2011/03/episode-01/>
2. Read chapter one of Bentham's *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789)  
This is freely available to read online <http://www.econlib.org/library/Bentham/bnthPML1.html>  
Key question: What does Bentham mean by the principle of utility?  
Some students will find this a difficult and technical text. It will need to be discussed and summarised at the beginning of the next lesson.
3. Listen to the following podcast from philosophybites and make notes.  
[http://traffic.libsyn.com/philosophybites/Philip\\_Schofield\\_on\\_Jeremy\\_Benthams\\_Utilitarianism.mp3](http://traffic.libsyn.com/philosophybites/Philip_Schofield_on_Jeremy_Benthams_Utilitarianism.mp3)

Learners may be advised to listen to the podcast first before reading Bentham in the original.

### Support Materials/Further Reading:

<http://www.justiceharvard.org/2011/03/episode-01/>

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/bentham/>

<http://www.econlib.org/library/Bentham/bnthPML1.html>

<http://www.philosophybites.com>





## A Level Religious Studies

### Lesson Element



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