



Take it further

The three high-order thinking skills of analysis, evaluation and creation are the highest parts of Bloom's learning taxonomy. Use a search engine to explore this further. Try to decide how successful you are at the different stages of learning.

Two example essays

Below are two example essays. The first is a good example of an essay that could be written in about 40 minutes. The second is a developing essay that has plenty of areas for improvement. It is slightly shorter but the framework is right for a 40-minute essay. You might like to cover up the annotations first to see what your comments would have been.

Annotated example 3.13

To what extent is the Ontological Argument successful in proving the existence of God?

A line of argument is established in the plan. Given the student's approach, the Ontological Argument (as an a priori argument) will be said to be unsuccessful.

Due to careful planning, the student knows that the a priori approach will be central to their essay and so ensures it is present in the introduction.

Plan

LOA: a priori arguments do not work in proving God's existence.

Successful	Not successful
God is a special case and so the argument works — Anselm start.	Defines things into existence — Gaunilo/ Kant 1st objection.
Works without using our experience which can deceive us — Anselm detail.	Existence is not a proper predicate — Kant 2nd objection.

Essay

The Ontological Argument, put forward by Anselm as a prayer and Descartes independently several hundred years later, uses an a priori approach to try to prove God's existence, thus differing from many other arguments. We shall see that Anselm's argument, while not defeated by Gaunilo, is weak simply as an a priori argument and that, as demonstrated by Kant, such arguments can never prove God's existence.

The argument's key strength could be said to be its reliance on the fact that God is a special case

The student shows context, a timeline and the key scholars in favour of the Ontological Argument.

Shows the bigger picture: the Ontological Argument versus other arguments.

Introduces the scholars against the argument.

Analyse. A relevant amount of information is introduced to keep the paragraph flowing.

The language of the essay is forceful but not judgemental.

The student recognises the need to explain Anselm's argument concisely for this essay and has planned to do this in this paragraph, which is why the first paragraph was shorter.

and so a different type of logic is required. Anselm said that God is 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived' and the idea that God is the greatest possible being might indicate that its logic needs to be different to other attempts to prove God's existence. When dealing with the metaphysical, it is likely that logic used in everyday situations is going to be different. It should be noted, however, that Anselm's *Proslogion* was written as a prayer to God and not as a direct attempt to prove his existence and therefore God's unique nature ends up being used as an excuse to suggest an argument works where, in fact, it does not.

A clear advantage of a priori arguments is the fact that they do not rely on our experience, which we know to differ from person to person and so can be argued to be unreliable. Anselm's first formulation of his argument states that, just like the Fool in the Psalms, all people have a common understanding of God that some reject and some accept. Anselm goes on to observe that a painter's imagination of a painting is different to the painting's existence in reality — there are two types of existence: existence in the mind alone and existence in reality. Anselm states that God exists in everyone's mind — atheist or theist. It is greater to exist in reality than in the mind alone; God, who is the greatest possible being, cannot simply exist in the mind as this would contradict his definition and so God must exist in both the mind and reality — and so God must exist. In his second formulation, Anselm says that there are two types of being — necessary and contingent beings. Necessary beings that cannot not exist are clearly greater than contingent beings (which we can imagine not existing) and so God, who is the greatest possible being, must be necessary, which means God must exist. Thus, Anselm's argument does

Point. Following the PACE structure, a point is made to guide the paragraph.

Criticise. A positive point is given to back up Anselm's view.

Criticise. A negative point is given to continue the discussion about the original point and to keep the paragraph flowing.

Evaluate. The paragraph is brought back to the point and also to the essay title.

not use observations or experience of the world to argue. The argument seems internally coherent but it ignores the fact that we can have unreal things in our minds that, even if we believe them, do not become real — such as Gaunilo's example of gossip. Equally, Gaunilo observed that there is a real difference between the imagined painting and the final product. We know that different people have different pictures in their mind when the same words are spoken. It seems, therefore, that however internally consistent Anselm's argument is, the fact that it does not rely on experience does not lead to the conclusion that it is successful.

Indeed, a key weakness of the argument is that it seems to define things into existence. Gaunilo used the argument of a perfect island to illustrate this in 'On Behalf of the Fool'. He said that we might imagine the greatest conceivable lost island somewhere in the ocean and if we were told about it, we might well be able to imagine it. However, simply because it is in the mind does not mean that it is in reality as well because nobody had demonstrated its existence in the first place. The idea behind Gaunilo's point is important because it shows the need to look externally to consider the notion of existence, but Anselm successfully rejected Gaunilo's logic in 'In Reply to Gaunilo' by redirecting him to the fact that God is a special case, not like an island, which is contingent. Kant seems to make the point more successfully, however, by using the example of a triangle. A triangle might be said to be a triangle because it has internal angles that add up to 180 degrees but the triangle only has these angles if it exists in the first place. There is therefore no proof in a priori arguments of God's existence because they only work if God exists in the first place.

Relevant scholarship is used — it is possible to get high marks in A-level religious studies simply from excellent use of the thinkers listed on the specification.

The overall essay remains in line with the line of argument stated in the introduction.

Kant is used as a development of the paragraph in the criticise part of the paragraph.

Can you identify the PACE structure of this paragraph?

The argument may further be rejected on the basis that it misunderstands the nature of existence as a predicate. Kant believed that existence is not a determining predicate, that is, it does not add anything to our understanding of a subject. Kant uses the example of 100 thalers (a type of currency) to say that 100 real thalers is exactly the same amount of money as 100 possible thalers — we know how many coins that would be. However, to say 100 thalers exists tells us nothing new about the thalers. Equally, we could use the example of a unicorn. We could say that a unicorn has a horn and is white and is magical and we know something more about the unicorn; however, we could not say that the unicorn exists because that tells us nothing new about it. Kant's approach does seem to reject the entire logic of the Ontological Argument and, although it could be rejected on the grounds that contingent and necessary existence are different because to say something exists necessarily does add information about that thing, it seems that any attempt to talk about different types of existence is simply playing with words and so the criticism of the argument seems to stand.

Although the essay is going to reject the Ontological Argument, it shows an openness to the other side.

Ultimately, the Ontological Argument's resurgence in recent years has opened the possibility to it successfully proving the existence of God. However, in no version does it successfully overcome the core challenge of how it attempts to use words to create an object — to define something into existence — and therefore it seems necessary to reject it as an argument for God's existence, perhaps in favour of a posteriori arguments.

This conclusion goes a bit wider to suggest what would essentially be the next step in research.

Annotated example 3.14

Evaluate the view that utilitarianism continues to offer a useful way of resolving moral dilemmas.

Plan

LOA: utilitarianism is a nice idea but not realistic in reality.

Does continue to offer a useful way	Does not continue to offer a useful way
Allows us to balance complex situations because it is objective — hedonic calculus.	With scientific advances, utilitarianism is no longer as helpful — Act Utilitarianism.
Does not need to be taken at face value — Mill.	Does not value human life intrinsically.

Essay

Utilitarianism is a major ethical theory that has a number of different forms. The key forms in this essay will be the views of Bentham and Mill. I will argue that utilitarianism is not a realistic ethical theory in any form, although it makes some sense.

Some people might say that utilitarianism is not as helpful as it was before because with modern scientific advances going so rapidly, it is not clear what the future holds. Act Utilitarianism is the idea that we should make each decision based on the moment and that involves predicting the future. One key weakness of utilitarianism is that it is very difficult to use because we cannot know the future. This means we cannot accurately decide what will benefit the majority. For example, we cannot know what use it will be to have stored embryos in the future because we do not know what they will be able to be used for in the future. We can develop this point by saying that we do not know how we should measure pleasure or pain. A weakness of this point is that

It is especially useful in ethics to give an illustration or case study without spending too much time on it.

The plan does not seem to offer direct points in favour of, or against, the title in each of the four boxes. The points are valid but it will be hard for the student to keep focused on the question.

A valid start but it does not fully engage with the specifics of the essay title.

This introduction is using the CBA technique (see p.38). How could you improve it?

This sentence needs developing. It is the criticise part of the PACE structure. The student is trying to point out that pleasure and pain are arguably difficult to measure because we do not know, especially when thinking into the future, what will turn out to maximise happiness and minimise suffering.

utilitarianism relies on our ability to make decisions each time, which is why it is relativist and so actually the fact that modern scientific advances are happening rapidly means that utilitarianism is best placed to help. ←

It might seem that the objectivity provided by utilitarianism is a less emotionally involved way of making moral decisions. Bentham's hedonic calculus treats all human life as having equal value and therefore ensures that there is complete separation from personal ties, and decisions can be made purely according to the measure of pleasure and pain. The hedonic calculus is a way of measuring pleasure and pain using seven factors that should be considered when making a moral decision. These factors are things such as the intensity of the pleasure or pain, the duration of it, how soon it will happen (propinquity) and how many people will be affected. This is how Bentham measures the 'greatest happiness for the greatest number'. The hedonic calculus is certainly thorough and ensures that we are thorough when making moral decisions — and it contributes to the theory being seen as straightforward — but it fails as an approach because it is entirely unrealistic in how it is applied. It also could lead to some things being seen as good simply because of a plain majority and might justify sadism. Therefore, utilitarianism's approach might be less emotional but this does not make it useful in resolving moral dilemmas. ←

Utilitarianism perhaps can be rejected on the grounds of its disinterest in human life and therefore be said not to be a useful ethical theory for modern times. With technology being prioritised in the twenty-first century, it could be argued that humans need to prioritise and protect human life, and an alternative approach that does that might be better, such as natural law, where preservation of life is one of the primary

The weakness is the criticise part, which leads into evaluation. However, the evaluation seems to contradict the student's line of argument and they perhaps should have developed it briefly to be clearer that even if Act Utilitarianism allows for rapid changes in society, it is still very unrealistic to go through the process each time.

This paragraph is much better written than the previous major paragraph. The point of the paragraph is clear and the PACE structure well-established. It often happens that essays warm up as they progress. It is important for you to consider how you will hit the ground running and be consistently good throughout.

The final major paragraph is a strength. Given the student wishes to argue against the theory, perhaps the order of paragraphs needed rethinking. This shows how 'make or break' the one or two minutes spent planning the essay can be.

While always valid, this is the third time that the student has used the idea of the rapid change of the twenty-first century. It makes the essay rather repetitive and could have been avoided with better planning.

The evaluation part of the paragraph is slightly stilted because you will have noticed that the point of the paragraph is not clearly stated. This is a common error. The best points will be clear arguments for or against which guide the paragraph.

precepts. For example, utilitarianism will allow abortion and euthanasia very easily and it will quickly make the decision to kill some lives if others might be saved — seen, for example, in the trolley problem. This is a strong point because many would argue that, whether or not you are religious, there is something intrinsically different and special about human life and its ability to reason and its place on the planet. I think this is a further demonstration of the unreliability of the theory and a form of utilitarianism that might work would be one that shows more regard for people.

A final strength of utilitarianism is shown by Mill's approach. Mill believed that Act Utilitarianism was too naïve in its approach and needed to be applied in the context of society and collective decisions, rather than individuals and each unique decision. Thus, Mill believed we should create rules that use utilitarian principles for society. These are rules that are generally kept and sometimes broken if needed, so Mill's approach is one of 'rules of thumb' rather than strict rules. However, rules might be said to clash, especially as society advances, and, as we have seen, society is changing rapidly. Therefore, Mill's approach does not seem to offer a modern way of making moral decisions.

Overall, utilitarianism is strong in theory but unrealistic in practice. I therefore conclude that it is not a useful way of resolving moral dilemmas, such as in business ethics when difficult decisions may need to be made that keep a business focused on its core mission statement even though the majority of customers might want it to change.

There are some interesting points in this paragraph. If Bentham and Mill are the only scholars on this student's specification then it would be understandable why they might not be able to show awareness of other types of utilitarianism. However, the A-grade student might well have read around the subject sufficiently so that they are not quite as dismissive as this student.

Perhaps realising how repetitive they have been, the student here introduces new material in the conclusion, which serves only to dilute the conclusion and therefore the essay as a whole. The student has clearly got many good points to make and the essay would have looked very different had it been properly planned from the outset.