**(a) Examine the six fundamental principles of Situation Ethics (20)**

Situation Ethics was developed by Joseph Fletcher based his theory on the promotion of agape. Agape is a type of love that is unselfish, it has no hope of personal gain (i.e. it doesn't expect to be loved in returned). Fletcher uses six fundamental principles to set out his understanding of Christian love. The first principle is "Only one thing is intrinsically good, namely love: nothing else at all". This suggests that the only thing that is good is love and love is good because it is good. This can be linked to the idea of the main Christian teaching being love and links to the teaching from St Paul – 1 Corinthians 13 "these three remain: faith, hope and love; and the greatest of these is love". Both this teaching and the first principle highlight the fact that love is the highest good, therefore showing that the first principle works in favour of Situation Ethics, as it is promoting love as a good way of making moral decisions. This is the second principle is "the ruling norm of Christian decision is love: nothing else". This is suggesting that love should be the basis of all decisions. Jesus replaced the Torah (JewishLaws) with the principle of love, love replaces law. For example, Jesus healed on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1-6) as it was the most loving thing to do even though it broke Jewish law. Again, 1 Corinthians 13:4-13 supports this principle, loving actions should not be done for reward (e.g. experiencing a good feeling or seeking altruistic deeds in return) but should be done for their own sake. The third principle states: 'Love and justice are the same, for justice is love distributed nothing else'. This means that love and fairness is the same, therefore love is fair. A biblical teaching agreeing with this principle in Galatians 5:15 "The whole law is summed up in one statement/commandment: "love your neighbour as you love yourself"".

The principle and teaching both suggest that love and fairness are the same, therefore love is fair and you would achieve fairness by loving your neighbour as you love yourself. The fourth principle states 'Love wills the neighbour's good, whether we like him or not'. This means that love should be unconditional for everyone, for example, even though they have sinned, murders should be loved. Mark 12:28-31 supports this with the teaching of "love your neighbour as you love yourself". As well as St Paul in Ephesians 2:13- 15 which states that love is powerful and you should love everyone equally. Both teachings, as well as the principle suggest that everyone should be loved even your enemy. Matthew 5:46 also states "why should God reward you if you love only the people who love you?" This suggests that you should love everyone as God does, everyone deserves love.

The fifth principle states 'only the loving end justifies the means, nothing else'. This means that the outcome must be loving; no matter what the action is, if the outcome is love, then it is right. No action is 'right' or 'wrong' in itself e.g. even murder can be 'right' if the outcome is a loving one. Matthew 5:46 states "why should God reward you if you love only the people who love you?" This suggests that you should love everyone as God does, 2 everyone deserves love. The suggestion that love should be unconditional for everyone supports the idea of love being the best way to make moral decisions. Fletcher's final principle "love’s decisions are made situationally, not prescriptively" means that as relativistic ethic, each unique situation is assessed and a loving outcome sort. There are no prescriptive rules to follow. Humans have the responsibility of free will and are not bound by any law. With this comes the responsibility to 'do the most loving thing' in every situation.

Example 2

Situation Ethics is an ethical theory developed by Joseph Fletcher in 1966. Fletcher was primarily influenced by various Christian thinkers, including Bonhoeffer – who was a Christian pacifist who plotted against the life of Hitler in WW2. Rudolph Bultmann also influenced him as he claimed that Jesus had no ethical theory other than 'love thy neighbour'. Situation Ethics is relativistic as it will never give a definite answer – it takes the situation and particular circumstances into consideration. A good action (in terms of situation ethics) is whatever the most loving thing to do is in the circumstances; it bases a lot of its foundations on agape which is unconditional love and a loving attitude which in Fletcher's eyes is more valuable and important than an emotional response.

The six fundamental principles of situation ethics are based and focussed around the religious aspects of things. The first fundamental principle is love is the only thing that is good in itself. This ultimately means that love isn't 'good' because of the consequences, it's good in its own right – it is a pure concept. From examining this principle there is an obvious link to St Paul's teaching of faith, hope and love, however he highlights that love is precious and is the greatest gift from God. Furthermore, the second fundamental principle is simply: love equals justice. As this evidently states love applies equally to everyone (sense of fairness) then it can be linked to Jesus' teaching of the woman taken in adultery – even though the woman carried out a 'bad' action, Jesus believed she deserved a second chance and treated her like everyone else.

The third fundamental principle is the ruling norm of Christian decision making should be love. This is essentially the idea that Christians should be acting out of agape instead of being obsessed with rules. Again, St Paul's teachings hold relevance as he claims that love is effectively the thing that makes people good (1 Corinthians) and the idea that love will not hold any grudges. The fourth fundamental principle is 'love wills your neighbours good whether we like him or not'. From this it is clear that love has to be applied equally and links to the 2 Greatest Commandments – especially 'love your neighbour as you love yourself'. It also links to the parable of the Good Samaritan. Love's decisions are based on the situation rather than the rules and so you have got to judge the particular circumstances rather than being strict (like Natural Law); this is the fifth fundamental principle and again links to the woman taken in adultery as well as the healing on the Sabbath (Luke 6). 3 The sixth and final fundamental principle is a 'loving end justifies the means' which essentially refers to the idea of the results of the action justifying what we did to get there. A loving outcome can justify what Natural Law says is a bad action – outlining some of the conflicts between both theories. This principle can link to the healing of the Sabbath. In conclusion, the six fundamental principles are obvious religious guidelines especially for Christians to follow as many teachings from the Bible support the main objective of each principle – love and agape.

**(b) 'Situation Ethics encourages unethical behaviour'. Evaluate this view. (25)**

Situation Ethics does encourage unethical behaviour as it is only really relevant to

Christians rather than non-religious believers. Peter Vardy's views regarding Christianity

and situation ethics can be used to support this Peter Vardy introduced the idea that

Situation Ethics will be of more value and use for individuals especially Christians as he

said that if you're a Christian who has already experienced/lived a life in relationship with

Jesus then this will allow you to resist temptation to be selfish and love in a more

agapeistic way. This demonstrates how Situation Ethics can easily encourage nonbelievers to carry out immoral and unethical behaviour due to the fact they don't fully understand the foundation of the theory.

Despite this, it can be argued that Situation Ethics rather discourages unethical behaviour

as it is a relativist, flexible theory that allows you to respond to a specific situation. People

who agree with this statement would put this point forward to support their opinion as

situation ethics also has a personal approach. Euthanasia is a good example here

depending on the circumstances of the particular situation, Situation Ethics may allow

euthanasia , if the outcome was a loving one. This is a strong point as it demonstrates

Situation Ethics relevance to the 21st century as it is suitable and applicable to an array of

situations regardless of the gender/age of the person. Situation Ethics therefore focuses

on agape, love making it less likely to encourage unethical behaviour.

On the other hand, many would say it does encourage unethical behaviour as it has

previously been condemned by various Popes, as a selfish and individualistic way of

making moral decisions. Pope Benedict said in April 2005, “We are moving towards a

dictatorship of relativism which does not recognize anything as for certain and which has

as its highest goal one’s own ego and one’s own desires". For example, the only person

to make a decision on what the loving thing to do is, is you/the person in the unique

situation. This would allow for selfish thoughts and decisions to be made out of choice

despite anyone else's thoughts.

Your decision could easily be clouded by your emotions. This is quite a compelling thought

as if the individual doesn't consider anyone else's point of view it could ultimately not cause

the most loving action and result in a negative way towards others. Also, the six

fundamental principles, and the four working principles only offer hints about how to apply

Situation Ethics– achieve the most agapeistic outcome, they do not provide a clear

decision.

However, Situation Ethics doesn't encourage unethical behaviour as it is a useful way to

make decisions due to the fact it offers a person moral autonomy, by giving a method to

choose between two good or bad courses of action. An example of where this can be

demonstrated is the clash between Natural Law's primary precepts of living in an ordered

society and reproducing. Both of these precepts don't always agree – too many children

would go against living in an ordered society therefore Situation Ethics might allow the use

contraception. This is a really powerful point because Situation Ethics clearly concentrates

on the most loving action for the people involved– in this case reducing the population.

In conclusion, I believe that Situation Ethics does encourage unethical behaviour as it is a

theory based on an ambiguous concept and people may find it difficult to interpret. Situation

Ethics is vague and because it has no fixed guidelines, it can often confuse people as to

what is meant by "the most loving thing to do" is. Therefore some people may not fully

understand the theory and so it may steer them towards an unethical decision.

**Example 2**

**(b) 'Situation Ethics encourages unethical behaviour'. Evaluate this view. (25)**

Situation Ethics is a flexible relativist theory that responds in the most loving way to the

specific situation you wish to apply it to. For example, the idea of euthanasia, if someone

was in a lot of pain dying slowly each day, it would tell you the person in the situation, to

perform the most loving act depending on what you think. Someone may choose a very

unloving approach, but because of Situation Ethics being lenient, they could back up their

reason for choosing/making that decision. This could mean that unethical behaviour could

be taken. This is a weak point as many options provided by Situation Ethics to do what is

the most loving thing are not unethical, and could not be used to back up an unethical

action due to the fact that you can easily distinguish a loving (ethical) action from a non-loving (unethical) action.

However, Situation Ethics has been condemned by Catholic leaders as a selfish,

individualistic and an unethical way of making moral decisions. This is why Roman

Catholics chose not to use it. For example, the only person able to make a decision on

what is the most loving is the person involved. They could act selfishly by not thinking

about every aspect leading towards the most loving action. Again, if a person wanted to die

due to pain, they could say that the most loving action is to keep them alive so that they

can be with the decision maker (most likely a family member in this case) for longer. This is

a strong point as you can become blind to the decision made and make unethical

decisions, if emotions are involved. You might do what they feel is better for them or

unintentionally put what you want first. Situation Ethics provides a means for you to choose

between different courses of action. For example, in Natural Law, the primary precepts

state that you need to reproduce and live in an ordered society. If someone had eleven

children, they would be reproducing, but not living in an ordered society, as there would be

too many people to care for which could be very chaotic. Situation Ethics would help you

choose between the lesser of two evils by stating that you should make the most agapeistic

decision possible. This shows that Situation Ethics can only guide you towards making

ethical decisions as it is using an agapeistic approach that would be highly unlikely to

result in unethical behaviour. This is a strong point as unethical behaviour can be spotted easily

as well as the fact that an all loving approach to something (insisted by Situation ethics)

can only result in all good, moral behaviour.

However, Situation Ethics offers no fixed rules or guidelines about what to do, so these

decisions (very difficult ones) would still be hard for a lot of people to make. This is useless

and could result in unethical behaviour (most likely unintended however), as people would

have to apply these agape to the way they live and the decisions they make. This is hard,

as the ideas of Situation Ethics/love are subjective, and could result in unethical behaviour

for some people. For example, stealing money/food to feed a poor family. This is loving for

the family, but not loving for the victim, and with no fixed rules, people could end up

making the wrong decisions. This is a strong point, as agapeistic actions could be different

for everyone, one person aiming to be loving could be seen as having unethical behaviour

for another.

I think that Situation Ethics can result in accidental unethical behaviour, as it is easy for

someone to make an unethical decision when using Situation Ethics if they do not fully

understand the idea of agapeistic love, or if they don't know the main idea of Situation

Ethics, as it gives no foundations for the person to follow.