

## Paper 1, Question 5/6

'The Theory of the Four Humours was the main idea about the cause of disease in the Middle Ages'.  
How far do you agree? Explain your answer.

(16 marks + 4 for SPaG)

### Strong answer

To be judged as the main idea about the cause of disease in the Middle Ages, the theory in question should have been widely-known and popular throughout the whole time period.

The Theory of the Four Humours was promoted by the Church as an explanation of the cause of disease in the Middle Ages. They liked the theory because it fitted with the Bible's idea that man is designed in God's image. Therefore, the theory was taught to physicians in universities and this meant that they referred to the theory when diagnosing patients. Therefore, in terms of widely-known theories, this was the main one.

The theory suggested that disease was caused by an imbalance in the humours. These were linked to the seasons and, later, the positions of the planets. The theory was very popular because it could be twisted to explain practically any disease. People understood the theory and believed it to be true. Therefore, in terms of staying power, this theory was the main one, because it lasted all the way up until the 17th century.

However, the theory was not the only explanation for diseases in the Middle Ages. Many people also believed that God was responsible. God sent disease as a test for the devout, or to punish sin. A good example of this is during the outbreak of the Black Death in 1348. Many people believed that God had sent the disease as a punishment for their sins.

Other people believed that disease was caused by evil vapours, or miasma, that were present in the air and spread disease. Dirt and rotting matter were responsible for spreading the miasmata and breathing it in led to disease. Some people also believed that earthquakes or volcanos released disease-carrying miasma.

However, it is important to note that people who believed God sent disease also believed in the theory: God created an imbalance in the humours, which caused the disease. The same is true about the idea of a miasma causing disease: people believed that inhaling a miasma upset the balance of the humours.

Therefore, in terms of popularity, it could be argued that the theory was the main idea about the cause of disease in the Middle Ages, because even people who believed other theories followed it.



There is a clear focus on the question from the outset, with criteria for making the judgement set out at the start and referred to throughout. The evidence selected to support the analysis shows an exceptional grasp of the wider context of the Middle Ages. Points are carefully linked to ensure the answer does not contradict itself at any point.

### Verdict

This is a good answer because:

- there is a consistently analytical focus, backed by very precise knowledge
- criteria for reaching the judgement have been set out and applied throughout
- there is a clear line of reasoning running through the answer.