Final Exam Assignment

The final exam has two parts. In the first part you are asked to answer three questions concisely. Each of these questions directs you to an issue you need to think about carefully before doing the second part of the exam. The second part of the exam involves writing a 1500-1800 word essay. A draft of both sections is due in lecture on Wednesday, December 7th. Please bring two copies, one to hand in, the other to give to the classmate assigned to offer you a critique. Keep the original for yourself. Critiques are due in discussion section on Friday, December 9th. Again, bring two copies to class (keeping the original for yourself) -- one to hand in, one to give to the author of the paper you critiqued. The final version of this assignment, which should be typed, is due in the lecture hall on Saturday, December 17th at 12 noon. This final version should have your name appear only on a front cover sheet and not on the subsequent pages. In addition, you should send an electronic version of your paper -- both parts, in a single document -- in Word, to your TA, as an email attachment. When you do this, please

(i) put Final Exam in the subject heading of your email and
(ii) name your paper using the following scheme: Firstname_Lastname_Final.doc (e.g. Jane_Doe_Final.doc).

The electronic version must be sent by 2 pm on Saturday, December 17th.

Part I

1. Mill and Kant each offer a theory of value. Describe, briefly and concisely, first Mill's theory of value and second Kant's. To do this well you need to keep in mind, and use, the various distinctions that have been mentioned by authors that have been assigned or in lecture (for example, but not only, the distinction between things that are valuable in themselves and things that are valuable for their consequences).

2. Mill and Kant each also offer a theory of what makes an action right or wrong. Describe, briefly and concisely, first Mill's theory of right action and second Kant's.

3. Describe what an act would have to be like in order for Mill and Kant to agree that it was morally wrong, even as they disagreed as to why. Describe what an act would have to be like in order for Mill and Kant to disagree as to whether it was morally right (or permitted). In both cases, make clear that you know why the kinds of acts you describe fit the bill.

Part II

Mill and Kant offer fundamentally incompatible accounts of morality. The difference shows up clearly in how they would address the question: would it be morally wrong for someone to decide to have an abortion. This question was raised nicely by someone in lecture this week, when she asked what the implications of Kant’s and Mill’s views were for people who decide to
get an abortion on discovering that the fetus has serious physical or mental defects. For purposes of this final, you should concentrate on the following case:

Imagine that you've gotten a chance to go home for Spring Break. On Friday evening you get together with some high school friends and have a nice evening remembering good times and recounting your exploits in college. One of your friends, Barbara, seems more subdued than normal and you notice that she hasn't even mentioned Alec, the guy she's been seeing for the past couple of years. Towards the end of the evening you take Barbara aside and ask 'what's up?'. She puts you off, but says she'd like to talk with you the next day. Saturday morning you give her a call and arrange to meet her for lunch. You know Barbara's been working hard this semester both on her school work and at the job she has to help pay her expenses, so you wonder whether she's just wiped out or whether, maybe, she and Alex have broken up. Either way, you hope you can be of some help.

At first, she seems pretty much her old self. She asks how you're doing, how's school, what's up with your love life, etc... But eventually the conversation turns to her life and you can tell something is up. Going with your hunch, you ask why she hasn't mentioned Alex. She looks down and seems to be choosing her words carefully. But what she says surprises you. She starts by telling you she and Alex have gone their separate ways -- but she says this fairly calmly and reinforces the sense you had already that it was inevitable (Barbara, you'd always thought, was too good for Alex). Anyway, you're gearing up to comfort her when she says that it's not breaking up with Alex that is upsetting her, it is that she's pregnant. She begins to lose it, so you ask for the check and then leave the restaurant. The pause has given her time to collect herself, and as you walk she begins to explain. Over the winter Alex had been pressuring her to sleep with him, saying that they'd been together for a long time, that they loved each other (didn't they?), and that their relationship had to move forward or end. Alex, she said, was really pretty nice about it; they didn't actually fight about it, and he didn't bring it up all the time, but still it was constantly there under the surface. The long and the short of it, she says, is that she finally said she'd sleep with him and went about getting advice about birth control. Far from strengthening the relationship, though, sleeping together was the final straw. Alex seemed to think of nothing else and she took no pleasure in any of the time they spent together. After Winter Break, once she was back at school, she eventually broke things off. She was, she tells you, relieved that things were over and is still convinced Alex isn't right for her. Only now she's discovered she's pregnant. How it happened, she doesn't really know. They'd been very careful about using birth control. The fact is, though, it happens and it has happened to her.

Alex thinks she should get an abortion and would do what he could to help pay for it (but he is pretty much broke). In the meantime, though, Barbara is the one who has to decide whether to have the abortion. She hasn't told her parents yet and isn't sure she will. She thinks her mother might understand, but she's convinced her father will go through the ceiling. In many ways, she says, having the abortion would be the easy thing to do (if she can come up with the money). It would surely be less hard than having the baby. If she had the baby she'd have to quit school and she has no idea how she'd manage to support the child. She'd be letting herself and her parents down and would have to abandon so much that she has worked so hard to get. She is very tempted just to have the abortion and put all this behind her as best she can. Yet so many people are affected, and in such major ways... (her voice trails off). What she needs to figure out, she says, is whether it would be wrong to have the abortion.
Here's the assignment:

(i) Utilitarianism, of course, has implications for the choice Barbara faces, as does Kantianism. Specifically, they have implications for what sort of considerations matter and why. Spell out, in the clearest way you can, what precisely these implications are, without getting bogged down in the details of the case. In other words, describe the kinds of considerations a utilitarian and a Kantian respectively will acknowledge as morally relevant to the decision Barbara faces and explain why these are (according to the theories) relevant. (In doing this, and in the rest of the paper, rely on the second formulation of the categorical imperative.)

(ii) Against this background, identify, in the form of an objection either to the utilitarian's view or the Kantian’s, some consideration that someone might plausibly charge is being left out of account or improperly appreciated. Select an objection that is worth taking seriously – one that articulates considerations people might reasonably think undermine the view against which the objection is being deployed. Be sure to set your essay up so as to put the objection as powerfully as possibly.

(iii) Having done that, defend the view – either the utilitarian’s or the Kantian’s – which is under attack as best you can (consistent with saying only what you genuinely believe). To defend the utilitarian position successfully you would need to show either that the consideration is morally irrelevant or that, to the extent it is morally relevant, it can be accommodated by a utilitarian. To defend the Kantian position successfully you would need to show either that the consideration is morally irrelevant or that it can be accommodated by a Kantian.

It might be, of course, that the objection you end up mobilizing is compelling and the best reply available on behalf of the theory attacked is not good enough. If that is how things turn out, fine. What is crucial is that you select some particular consideration that is genuinely relevant by your own lights that will work well to reveal your appreciation of the subtleties of the views we have studied. No matter what, you should do your best to write an honest, clear, and probing discussion of what is, or might seem to be, morally relevant to the sort of decision Barbara faces.

Make sure you have done the following things:

[ ] Answered all three questions in Part I clearly and accurately.

[ ] Described Mill's theory accurately and with appropriate detail.

[ ] Described Kant's theory accurately and with appropriate detail (using the second formulation of the Categorical Imperative).

[ ] Identified and deployed in as compelling way as possible some objection to what either the utilitarian or the Kantian is committed to saying is relevant (or not) to the case at hand, offering in the process reasons for thinking the objection is correct.
Mobilized the best response you can on behalf of the view being attacked, showing in the process that you understand the resources the view has at its disposal.

Made clear in the process your own view as to whether the objection is successful.

It is fine, in fact desirable, for you to give help to each other. BUT, you should also be sure to respect the constraints imposed by the honor code. If you should receive help from someone, or if you should pick up on and use someone else's idea, YOU MUST GIVE CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE -- whether the help comes from the person who wrote a critique of your paper, a TA in the course, or from someone else. It is perfectly appropriate to have a footnote saying "I owe this point to xyz" or "XYZ made clear to me that Socrates could respond in this way." It is neither appropriate nor acceptable for you to present someone else's ideas or words as your own.