

PHILOSOPHY RELIGION & ETHICS



Resources pack and taster
activities to give you a greater
understanding of the
A' Level course ahead.



Achievement for all

Planning on starting A' level Philosophy, Religion and Ethics next year?

This A' level is a great subject to help you build a wide range of skills, including improving your skills as a writer, speaker and thinker.

Over the summer, you can read, watch and listen to interesting ideas and think about the opinions expressed. How far do they match your own views? What might someone say if they had a very different opinion? Keep up your writing skills by putting your ideas down on paper – try, if you can, to handwrite, just to keep up the practice of handwriting so that your writing isn't completely illegible by the time you go back to school.

Reading good quality writing is the best way of improving your own writing. As you read a good writer, you will gain a better understanding of the meanings of new words and the ways in which carefully chosen words and punctuation can add real emphasis to someone's argument. Different writers express themselves in different ways, and by reading them you will develop your own 'voice'. Reading also helps with more basic skills such as spelling, because if you see a word written down often enough, you will know when it 'looks right' when you write the same word yourself.

Thinking skills can be developed if you try to take a questioning attitude to the things you watch, hear and read. Do you agree with what's being said? If you watch a film where people have different attitudes towards something, which do you agree with most, or least, and why? So much of the skill in this subject is developing your own well-informed and educated opinion, so the more that you can justify your perspective, the better.

At the moment, if I could only recommend a few books as preliminary reading, these are they (I have listed more at the end of this pack, though):

Philosophy: *Sophie's World* by Jostein Gaarder is a novel about a teenage girl being introduced to the history of philosophy by an older philosopher.

Christianity: *Christianity: An Introduction* by Alister McGrath – you don't have to read it from cover to cover, but it's useful to dip into and for reference.

Ethics: *The Puzzle of Ethics* by Peter Vardy – clear, accessible and academic, he is a great writer for A'Level students.

All of these books are available fairly cheaply from Amazon, especially if you get them second hand (with the McGrath book, it's fine to get an older edition – I have). If you have any difficulty, please contact me and I will do my best to help. With these books, it might be helpful to make notes on them if it will help you to remember and process the information more effectively; or do things such as mind maps, talking to someone else about it, etc.

In this pack are some activities and exercises for you to try when you're learning from home.

Please complete ALL tasks in the 'structured activity' sections. Please bring these and any extra activities that you have completed to the first lesson in September.

If you have any queries about anything to do with the course or these resources, please email me on SStrow@presdales.herts.sch.uk and I will do my best to help.

STRUCTURED ACTIVITIES: COMPULSORY TASKS

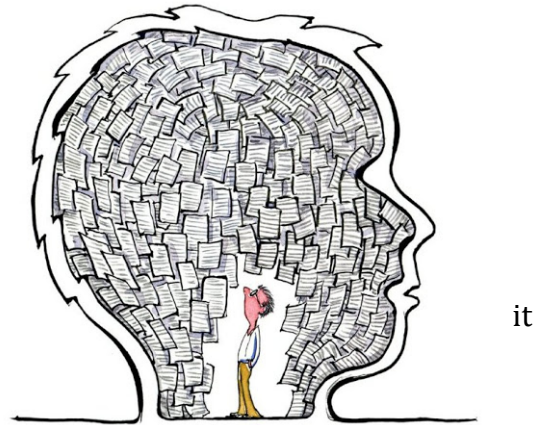
PHILOSOPHY

TASK 1: A philosophical thought experiment.

Watch this video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Br59pD583Io&t=2s>

1. What is your initial reaction to the situation the person finds themselves in? What would you do if it was you, and why?
2. How does the maker of this thought experiment link to the issue of abortion?
3. What do you think the message is of the thought experiment? What is it trying to get us to consider?
4. Whose rights should be considered more - the foetus, or the pregnant woman? Explain your answer.

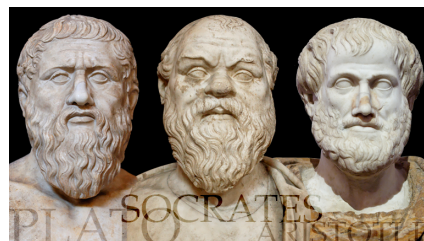


TASK 2: Create a fact file of one or more of the philosophers listed below. You can present it how you wish: a powerpoint; mind map; word document; video, etc. Include :

- A brief biography
- Pictures
- Key ideas from their philosophy
- Why they are remembered
- Any other interesting and/or fun facts about them
- What impression you get about what they might have been like as a person

There are all kinds of resources online and in books to help you, if you want to start to learn a little more about some of the philosophers you will meet in your A' level course. Use Google/Wikipedia as a starting point and follow some of the links in the articles. You could do some research about:

Plato
Aristotle
Aquinas
Hume
Descartes



Useful YouTube channels:

The School of Life, Western Philosophy playlist:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLwxNMb28XmpeypJMHfNbJ4RAfKrtmAN3P>

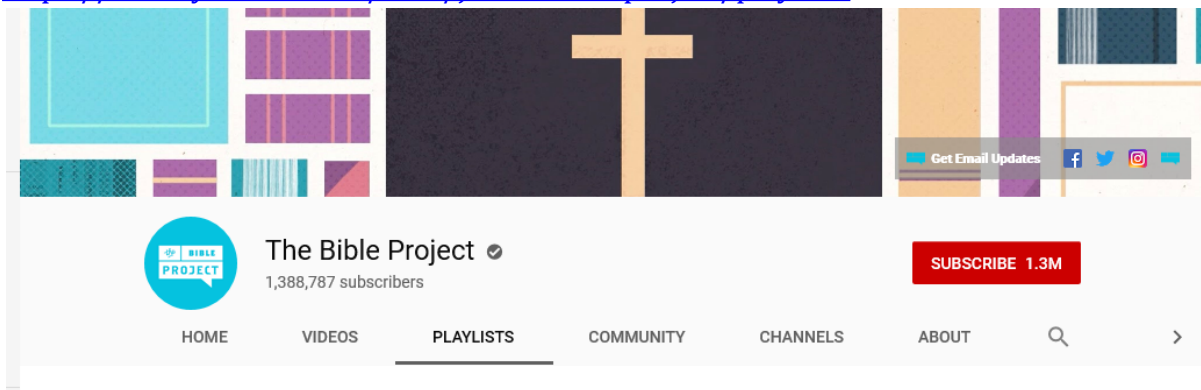
Crash Course, Philosophy playlist:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8dPuuaLjXtNgK6MZucdYldNkMybYIHKR>

RELIGION: Structured tasks

Our religion of study is Christianity: a good background knowledge of the Bible is important and therefore this is what your tasks are based on. The Bible Project Series on YouTube will help you with this.

<https://www.youtube.com/user/jointhebibleproject/playlists>



I would recommend the Biblical Themes playlist which is about 1 hour 30 minutes long if you watch every video. Bear in mind the Bible Project is a Christian organisation, so it portrays the Christian beliefs, rather than an academic debate about them.



TASK 1: Using these videos and your own research, find out about the following Biblical stories, events or characters:

1. The Story of the Fall (the Tree of Life)

What happens?

How does this story link with Christian ideas about Jesus?

2. The story of Exile

Where, when and why were the Israelites exiled to?

What does the prophet Jeremiah teach about exile in Babylon?

What is the link with Jesus?

3. The Messiah

What does the Old Testament teach about the Messiah?

Why do Christians believe that Jesus was the Messiah?

What Jewish expectations of the Messiah does Jesus not fulfil?

4. Jesus

What are the main events in Jesus' life?

What does Jesus teach in the Sermon on the Mount?

What does Jesus mean when he calls himself the Son of Man?

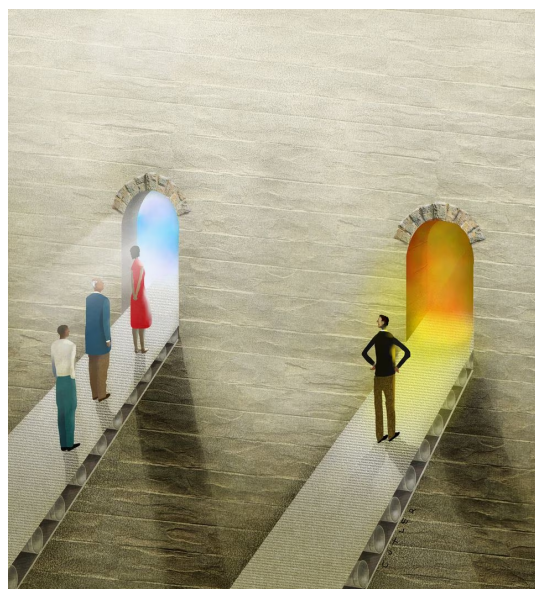
What is the day of the Lord?

TASK 2: Watch this documentary, 'Barra Boy' and answer the questions following:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nhGX1YCsvAM>

1. Do you think the story provides convincing evidence for reincarnation? Why, or why not?

2. What do you think counts as 'convincing evidence' for life after death (e.g. scripture, near death experiences, nothing)? What makes evidence convincing or unconvincing?



3. How does the belief in reincarnation compare to the Christian belief in resurrection, and heaven and hell?

Information on Christian beliefs here -

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zgqjgdm/revision/2>

4. What are your views on life after death? Explain your answer.



ETHICS: Structured tasks

TASK 1: This is the first episode of Stephen Fry's series 'Out There', where he explores attitudes to homosexuality in different parts of the world: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMPl25oraVc>



Questions to think about and/or write about – try to support your answers with reasoning:

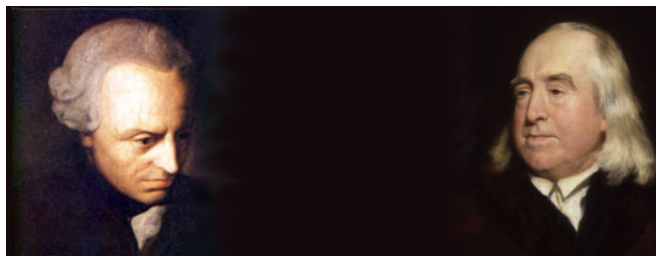
1. Do you think there is a 'right' attitude and a 'wrong' attitude towards homosexuality? What is it that makes these attitudes right or wrong, in your view?
2. Some people might argue that different cultures have different ideas about morality, and that these different cultural beliefs should be respected even if we don't agree with them. Do you think we should always respect the beliefs and attitudes of cultures different from our own, or should we try to persuade them to adopt our own beliefs instead?
3. What do you think are the aims of this television series? Do you think they are good aims? Do you think this first episode is successful in achieving its aims?
4. What religious reasons do people sometimes give for opposing homosexual relationships? How would you support or oppose these views?

TASK 2: Create a fact file of one or more of the key ethical thinkers listed below. You can present it how you wish: a powerpoint; mind map; word document; video, etc. Include :

- A brief biography
- Pictures
- Key ethical ideas: what should moral decisions be based on?
- Why they are remembered
- Any other interesting and/or fun facts about them
- What impression you get about what they might have been like as a person

There are all kinds of resources online and in books to help you. Use Google/Wikipedia as a starting point and follow some of the links in the articles. You could do some research about:

Immanuel Kant
Jeremy Bentham
John Stuart Mill
Joseph Fletcher



Useful YouTube channels:

Wireless Philosophy, Introduction to Ethics
playlist:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLtKNX4SfKpzW02Yjvkv-hMS0gTI948pIS>

Crash Course, Philosophy playlist:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8dPuuaLjXtNgK6MZucdYldNkMybYIHKR>

Free Response activities

Below are a plethora of resources, from which you can choose whichever interests you and that you would like to know more about. I have included films, TV shows, documentaries, online talks, podcasts and radio programmes that will hopefully be interesting, thought-provoking and enjoyable. I'll be honest – I haven't seen all of them – but I have taken some on recommendation and am working my way through them!

While watching, make a note of anything that strikes you as interesting – whether you agree or disagree with it – or any questions that it sparks. Afterwards, write or record your reflections on what you have learned. You can use the following questions as a guide if it's helpful:

- What new things did you learn?
- What did you find interesting?
- Did anything you saw/heard make you think differently about an issue/belief/idea?
- Was there anything you disagreed with? Why?
- What is your response to the philosophical/religious/ethical issues raised?

The main goal of these activities is to encourage critical thinking – listening to different approaches towards a particular issue or belief, and then forming your own educated judgement on them. This forms the bedrock of the skill you will need to develop at A'Level!



Films:

Title	Themes
The Truman Show	Philosophy: the nature of reality; are we truly free?
Blade Runner	Philosophy: what does it mean to be human?
Inception	Philosophy: the nature of reality
The Matrix	Philosophy: the nature of reality: how can we know what is true?
A Short Stay in Switzerland	Ethics: Euthanasia
Juno	Ethics: Abortion
The Two Popes	Christianity: the Roman Catholic church; nature of God; the path of Christian discipleship
The Shawshank Redemption	Philosophy: the problem of evil. Christianity: The importance of hope and compassion
Conversations with God	Philosophy: religious experience; the nature of God
La Vita e Bella (Life is Beautiful)	Philosophy: problem of evil
Gattaca	Ethics: Genetic engineering
The Mission	Christianity: forgiveness; unconditional love; conversion; violence vs pacifism; Christian ethics
The Reader	Philosophy: the problem of evil. Ethics: is it always right to do your duty?
Schindler's List	Ethics: Should we always obey the law? Philosophy: problem of evil
The Diving Bell and the Butterfly	Ethics: Euthanasia; Philosophy: what makes us human?
Erin Brokovitch	Ethics: Business Ethics
The Man who Knew Infinity	Philosophy: where does knowledge come from?
The Theory of Everything	Philosophy: origin of the universe; Ethics: euthanasia



TV Shows and Documentaries:

Title	Themes	Available on
The Story of God – Morgan Freeman	Philosophy: the nature of belief; miracles	Netflix
The Big Questions	Various moral and ethical issues	BBC
The Good Place	Ethics: how to live a moral life; Philosophy: what is good?	Netflix
The Five People you meet in heaven	Philosophy: life after death	Netflix
Priest School	Christianity: the nature of vocation	BBC Scotland
Louis Theroux	Ethics: various issues including homosexuality; race; euthanasia; marriage; gender identity; most are excellent!	BBC and Netflix
Derren Brown	Philosophy: how free are humans? Nature of identity and belief; miracles and faith healing	Netflix; Channel 4; YouTube
Panorama	Various topical ethical issues	BBC
Stacey Dooley investigates...	Various topical ethical issues	BBC
Crip Camp	Philosophy: human identity; Ethics: civil disobedience	Netflix

YouTube:



Christianity: contemporary issues

- **Richard Dawkins: The root of all evil**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8nAos1M-Ts>

The Root of All Evil?, later retitled The God Delusion, is a television documentary written and presented by Richard Dawkins in which he argues that humanity would be better off without religion or belief in God

Christianity: Epic journey to the holy land (Jerusalem)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XitSINH4KL4>

Simon Reeve travels on to the Holy Land (Jerusalem) to discover its history and life there today.

Philosophy: Challenges to religious belief - The problem of evil and suffering

- Tsunami (where was God?) – A channel 4 programme that examines how the 2004 boxing day Tsunami both challenged and strengthened people's faith in God

Part 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jM_tCFE8gwM

Part 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P3hDIDvjLNM>

- TED talk - In the days following the tragic South Asian tsunami of 2004, the Rev. Tom Honey pondered the question, How could a loving God have done this? Here is his answer:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wdkxdiOFJA>

Arguments for and against the existence of God

- Russell Brand and Ricky Gervais discuss God and atheism:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEtekn6NoV8>

- Stephen Hawkins on the universe – good general links to how our universe began:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xjBlsp8mS-c>

- The genius of Charles Darwin – Richard Dawkins explores evolution. Good link to the teleological argument: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gf6s7tMGrFE>

Religious belief as a product of the human mind

- The big think – The brain creates religion: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5y5NfiMqY>
- Is the brain hardwired for God? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uxREBIWvxfk>
- Stephen Fry on the importance of ‘unbelief’: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CqibqD4fjZs>

TED talks are also great and there are many of them, e.g.:

- Kwame Anthony Appiah - Is religion good or bad? (This is a trick question)
- Damon Horowitz – We Need a Moral Operating System
- Elizabeth Loftus – how reliable is your memory?
- Dan Gilbert – why we make bad decisions
- Richard Dawkins – militant atheism
- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie – We should all be feminists
- Damon Horowitz – Philosophy in prison



There are loads of talks on here, so use the search engine to find topics that interest you. Practise note-taking; write notes as you listen, just as you would if you were listening to a real-life lecture, and practise the skill of jotting down key points at speed. Ask yourself questions when you get to the end: what were the speaker’s key messages? Do you agree with the speaker? What might someone who disagreed say, and what might their reasons be?

Audio Resources:



You will soon learn that I love Radio 4, and it is full of thought-provoking, interesting and enjoyable programmes. There are many that support the study Philosophy, Religion and Ethics, and it’s worth having a browse or looking at BBC Sounds. Many programmes are now released as Podcasts. Some great examples are:

The Moral Maze <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qk11/episodes/player>

Thinking Allowed <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qy05/episodes/downloads>

The Infinite Monkey Cage <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00snr0w/episodes/downloads>

More or Less <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qshd>

Beyond Belief <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006s6p6>

A Bright Yellow Light – a remarkable one-off program about an extraordinary religious experience: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000cmsf>

Podcasts:

I have to admit, I haven’t immersed myself in Podcasts, but there are some promising ones out there, such as:

- Panpsycast Philosophy Podcast
- God In Film
- BBC In Our Time Religion Podcast



Thinky games!

<http://moralmachine.mit.edu/>

<http://www.philosophersmag.com/games>

Some great books:

Reading *anything* of good quality, even if it's a novel or a book about an entirely different topic, is always helpful for improving your skills, because you are practising your comprehension skills as well as practising understanding different ways in which writers express their ideas. Your own writing will improve, the more you read.

Philosophy:

Vardy, Peter - *The Puzzle of God*
The Puzzle of Evil

Blackburn, Simon - *Think*

Law, Stephen - *The Philosophy Files*
The Outer Limits
The Philosophy Gym

Dawkins, Richard - *The God Delusion*
The Blind Watchmaker

McGrath, Alister - *The Dawkins Delusion*

Walsch, Neale Donald - *Conversations with God*

Buckingham, Will - *The Philosophy Book: Big Ideas Simply Explained*



Religion/Theology:

Loveday, Simon - *The Bible for Grown-Ups*

Vardy, Peter - *The Puzzle of Christianity*

Armstrong, Karen - *A History of God*

Winston, Robert - *The Story of God*

Ethics:

Vardy, Peter - *The Puzzle of Sex*

Bauby, Jean-Dominique - *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*

Blackburn, Simon - *Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*

I am very much looking forward to embarking on the A'Level journey with you all! And until then...

