

RELIGIOUS STUDIES: Philosophy and Ethics

OCR AS level specification H172

Because "The unexamined life is not worth living"
(Socrates c.470BC-399BC)

Unit	Unit Title	Duration	Mode of Assessment	Weighting at AS
G571	AS Philosophy of Religion	1 hour 30 minutes	Written Examination	50%
G572	AS Religious Ethics	1 hour 30 minutes	Written Examination	50%

This stimulating course explores the fundamental questions addressed by philosophers and religious traditions about the nature and origins of human existence, questions of morality, purpose, destiny and God. Through discussion and careful analysis of the most influential secular and religious viewpoints, students will not only enjoy debating questions of ultimate significance, but also develop the capacity for coherent and well balanced argument, and further their powers of self-expression. Students sit two papers in each year:

Philosophy of Religion

- The philosophies of Plato and Aristotle and their influence on Judeo-Christian thinking on the philosophy of religion.
- The traditional arguments for the existence of God from such figures as Kant, Descartes, Anselm, Aquinas and Paley. Can God be proved by rational argument or by experience? Does the apparent design in the universe point to a divine mind?
- The challenges posed to religious belief from Hume, Russell, Darwin, Dawkins, Freud and Marx, amongst others. Does the extent of suffering disprove the idea of a loving being? Is religion a psychological illness or a benefit? Might religion be no more than a response to the needs of society? Can religion fit with a scientific view of the world?

Ethics

- How do people decide what sort of actions are 'good' or 'bad'? How do we know what is right and wrong? Are there absolute moral standards or is 'goodness' a relative concept?
- Does the end justify the means, as Utilitarianism claims, or is 'good' to be associated with certain duties, as Kant argues? Is there such a thing as a 'Natural Law', as Aquinas holds? What does Situation Ethics claim about the nature of morality? What is the nature of Christian Ethics?
- How do these ideas relate to issues such as abortion, euthanasia, war and peace, the right to life, genetic engineering and embryo research?

Course Prerequisites: An ability to write fluently - a B grade at English is the recommended minimum and an open, enquiring mind with an appetite for discussion.

Why RS? RS encourages clear, analytical thinking and teaches students to spot flaws in arguments and express themselves in an articulate, reasoned manner. Our students often find themselves having impassioned debates outside the classroom as they follow in the footsteps of some of the great thinkers. These transferable skills are invaluable for any university course or career.

Style of Work: Debate, discussion & analysis, essay writing.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES: Philosophy and Ethics

OCR A2 level specification H572

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(Socrates c.470BC-399BC)*

Unit	Unit Title	Duration	Mode of Assessment	Weighting at AS
G581	A2: Philosophy of Religion	1 hour 30 minutes	Written Examination	50%
G582	A2: Religios Ethics	1 hour 30 mintues	Written Examination	50%

The AS units of Philsosophy of Religion and Ethics are further developed at A2 level, building on fundamental ideas introduced at AS level.

Philosophy of Religion at A2

- The mind/body problem: is there such a thing as a 'soul'? Does it interact with the body? We examine this through the eyes of Plato, Descartes, John Hick and Richard Dawkins amongst others.
- Life after death: are there any reasons, evidence or arguments that could lead us to believe in an after-life? We examine the concepts of resurrection, reincarnation, Heaven and Hell and other concepts of existence beyond this life.
- Religious experience: are religious experiences credible? Do they justify religious belief, or might they have other explanations? Students study William James' Varieties of Religious Experience. What should a critically minded person make of the Bible or other religious scriptures? How far does David Hume destroy the idea of miracles?
- Language: what is the nature of language and can it make meaningful claims about the questions of religion? We examine various understandings of the way that language works, including the view of A.J. Ayer, Wittgenstein, Aquinas and Maimonides.
- The nature of God: what does it mean to call God omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent, and are these concepts sustainable? We investigate the views of Boethius in his Consolations of Philosophy, the most widely read book of the Middle Ages after the Bible.

Ethics at A2

- Free will and determinism: are we really as free as we think we are? Aren't we almost entirely shaped by our genes and environment? We look at an age old conundrum through the eyes of Hume, Kant, Leibniz, Sartre and others.
- The conscience: what is the nature of our sense of moral responsibility? Is it God-given, objective or a social construct based on childhood guilt? We analyse the views of Freud, St Paul, Aquinas, Fromm and Piaget amongst others.
- Virtue Ethics: how does Aristotle and his modern followers understand the nature of a virtuous character? Does this distinctive approach to ethics work better than other models?
- Meta-ethics: what is the nature of ethical language? Students study the logical positivist approach of A.J. Ayer, the intuitionist approach of G.E. Moore and others.
- Sexual ethics, environmental ethics and business ethics: students consider how the differing ethical approaches studied elsewhere in the course relate to these contemporary problems.

