



RELIGIOUS STUDIES: PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION AND ETHICS

AQA syllabus

Abstract

This document will provide you with various activities that link to the content you will cover over the two-year course. The activities have been selected to cover a wide range of learning styles: from article readings to YouTube learning videos. In addition, you will find various reflection questions as well as a link to the course specification.

Every student who chooses to go to university aims to apply to one of the UK's leading universities whether that is Oxford, Cambridge, Birmingham, Durham, or Bristol. Therefore, you will find a helpful tool provided by 'Informed Choices' on the Russell Group website, which you can use to find the right A level courses for the subject you wish to study for your undergraduate degree.

If you have any further questions, please contact Mr R Hotea on rhotea@st-peters.surrey.sch.uk to find out more.

Contents

Introduction:	2
Ethics – Moral Decision Making.....	2
Philosophy – Is religion Good or Bad?	2
Christianity – Why Is the Bible Important to Christians?.....	3
Philosophy – Does God Exist?	4
Ethics – Deontology and Teleology.....	5
Christianity – Militant Atheism	6
Ethics: Application of Natural Moral Law	8
Christianity: Expressions of religious identity.	9
Philosophy: The Problem of Evil and Suffering – Philosophy	10
Christianity: Relationship between religion and science	12
Ethics: Moral decision making	12
Philosophy: Defending Religious experience – Richard Swinburn.....	13

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Introduction:

- Think about your decisions:
 - Why do you want to choose Philosophy and Ethics (or why might you)?
 - What do you think it is?
 - Which part of the course are you looking forwards to the most? (a link to the specification can be found [here](#))
 - What do you want to know?
 - What are you worried about?
 - What are the main skills you think you need for this subject?
 - Which university courses need Philosophy of Religion and Ethics A Level? (link to Russell Group University's 'Informed Choices' platform is [here](#))

Create a fact file on Plato, Aquinas and Aristotle, to include their field of work and some of their core teachings.

Complete a research on what makes a person an efficient debater? Use the clips below to help you

Watch the following short clips on how to argue.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NKEhdsnKKHs&t=113s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-wrCpLJ1XAw>

Make notes and explain what the most important parts of an argument are. Think back to situation where you needed to convince someone about your opinion. How did you approach that situation?

Take it a step further. Try to find something positive in a bad situation, for example Liz Truss's mini budget announced in September 2022, and put it to a family member who might not see the budget as a good move. How will you build up your argument so that your premises will be valid?

Ethics – Moral Decision Making

Use the following website to consider some of the moral issues it presents to you. Do this as a social experiment. Have a look at them first yourself, make a moral judgement. Make a few notes on what you decided and what were the reasons for your decision. Consider using these premises when discussing the choices. Next, ask your parents, siblings or guardians to join you in making those decisions. Make a note of their choices and a brief outline of their reasons.

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

For each scenario, give at least one reason why someone would choose the opposite to you. Challenge yourself: Try to explain what would Aquinas (Christianity), Aristotle (Ethics) and Plato (Philosophy) decide in those scenarios knowing what you have found through your fact file on these scholars.

Philosophy – Is religion Good or Bad?

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Did a belief in supernatural powers, some might call it 'God', give our ancestors an evolutionary advantage? In other words, can we thank our ancestors our lives that they believed in something bigger? Listen to the following podcast and see whether you agree that Religion, or belief in the supernatural, has given us an evolutionary advantage.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b00rfhpr>

Is religion good or bad? What is religion? What makes a person religious? Watch the following TED Talk and note down some of the ideas that it points out. Do you agree with the talker; Kwame Anthony Appiah?

https://www.ted.com/talks/kwame_anthony_appiah_is_religion_good_or_bad_this_is_a_trick_question/transcript#t-22290

Having looked at some aspects of religiosity, if religion is good and being religious somehow entail a belief in some sort of deity, what does it mean when people say they have experienced God? Is our understanding of '*religious experiences*' only a personal experience, therefore no two religious experiences can be the same, or can these experiences be explained from a neurological perspective? In other words, is it only in our heads, imagination?

Listen to the following podcast on BBC Sounds (you will need to sign in so ask your parents if they have an account, if not, you can create one yourself) and express your opinion on the way people describe their religious experiences.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b00rp1dr>

Christianity – Why Is the Bible Important to Christians?

From your previous knowledge, how would you sum up Christianity? Imagine that aliens come to this planet and they have never heard of any religion. Your task is to introduce them to the 5 world religions. You start with Christianity. What would you want the alien to know about Christianity?

Probably one of the things you may have taught the alien is that the Christian holy book is called the Bible. But how did that come about? Watch this documentary on the origins of the Bible and based on the information you hear, consider the question, why is the Bible so important to Christians? x

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ksp4kRn7IGk>

Come up with 3 valid premises that can lead to the conclusion that the Bible must be important to Christians.

Part 2

Philosophy – Does God Exist?

One of the first topics in the Philosophy course is arguments for the existence of God. In preparation for this, you will be watching part of a debate between the scholars William Lane Craig and Christopher Hitchens. William Lane Craig is an American philosopher and theologian who is a theist (believes in the existence of God). He is a proponent of the cosmological argument, which is the argument that the universe itself had a first cause for its existence – this first cause, Craig believes, is God. Christopher Hitchens, on the other hand, was an atheist (rejects God's existence), who believed that there is no evidence for the existence of God, and that assertions about God's existence go against reason and science.

The debate is called [Does God Exist? William Lane Craig vs. Christopher Hitchens.](#)

Structure of the talk

Please watch the following 2 sections of the debate:

- William Lane Craig at 13 minutes
- Christopher Hitchens at 33minutes and 30 seconds

Whilst you are watching the debate, make Cornell notes

For many of you, Cornell Notes will be new to you, so watch this short video explaining how to take them effectively: [How to take Cornell Notes properly](#)

If you want to, you can keep watching the debate to listen to the responses from William Lane Craig and Christopher Hitchens, but this is entirely optional.

Once you have finished this, and have drawn out the key ideas of the debate on your Cornell Notes page, type up 2 or 3 paragraphs answering the key question of the debate: Does God exist?

- Make sure you refer to the ideas shared in the debate.
- Explain who you think won the debate and why.

Once you have finished writing your paragraphs, save them and post them in the 'Posts' wall on Teams for this subject.



Ethics – Deontology and Teleology

Task 1:

Watch the following [Ted Talk](#) by Damon Horowitz – “We Need a Moral Operating System”. You can follow the transcript below whilst watching the video which is useful. Damon Horowitz reviews the enormous new powers that technology gives us: to know more and more about each other, than ever before. Drawing the audience into a philosophical discussion, Horowitz invites us to pay new attention to the ethical principles behind the burst of invention remaking our world. Where's the moral operating system that allows us to make sense of it?

Task 2:

I want you to do what Horowitz asks his audience to do at 12:17 of the video: think of the last time you had a decision to make where you were worried to do the right thing, where you wondered, "What should I be doing?". Bring that to mind, and now reflect on that and ask yourself: "How did I come up that decision? What did I do? Did I follow my gut? Did I have somebody vote on it/help me to make that decision? Or did I think 'what is the law/rule that I need to follow?'" – **put your responses to this reflection below:**

An example would be: In 2020, under government law and guidelines, we had to stay at home and only leave the home for essential travel (e.g. work if you cannot work from home, or to get food or medicine). We could also only do one daily exercise outside the home each day. I had been tempted to go and visit my family, particularly my 93-year-old Grandma who was on her own every day. When making the decision as to whether I should go and visit her or not, I considered the following: 1. It would be breaking the law as stated by the government as we have been instructed not to visit people, even family or close friends. I could have risked being fined by police for breaking this law. 2. My gut was telling me that even though she is lonely, I didn't want to put her at risk of potentially bringing the virus into her home unknowingly, and her becoming unwell. 3. I also had my other friends and family advising me that no, I should not go and visit her at all as it is too much of a risk. In that one scenario, I was able to draw upon three different factors to allow me to make an ethical decision: the law, my gut feeling and the influence of others.

Task 3:

I now want you to read about the following three normative ethical theories that we will be studying in Year 12. Each ethical theory follows a different method of making moral decisions in life. Afterwards, complete the task below.

Deontological Ethics: these are ethical theories which make judgements about ethical actions based on the *intention* of the person, or whether they are consistent with *moral laws* (it focuses on whether the intentions and the act itself is good and does not consider the consequences of the act). This is an *absolutist* form of moral decision-making: it claims what is right in one situation must be right in all situations. This ethical-decision making is based on upholding duty, rules/laws and rights. For example: when applying to the case of theft: stealing is always wrong because stealing is breaking the laws/rules. No matter what the intention of the person is, the act of theft is not good because it breaks the law, so it is

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always wrong. The 'deontological' ethical theory we will study in Year 12 is Thomas Aquinas' Natural Moral Law.

Teleological Ethics: This type of ethical theory considers the purpose (means) of actions and what the consequences (ends) of these actions may be (the outcome). It is consequentialist because this theory believes it is an effective way of achieving a goal/purpose (telos). For example: when applying to the case of theft, there is no right or wrong answer as to whether it is wrong. It depends entirely on the situation and what the consequences to stealing will be e.g. if you were stealing to save the life of a starving family, that could be considered justified, but if you were stealing for personal gain, this cannot always be considered justified. You have to consider what the consequences of everyone involved may be, and what the purpose of that action entails. The 'teleological' ethical theory we will study in Year 12 is Joseph Fletcher's Situation Ethics.

Character-based ethics: these types of ethical theories make judgements about persons rather than actions. It is concerned with 'what kind of person should I be?' rather than 'what should I do?'. It contains the idea that a person who is unselfish, kind, etc., is going to perform actions that are unselfish, kind etc. For example: when applying to the case of theft, this ethical theory may conclude that theft is always wrong because it is not the act of a 'virtuous' / 'good' person. It is always the action of an unjust person. Moral decisions are based on whether it makes someone a 'good' / 'virtuous' character or not. The 'character-based' ethical theory we will study in Year 12 is Aristotle's Virtue Ethics.

Task: explain what you think the strengths and weaknesses of each ethical theory might be in your opinion. Try and give two strengths and two weaknesses for each.

Christianity – Militant Atheism

I would like you to consider something that you may have already come across by talking to others about God or religion but haven't really verbalised yet; atheism. One way or another you will probably know someone who considers themselves atheist. Atheist, of course, meaning to reject the idea that there is anything supernatural or God and so rejects the idea of an afterlife as well.

There are many different atheisms; soft or hard atheism – considering the existence of God on the measure they are willing to accept unexplainable events happening around them – and militant atheism. The last one being the one we are interested in this last session. Where does militant atheism come from? One prominent advocate of militant atheism is called Richard Dawkins, you might have heard of him before. Watch the following TED Talk clip of him arguing why is it that Religion and science contradict each other.

https://www.ted.com/talks/richard_dawkins_militant_atheism

As a second task, I would like you to hear from another scientist who was a devout atheist himself. This has changed once he started to look into Theological matters. His name is Alister McGrath. He has a different view on the relationship science and religion have. I would like you to watch an interview with him.

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

I would like you to compare the main points the two scholars are making, and I would like you to ask the question, should a person only subscribe to one view – either to agree that religion and science work together – or to the other. What can be the implications on a person's life? It would be a good idea to include your family again. Pose them the question why are they an atheist or a theist? How did that impact their lives? And based on what evidence can they say they are either of them?

Part 3

Ethics: Application of Natural Moral Law

As part of your A-level course, once we have studied an ethical theory (e.g. Natural Moral Law), we then have to apply this theory to matters of life and death in both humans and animals, for example, as shown in last week's tasks, how did the ethical theory apply to theft. I listened to this podcast recently which I thought would be interesting to get your response too, and to see how effectively you can apply an ethical theory to a real-life human situation.

Podcast: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000gmgm>

Task: read the reflection points and questions that I have compiled below. You can either listen to the podcast (42 minutes) yourself, and pause as you go through, or at least listen to the first half so you can get an idea of the debate. Answer the questions I have given below each one. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions, they are merely based on personal thought and opinion, but I wanted to challenge you to consider how different ethical theories might apply to the same situation, and explore your own critical thoughts on the matter at hand.

Applying to Isolation – will it change us morally?

This podcast was released on 25th March 2020, just after lockdown was imposed on our country, and the debate explores the following:

Does the panic buying, the careless weekend gatherings, the apparent unconcern for others and the public good, show that we are fundamentally self-centred? That virtue must be learned or imposed?

This links to Aristotle's Virtue Ethics, as he taught that our moral virtues e.g. courage, temperance (self-control), generosity etc, are all virtues (character traits) that need to be learnt through habit and imitation. Have people been acting selfishly through habit? Are we ultimately self-centred beings?

Or... would you take the **opposite view:** there has been generosity, self-sacrifice even, in these last few weeks, altruism (love of others) – which shows we are naturally good. Thomas Aquinas in his Natural Moral Law argues that "*good is to be done and pursued and evil is to be avoided*". His first and most important precept was to 'preserve human life', so does that mean as a society, we will, through applying our ability to reason, choose to do good and preserve human life?

Did we begin with uncorrupted morals, and is it civilisation that has been the problem, not the solution? And what will the response do to us social animals that we are: will it have a negative impact on our mental-health, or will an enforced period of reflection actually do us some good?

Debate one: first 10 minutes of podcast:

1. On the topic of panic-buying: a lot of people thought it was crazy and selfish, but were they merely acting as a rational human being, who may not be able to leave their house for the next few weeks? Did this then encourage others to mimic the behaviour of others? Were people empowering themselves and their families to have the supplies that they need? **Were they justified in acting 'rationally', 'pragmatically', or 'morally' for themselves?**
2. ...Or do you hold the view, that on the grand scheme of things, for the country as a whole, was what they were doing wrong? should they have been publicly shamed?

Debate two: 10-17 minutes in:

1. Do the media focus on the ‘delinquents’ (lawbreakers)?
2. Have people been behaving altruistically (put others before self)?
3. Were people being ignorant (misinformed) or selfish by panic-buying and continuing to visit restaurants in the last weekend before lockdown? You could link this back to Joseph Fletcher’s Situation Ethics: he argued that all situations need to be looked at on a case-by-case basis. He argued that you should ‘do what the situation demands’, but that agapeic (Christian love) should always be at the centre of every decision made. If you apply Fletcher’s working principle of ‘positivism’: people, come before laws. The question to be asked in any situation is ‘who is to be helped?’. What then do you think of people panic-buying or continuing to disobey the guidance that the government had set out the weekend before lockdown?
4. Or what about people who have upheld all the rules: self-isolated, kept a 2metre distance etc. - are they simply better informed or acting altruistically? Would you say that ‘altruistic’ people are ‘better’ people?
5. Linking back to Aquinas’ Natural Moral Law: you must always obey the rules/uphold the law... but if people are innately/intrinsically good, do we therefore need external rules/laws in place?

Debate three: 17-25 minutes in: Socialising is a basic primary behaviour, but we have no evidence as to what the long-term consequences of this isolation will be. How much damage do you think isolation will do to relationships and individuals?

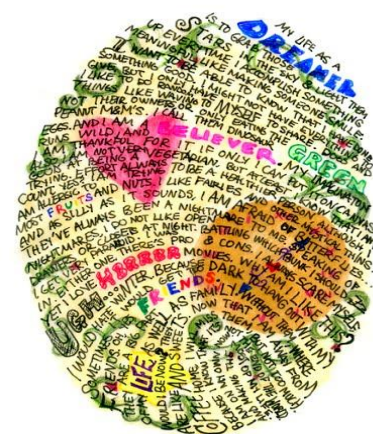
Debate four: 25 minutes in: Aristotle said: ‘you’ve got to be able to befriend yourself before you can befriend others’. what do you think this passage means? Do you think this lockdown will make us more egotistic (self-centred) or altruistic?

Christianity: [Expressions of religious identity.](#)

In this week’s Christianity part, I would like you to consider the idea of **identity**. What is identity and how can we talk about it.

I would like you to do a bit of a research on what is identity. How many of those a person can have. Watch the following [short film](#) to get you started.

Next, I would like you to create a piece of art showing identity. There are a few examples included below. I would even ask you to create a self-portrait of your identity. The piece of art can be done by hand or by computer (it can be an image or a videoclip, similar to the one you’ve seen). What I am looking for will be the way you choose to interpret the theme of identity.



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One form of identity is **religious identity**. This is when a person understands, experiences, shapes, and is shaped by the traditions, laws and doctrines of a religion. In your a Level course, you will be looking at two main teachings within Christianity and the way they help people identify with that particular group. This is Baptism and Holy Communion.

Choosing a different way of demonstrating, I would like you to add to your piece of art to show how would a person express their religious identity.

Extension: Think about how a religious identity would influence a person's attitude to religiously controversial issues such as abortion, euthanasia or homosexuality.

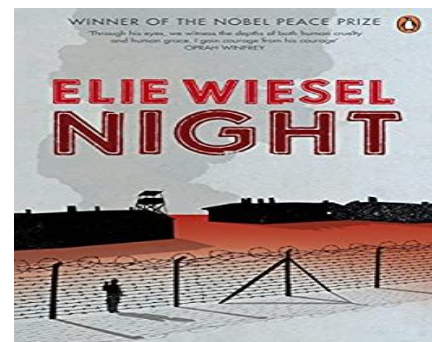
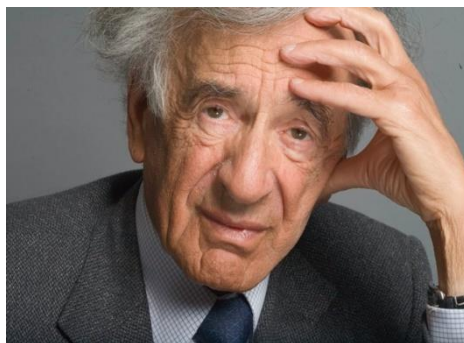
How could religious identity fuel right wing populism? Listen to the following [podcast](#) to give you some food for thought.

Philosophy: The Problem of Evil and Suffering – Philosophy

The 2nd unit of work in the Philosophy course is entitled 'The Problem of Evil and Suffering.' In this unit, we will be asking the question: "If God is all-powerful and all-loving, then why does he allow evil and suffering to exist?" Many philosophers have argued that since unimaginable evil and suffering exist in our world, it is inconceivable that there is a God, since He would be loving or powerful enough to prevent it from happening. Many theologians and philosophers have argued that whilst there is evil and suffering in the world, God still exists.

An area of study in this topic is the Holocaust, which was the systematic murder of 7 million people, 6 million of which being Jews during World War II. Many have argued that the Holocaust is a challenge to God's existence, since if He were to exist, He has allowed the pointless and extreme suffering of so many people, and therefore it would be simpler to suggest that He doesn't exist.

For this week's Philosophy work, you will be reading an extract from Elie Wiesel's book *Night*. Wiesel was a Romanian-born writer and activist, who wrote about his experiences being imprisoned in Auschwitz and the suffering he faced.



Tasks:

1. Read the extract from *Night* and make some very brief Cornell notes on the events of the story.
2. Explain how Elie Wiesel suffered, as shown in this extract.
3. Explain how Elie Wiesel's experiences affected his belief in God (use the last page to help you).

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4. Explain whether you think the evil and suffering as shown in this story shows that God does not exist and why.
5. Explain why someone may disagree with you.

You can write your answers up and bring them in to school in September.

Part 4

Christianity: Relationship between religion and science

In the penultimate week of the bridging work for Philosophy and Ethics, I would like you to discuss a topic (it is a year 13 topic) that, I as a young theologian working behind the bar, was asked many of times; what is the relationship between science and religion. One of the most famous debates about the relationship of the two is called the 'Great Debate' (<https://oumnh.ox.ac.uk/great-debate>) or the Huxley Wilberforce debate. I would like you to watch a clip from a film called Darwin and its interpretation of the debate that took place in 1860 and believing what you believe today, if you were in the room with the two debaters, whom would you support? Why would you support them?

Next, I would like you to consider and research a few scientific discoveries (I will give you some examples below) and I would like you to look at its impact on aspects of Christianity and on Christian thinking. Once you've considered and researched it, I would like you to write a brief outline of what you have discovered. Some examples to research can be:

- a) Heliocentrism & the church
- b) Quantum theory & God's action in the world
- c) Neuroscience & religious experience

And lastly, one of the scholars you will learn from is called John Polkinghorne. He is a particle theoretical physicist and an Anglican (Church of England) priest. Watch a short (about 30 minutes) lecture on his take on the relationship between science and religion followed by a short (20 minute) interview with him on the reason he has decided to become a priest and leave the field of physics. The video can be found [here](#).

Ethics: Moral decision making

Task 1: research and choose a recent story from the news that includes one of the following themes:

- Abortion
- Embryo research
- Euthanasia
- Capital punishment
- Humans' treatment of animals

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/ethics> - this link will direct you to all *the Guardian* stories that are ethical related, but you may find it easier to just type in your choice of theme into the search engine of a news website.

Task 2: Write a response to the story, considering several different points of view. To help with this, you could consider the points of view of:

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- An atheist (someone who passionately believes there is no God)
- An agnostic (someone unsure about religion and faith in God)
- A committed Christian
- A dying man or woman
- A child

Task 3: Write your own response to the following question:

“How should we decide what is the right thing to do?”

In your answer you should:

- Include a range of different opinions, including your own
- Conduct your own research to find possible answers from different fields of thinking (philosophy, psychology, sociology, religion, etc)
- Justify your answer with a range of reasons – you can link it back to some of the themes as above
- Include examples to illustrate your point
- Reach a justified conclusion

Philosophy: [Defending Religious experience – Richard Swinburn](#)

In your prior studies, you may have looked at Lourdes and religious experiences which people claim to take place there. To recap, religious experience means when someone experiences the presence of the divine (God) through visions, a sense of His presence, mystical experience etc. Many scholars believe that religious experiences are not veridical (have no meaning in reality) because they can't be verified as ever happening in reality, and there may be other reliable explanations as to why people may have religious experiences, for example, hallucinations.

Other scholars, such as Swinburne have defended religious experiences as reliable sources of wisdom for God's existence, and that they should be taken seriously as true veridical accounts. Richard Swinburne (pictured below with the St. Peter's A Level Philosophy group) is a Christian theologian who sets out his defence of religious experience in two key theories: the principle of credulity and principle of testimony.

Tasks:

1. Watch the [video](#) explaining Swinburne's defence of religious experience and make Cornell notes on this.
2. Explain briefly in your own words the meaning of both the principle of credulity and the principle of testimony.
3. Explain whether you think we should accept people's testimonies of religious experiences. For example, if someone said they saw the Virgin Mary at Lourdes, should we accept that account as reliable?
4. Explain why someone may disagree with you.