

RELIGIOUS STUDIES PRE-COURSE ACTIVITIES

Welcome to A level Religious Studies. In this course you will study AQA Religious studies 7062, Specification A: Philosophy, Ethics and Christianity. Your teachers are looking forward to welcoming you in September. Remember to arrive at your first lesson with a folder, dividers and highlighter pens.

A reminder that the entry requirements for Philosophy, Ethics & Religion are grade 5s in English and RE GCSE. Prior knowledge of RE or RS is important for this course, however, this can be negotiated.

Over the summer, we recommend that you watch and or listen to some of these great philosophy and ethics programmes, to give you a task of the type of discussion you will have in class.

- The Good Place (Netflix)
- Surviving Death (Netflix)
- Dead Poets Society (Netflix)
- The Chosen (Also on Youtube and Prime Video)
- The Panpsycast Philosophy Podcast: <https://thepanpsycast.com/>
- The RE Podcast: <https://www.therepodcast.co.uk/post/s12-e11-the-one-about-miracles>

Reading is an essential part of our course, some of the greats include;

- Plato's Allegory of the Cave
- The Puzzle of God by Peter Vardy
- The Puzzle of Ethics by Peter Vardy
- The Screwtape Letters by CS Lewis
- Sophie's World by Jostein Gaarder
- Think by Simon Blackburn
- Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do? by Michael J. Sandel
- The Pig That Wants to Be Eaten by Julian Baggini
- The Elements of Moral Philosophy by James Rachels
- Mere Christianity by C. S. Lewis
- Simply Christian by N. T. Wright
- Meditations by Marcus Aurelius
- The Problems of Philosophy by Bertrand Russell

Below you will find some engaging activities to keep you thinking, as you prepare for the wonderful world of Philosophy and Ethics.

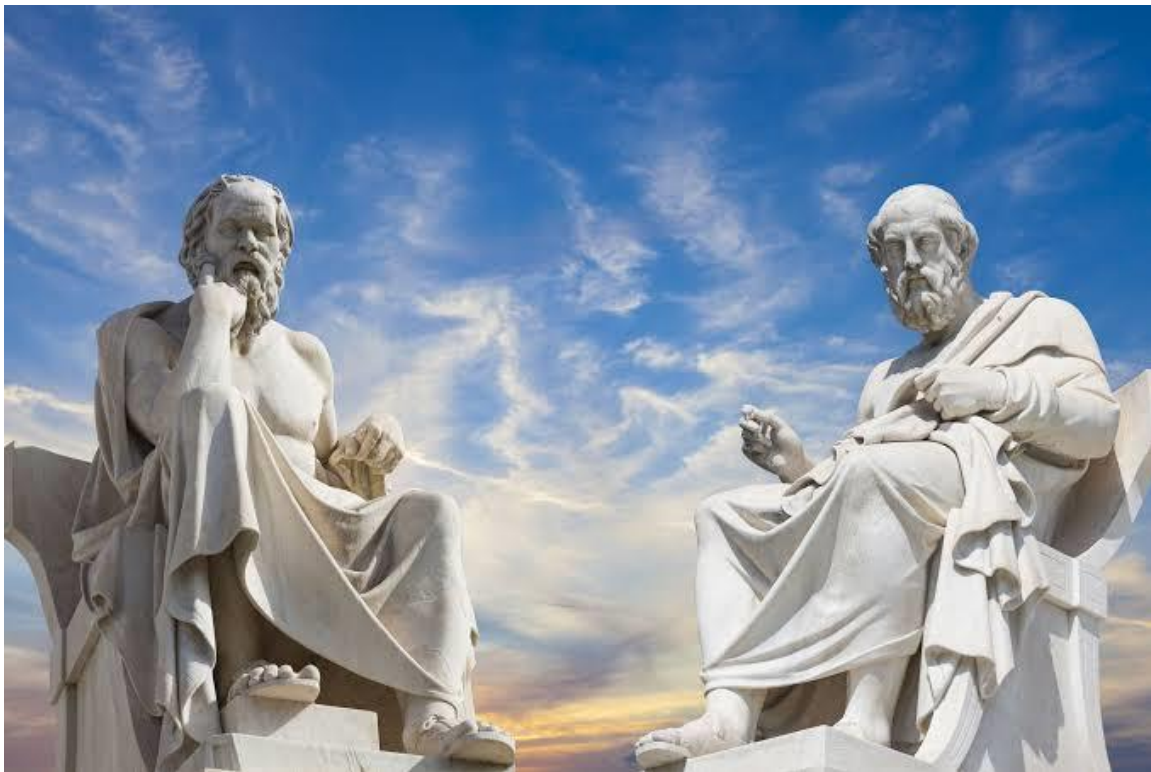
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WHAT IF...?

A Summer Introduction to Religious Studies Thornleigh Salesian Sixth Form AQA Religious Studies (7062) - Specification A

Most subjects ask you to remember answers. Philosophy asks you to question them.

This booklet is not a test. There are no marks and very few 'right' answers. Instead, it is an invitation to begin asking some of the biggest questions ever explored. Bring this booklet with you to your first lesson in September.



Activity 1. Can you trust your own mind?

Imagine waking up in a hospital. Your family knows your name. Your phone unlocks with your face. Your passport, fingerprints and photographs all prove who you are. Yet you remember absolutely nothing.

Would you believe everyone? What evidence would convince you that this is really your life?

Meet René Descartes



Descartes wondered whether everything he believed could be false. He imagined dreams and deception until he reached one certainty: "***I think, therefore I am.***" Even if everything else was false, someone had to exist to do the thinking.

Challenge

Which do you trust most: your senses, science, memory, other people or logic? Explain why.

Watch: [Wireless Philosophy – 'Descartes and Radical Doubt'](#) (YouTube).

Activity 2. The world's hardest decisions

Read each scenario. Write down your thoughts for each one, what would you do? There are no easy answers.

An autonomous car must choose between hitting one pedestrian or five.

A doctor could sacrifice one healthy patient to save five others.

You know your best friend cheated in an important exam. Do you tell the truth?

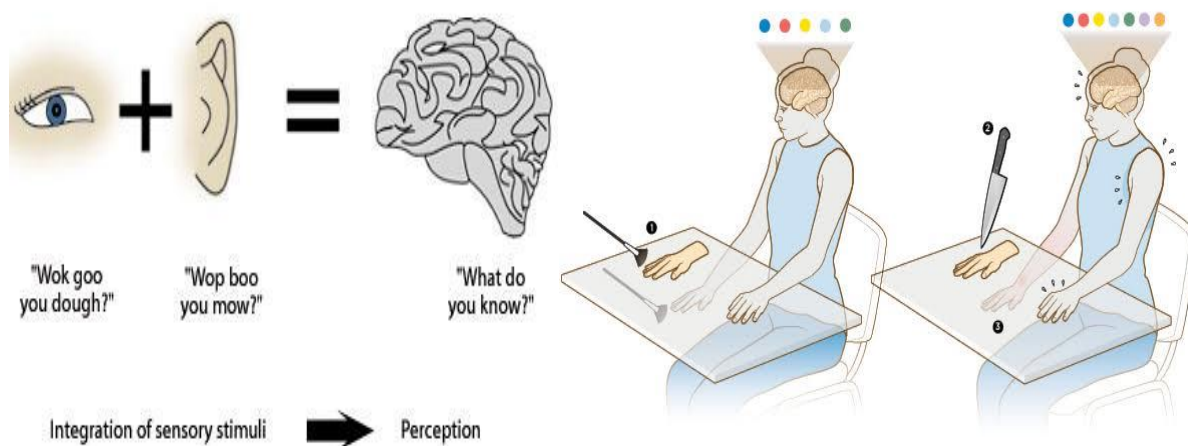
The Big Idea

Without realising it, you have begun studying ethics. What makes an action right? Do consequences matter more than rules?

Research: Jeremy Bentham and 'the greatest happiness principle'. Write a 100-word summary.

Activity 3. Your brain is lying to you

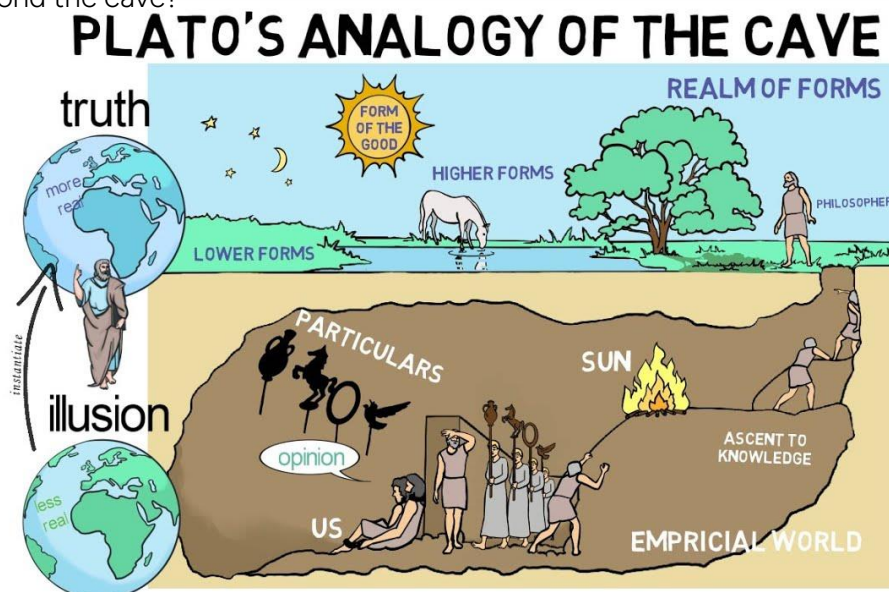
Search for: • [The McGurk Effect](#) • [The Rubber Hand Illusion](#).



What do these tell us about human perception?

Plato's Cave

Read/Watch a short summary of [Plato's Allegory of the Cave](#) (BBC Bitesize or Encyclopaedia Britannica). If everyone only saw shadows, would they realise there was a real world beyond the cave?



Choose The Matrix, The Truman Show, The Good Place, Black Mirror or Inside Out.
Explain one philosophical question it raises. Would different people answer it differently?

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Activity 5. Meet five scholars.

Research Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Kant and Bentham. For each, write one key idea and one question you would ask them.





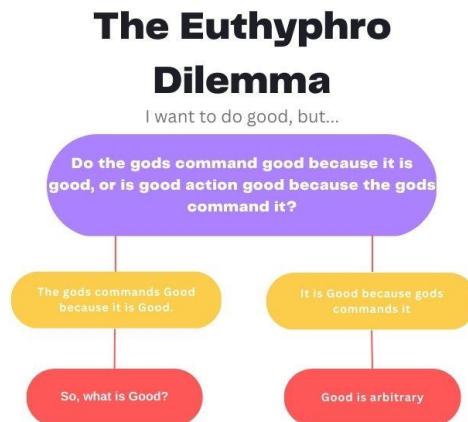






Activity 6. Does God decide what is right?

Read about the Euthyphro Dilemma. Is something good because God commands it, or does God command it because it is good?



The Euthyphro Dilemma comes from a dialogue written by Plato in which Socrates asks a simple but profound question about morality and God.

He asks: Is something good because God commands it, or does God command it because it is good?

This creates two possible answers, both of which

seem problematic.

Option 1: Things are good because God commands them.

This is the basis of Divine Command Theory.

If this is true, then morality depends entirely on God's will. Something is right simply because God says it is.

Strengths

- *Morality has a clear and objective source.*
- *God's authority gives moral laws certainty.*
- *Fits well with many religious traditions.*

Problems

- *It seems to make morality arbitrary.*
- *If God had commanded lying or cruelty, would they become good?*
- *It suggests goodness is simply whatever God chooses.*

Option 2: God commands things because they are already good.

Here, goodness exists independently of God, and God recognises and commands what is already morally right.

Strengths

- *Goodness is not arbitrary.*
- *Morality has rational foundations.*
- *We can meaningfully say that God is good because God acts according to goodness.*

Problems

- *It appears to limit God's power.*
- *If goodness exists independently of God, is God really the source of morality?*
- *Some believers think this weakens God's sovereignty.*

Divine Command Theory

Divine Command Theory (DCT) argues that:

An action is morally right if God commands it and morally wrong if God forbids it.

In other words, morality comes directly from God's commands.

For example:

- *Do not murder.*
- *Love your neighbour.*
- *Care for the poor.*



These actions are good because they are commanded by God.

Key strengths

- *Provides an objective moral standard.*
- *Explains why moral duties are binding.*
- *Fits naturally with Judaism, Christianity and Islam.*

Key criticisms

- *Faces the Euthyphro Dilemma.*
- *Can make morality seem dependent solely on authority rather than reason.*
- *Raises questions about interpreting God's commands when religious texts disagree.*

A Christian Response

Many Christian philosophers, especially Thomas Aquinas, reject the idea that God arbitrarily invents morality.

Instead, Aquinas argues that:

- *God is goodness itself.*
- *God's nature is perfectly loving, just and rational.*
- *Therefore, God commands actions that reflect His own perfectly good nature.*

This offers a middle position. Goodness is not independent of God, but neither is it arbitrary. God cannot command evil because it would contradict His own nature.

What do you think about this?

Religious Studies, Philosophy, and Ethics is a thought-provoking course that challenges you to think critically, question your own beliefs and assumptions and explore different perspectives on life, morality, and existence. Through discussion, debate and reasoned argument, you develop the skills to analyse complex issues with an open mind and respect for others. The course encourages self-reflection, empathy and ethical decision-making, helping you

grow not only as a student but also as a more understanding, compassionate and thoughtful person. If you have enjoyed these activities, then you'll really enjoy your studies over the next two years.