

Final Phase of A Level Philosophy, Ethics and Buddhism transition tasks.

Religious Studies is a great subject to help you build a wide range of skills, including improving your skills as a writer, speaker and thinker.

Even though you haven't been able to finish your Year 11 course this year, you can still practice and develop Religious Studies skills at home. 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 write by hand, just to keep up the practice so that your handwriting 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?

Here are some different activities and exercises for you to try whilst you're learning from home. In Religious Studies, some of the topics can be quite sensitive, so if the activity involves an issue that might make you upset, choose a different one. These times are already difficult enough; nobody wants you to be upset when there's no teacher there to talk you through your feelings.

Reading activities

Here are some books and some online resources you could try, if you can get hold of them. Don't worry if they're not available or you can't get on the computer for very long – you won't be at a disadvantage. Remember, your local library has a bit list of online materials available. Use this link to find out more -

<https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/libraries/ebooksandaudiobooks>

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.

These are just *some* ideas – you don't have to choose any of these if you'd rather read something else, and there are so many good books in the world that this list could go on for ever, but it's a start:

***The Brothers Karamazov* by Fyodor Dostoevsky:** a huge and important 'classic' book, which takes time and effort and is well worth both. Raises issues of God, evil, rivalry, loyalty...

***To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee:** another classic that should be on everyone's 'must read' list

***The Puzzle of...* series by Peter Vardy:** this series of non-fiction books is about issues in religion and philosophy, very readable and you don't have to be an expert to enjoy them. You can dip in and out of different chapters rather than having to start at the beginning and work through to the end.

***Candide* by Voltaire:** another 'classic', this one takes a philosophical view of people's approaches to evil and natural disaster. It's a great book but the topics might be too difficult for you to cope with in the current circumstances, so try it if you want to but save it for more stable times if you don't.

Critical thinking skills

Here are a couple of activities to try, to start you off, and then a selection of other directions you might like to take.

Activity 1

This is the first episode of a documentary about attitudes towards homosexuality:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMPI25oraVc>

This is the first episode of Stephen Fry's series 'Out There', where he explores attitudes to homosexuality in different parts of the world.

Here are some 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?
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?

Activity 2

Watch this documentary, 'The Boy who Lived Before':

<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. Read the accounts in the gospels of the resurrection of Jesus (you could use biblegateway.com if you don't have a Bible at home).

Matthew 28:1-10

Mark 16:1-8

Luke 24:1-10

John 20:1–18

4. Do you find these stories convincing? Why, or why not?
5. Do you think the stories contradict each other, or are they just told from different points of view, in your opinion? What might account for the differences and the similarities between the stories?

Resources to help develop your thinking skills

Books

The Pig that wants to be Eaten by Julian Baggini

50 Philosophy Ideas you really need to know by Ben Dupré

Think by Simon Blackburn

The Blind Watchmaker, and/or The God Delusion by Richard Dawkins

These suggestions are only a few of the very many available, so don't worry if you can't get hold of these specific titles.

Online resources

The Philosophy Man (thephilosophyman.com)

This website gives you lots of different ideas to think about. Some are for younger children but you could try the 'brainsqueezers'. These are good if you don't have too much time, or if you're finding it difficult to settle to anything more concentrated.

The Philosophers' Magazine (philosophersmag.com)

Try the games on this website, and read the commentaries that go with them. Lots to think about!

Some things to watch and think about

All kinds of films and series have philosophical and religious ideas in them, so follow your own interests! You could try these, or choose something else, but try and use them as a stimulus for thinking and writing, rather than just sitting in front of them:

- The Matrix
- Unorthodox – available on NetFlix

- Twelve Angry Men
- The Good Place – available on NetFlix.

Some questions you could consider whilst watching -

- 1 What does it mean to be 'good'?
- 2 Does doing good things make you a 'good' person?
- 3 What does Eleanor do to try and gain 'good' points?
- 4 Do her actions actually make her a 'good person'?
- 5 Are good things done for selfish reasons still 'good'?
- 6 Would you describe Eleanor as 'good'? She's done a lot of 'good' things but do these actions actually make her a 'good' person?

The link below discusses what The Good Place says about good and evil -

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/what_the_good_place_says_about_good_evil
!

Philosophy Task

Watch this debate between William Lane Craig and Christopher Hitchens.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0tYm41hb48o>

The video is called

Does God Exist? William Lane Craig vs. Christopher Hitchens - Full Debate [HD]



If you watch from 11 minutes 30 seconds you will see William Lane Craig and Christopher Hitchens being introduced. William Lane Craig is a Christian and Christopher Hitchens was a New Atheist.

Structure of the talk

The lecture is quite long and so you may wish to watch this in stages. They talk for 20 minutes each and then have a right of reply each.

- William Lane Craig starts at 13 minutes
- Christopher Hitchens starts at 33minutes and 30 seconds
- Williams Lane Craig replies to Christopher Hitchens from 54 minutes and 15 seconds
- Christopher Hitchens replies to William Lane Craig from 1hr and 7 minutes

From one hour 20 minutes there is a cross examination that you may wish to watch.

Having watched the videos you are going to make notes, we'd recommend the Cornell notes method (see the study skills section)

Make notes on -

- The key arguments given by both sides
- The responses and evaluations given
- Your own view of which side is more convincing and why

Going further with Philosophy of Religion

If this is your favourite area, you might want to try some of the following extras

1. Stephen Law and the Evil God challenge

Watch the video here on Stephen Law's 'Evil God' argument

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

Summarise his reasoning as best as you can



Law isn't suggesting that Evil God exists, but that if you reject the reasoning around why an Evil God would allow goodness, you should also reject the reasoning for why a Good God would allow evil. Do you think this is an effective challenge? Why or why not?

2. Watch the BBC documentary 'God on the Brain'

<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x7okydo>

(apologies, this is the only public link I can find and for some strange reason the image is flipped)

Make a note of some of the key ideas and thinkers associated with 'neurotheology'

Based on the evidence from the video – do you think that religious belief is a result of the biology of the human brain? Do you think that this counts as evidence for or against the existence of God? Why? Why not?

Ethics Tasks

There are 2 ethics tasks, one to give you an overview of what we'll study and another to get you involved in some ethical decision making with a famous thought experiment. Complete them in any order.

Task 1 - Would you sacrifice one person to save five?

Complete the Ted-Ed lesson here <https://ed.ted.com/on/HcROMDBy>

Watch the video, try the multiple-choice questions, explore further on the dig deeper links and then answer the questions below:



Would you sacrifice one person to save five?

LESSON CREATED BY LISA O'CONNOR USING TED-Ed's LESSON CREATOR
VIDEO FROM TED-Ed YOUTUBE CHANNEL

Let's Begin...

Imagine you're watching a runaway trolley barreling down the tracks, straight towards five workers. You happen to be standing next to a switch that will divert the trolley onto a second track. Here's the problem: that track has a worker on it, too — but just one. What do you do? Do you sacrifice one person to save five? Eleanor Nelsen details the ethical dilemma that is the trolley problem.



- Watch
- Think
- Dig Deeper
- Discuss

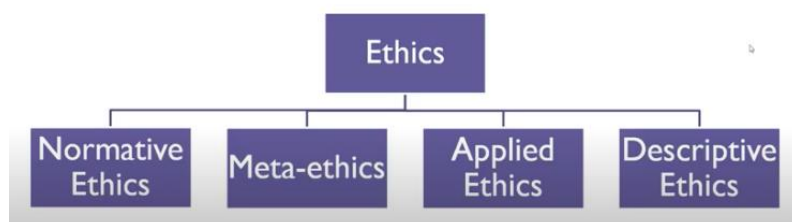
Do you think the right thing to do is to pull the lever? Why or why not?

Would it be acceptable to kill one person to allow 5 people to receive organ transplants? Why or why not?

Task 2 – An introduction to Ethics

There is an accessible video introduction to this topic area here
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VI-toeWp9WA>

Areas of Study in Ethics



Make notes on the following;

- 1.** What is ethics?

- 2.** What is meant by normative ethics?

- 3.** What are the key ideas of;
 - a. Deontological ethics

 - b. Consequentialist ethics

 - c. Virtue Ethics

- 4.** What is meant by meta-ethics?

- 5.** What is meant by descriptive ethics?

Going further with Ethics

If you'd like to explore this area further we'd recommend -

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_t4obUc51A&feature=emb_title

This video from Academy of Ideas goes deeper into the different areas of ethics and asks whether morality is objective or subjective.

Watch and add to your previous notes.

Do you think that morality is an objective fact about the world that we can discover somehow, or is it an expression of individual feeling? Or is it something else? Why?

Test out your own moral intuitions and those of others by watching some of the clips from 'What would you do?'

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCwdo8-3UrfZ9schPI0m4Ysg>

Buddhism Tasks

Check out the online webinars on Buddhism held as part of the University of Chester's Tuesday lunchtime series –

<https://www1.chester.ac.uk/theology-and-religious-studies/schools-engagement/trs-chester-level-webinars> (also useful for Philosophy).

Access Paul Gethin's book 'The Foundations of Buddhism' (pdf version available on the Handful of Leaves website - <http://www.ahandfulofleaves.org/Library.html>) Read the introduction and up to page 36 about the Historical Buddha. Create a timeline of the events leading up to the Buddha's birth.

Use <http://www.ahandfulofleaves.org/Library.html> to read other texts about Buddhism. These are university level texts but stick with them!

Research the history of the Caste system in India (use <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-35650616> as a starting point) to understand the type of society that the Buddha was born into.

If you prefer to watch, rather than read, check out the NetFlix series 'Buddha'. It is very long but it would be useful for you to watch the first few episodes as an introduction to the Buddhism that you will study at A-Level.

Study Skills

Note-making is a key skill for A level. You will be provided with workbooks throughout the course but also additional reading and multi-media resources. Being able to bring this all together in an organised way so that you have effective notes to learn from is one of the key differences between students who do well and those who do less well.

We strongly recommend the Cornell Notes method and have provided some guidance here, as well as some blank templates. Try making Cornell Notes for at least one of these activities and make sure you bring them in when you start with us in the autumn.

There are instructions on how to take Cornell Notes in this video.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ErSjc1PEGKE>

You have some blank templates in this booklet, but you can easily use a ruler to divide up a page. On the next page is an example of some completed Cornell Notes for you to see on a different topic.



Based on the Ted-Talk here

https://www.ted.com/talks/tom_honey_why_would_god_create_a_tsunami?language=en

IX. A Model of the Cornell Notes document

Name	Date
Topic: Topic Rev Tom Honey on why God allows tsunamis	Subject: Problem of Evil

<p>Main Ideas:</p> <p>We need to move away from the God of classical theism</p> <p>We need to stop looking for a philosophical answer to the problem of evil</p> <p>Abandon God of classical theism for a suffering God – this fits the 20th century</p> <p>A God who responds to prayer or acts in history is biased and unfair</p> <p>Abandon traditional God, not one who acts but a divine presence</p>	<p>Notes:</p> <p>Many people see God as the almighty, a policeman in the sky. In the past we have not wanted to rock the boat by exploring other ideas about God.</p> <p>Archbishop of Canterbury – people do not want an intellectual explanation of evil. There are no words that can make up for what has happened; instead, a compassionate silence and practical help is needed.</p> <p>God has to be able to feel and experience our pain. One who weeps when we weep and rejoice when we rejoice. We need to move away from an unchanging God who is cold and indifferent. WW1, WW2 and Holocaust. Where is God – the answer is God is in this with us or he does not deserve our allegiance. An unchanging God may exist but I do not want to know him.</p> <p>Why would God act in some cases but not others? This makes him unfair and partisan.</p> <p>We should see God not as one who does things as in the Old Testament, defeating Egyptians etc. but instead he is in things. Is this Pantheism? Pantheism? There are lots of don't knows but that is what makes God a divine mystery.</p>
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<p>Summary:</p> <p>We most move away from the God of classical theism. God is not a grand fixer but instead a presence within us who feels our pain and joy. This allows us to offer support to those experiencing evil rather than philosophical arguments. A God who acts in history becomes partisan, and it makes more sense to have a God who understands all suffering rather than one that fixes some suffering whilst ignoring others' pain.</p>

Name	Date
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Topic	Subject
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Main Ideas	Notes
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Summary
