

STEPPING UP...

AN ONLINE COURSE FOR STUDENTS BEGINNING
A LEVEL RELIGIOUS STUDIES

With Charlotte Vardy

Name:

School/ College:

Keep this booklet, filled in, as a record that you have completed the course.
Your teacher(s) may ask to see it in September.

Welcome to Stepping Up:

AN ONLINE COURSE FOR STUDENTS BEGINNING
A LEVEL RELIGIOUS STUDIES

with Charlotte Vardy



This course should take around 6 hours to complete and consists of videos and a booklet full of activities to fill in as you watch and then complete afterwards, module by module. You will need the booklet open, whether printed out or in .pdf form, to start the course.

Contents:

Introducing A Level Religious Studies

Module 1: Introducing the Philosophy of Religion

Module 2: Introducing Ethics

Module 3: Introducing Theology

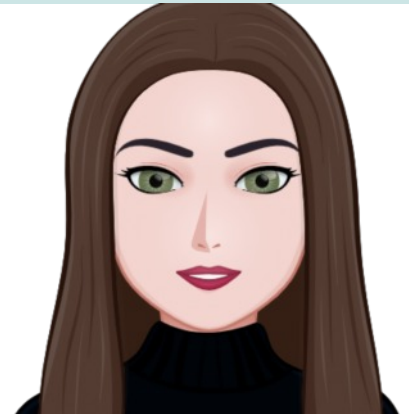
Study Skills for A Level Religious Studies

Writing your first A Level Essay

INTRODUCING A LEVEL RELIGIOUS STUDIES

It is great that you have chosen to take Religious Studies to A Level!

Religious Studies is a well-respected, academically rigorous course which will help you to develop strong skills in critical thinking, discussion and debate, analysis of written sources and essay-writing, ensuring that your transition to



So, is Religious Studies a “facilitating subject”?

In the past, Oxford, Cambridge and the Russell Group Universities issued lists of suitable subjects to take at A Level... so-called “facilitating subjects”... and yes, Religious Studies was on the lists of preferred subjects for both Oxford and Cambridge and was mentioned alongside Economics as a rigorous subject suitable to prepare students for studying at Russell Groups universities.

“There are some advanced level subjects which provide suitable preparation for entry to university generally, but which we do not include within the facilitating subjects, because there are relatively few degree programmes where an advanced level qualification in these subjects would be a *requirement* for entry. Examples of such subjects include Economics and Religious Studies.”

Russell Group “Informed Choices” document

For information, all these universities have now withdrawn their lists because the government, schools and students kept taking them out of context and because seeming to denigrate subjects commonly studied in state schools and Sixth Form colleges did little to improve equal access to their institutions!

- The Russell Group now has a website <https://www.informedchoices.ac.uk/> which gives advice about which courses have particular entry-requirements.
- Advice varies from subject to subject at Oxford and Cambridge, but the Universities only state subjects they require and don’t comment about which other subjects students should study.

Did you know?

- Last time a survey was done of which subjects students of PPE at Oxford had studied, 20% said they had taken A Level Religious Studies.

What will I study?

All the English exam-boards share core content in the Philosophy of Religion and Ethics, and most schools choose to study Christian Theology for their third paper (although some schools choose to study the New Testament or another religion).

1. **Philosophy of Religion** explores the nature of reality, considering what we can know, whether there is a God, what a God could be like and what religious claims really mean.
2. **Ethics** explores how we should live, considering different ideas about the purpose of human life and how our decision-making relates to that when it comes to contemporary issues like Euthanasia.
3. **Christian Theology** explores central Christian beliefs and how Christians have responded when these beliefs have been challenged, whether through science, secularisation, multiculturalism or feminism.

How will I be assessed?

All the English exam-boards assess Religious Studies by means of exams at the end of the course, during the May/June of Year 13. There is **NO COURSEWORK** for A Level Religious Studies.

- If you are following the **AQA** specification, you will have two three-hour exams
- If you are following the **OCR, Edexcel or Eduqas** specifications, you will have three, two-hour exams

Using this information and the A Level choices booklet provided by your school or college (or the Religious Studies page of the school/college website) fill in this section...

I will be studying the Philosophy of Religion, Ethics and _____ for A Level Religious Studies. At the moment, I am most excited by studying _____, because...

I will be following the _____ specification for my A Level in Religious Studies, which means that I will be working towards _____ exams, each lasting for _____ hours, at the end of Year 13.

What are the Attainment Objectives?

The Attainment Objectives for the A Level Religious Studies were set centrally by the DfE and apply equally to all examination boards, specifications and options. This is checked by OfQual. This means that regardless of which exam-board your school or college uses, your work will always be assessed in relation to the same skills, described through the same two ATTAINMENT OBJECTIVES.

When you take the A Level exams, you will be assessed on your ability to meet ATTAINMENT OBJECTIVE ONE (AO1) and ATTAINMENT OBJECTIVE TWO (AO2), which are used by the exam-boards to determine and to divide up the marks for each essay and to shape level descriptors used by markers.

AO1 (40%)

Demonstrate **knowledge and understanding** of religion and belief

AO2 (60%)

Analyse and evaluate aspects of, and approaches to, religion and belief, including their significance, influence and study.

What does this mean?

Only 40% of the marks are available to reward your knowledge and understanding of the content of the course.

Accurate, detailed description and explanation of the ideas and arguments we study will only earn you an E grade.

A full 60% of the marks depend on your ability to analyse and evaluate ideas and arguments. These skills are assessed by means of your ability to develop and sustain a well-reasoned argument.

Beyond a bare pass, your whole grade depends on your ability to make and defend an academic judgement, sustaining an argument, in response to the question set.

What does knowledge and understanding (AO1) look like?

If you did GCSE Religious Studies, you will know how to develop AO1 points with explanation and evidence. Even if you did not do GCSE Religious Studies, but did another Humanities subject like History or Geography... or did English Literature... you will know that demonstrating good knowledge and understanding means writing PEE paragraphs rather than single sentence answers

What is a PEE paragraph?

Make a (correct, relevant) POINT, EXPLAIN it and then add some EVIDENCE to back up what you have said. Evidence comes in different forms and could be an example, some statistics or, as in this case, a quotation.

Take these typical GCSE questions... label or colour-code the POINT, EXPLANATION and EVIDENCE in each PEE paragraph.

Explain TWO Religious teachings about euthanasia. You must refer to Scripture or another source of wisdom and authority in your answer.

Euthanasia literally means "a good death". One conservative Christian teaching is that it is wrong to cause someone's death deliberately, so killing someone actively could never be considered right. Human beings are made in the image of God, so human life is sacred and destroying it breaks God's law and offends Him. Exodus 20:13 says "thou shall not murder" and murder is the intentional killing of a human being, so any active form of euthanasia would be a form of murder and against the ten commandments.

A second Religious teaching about euthanasia is the liberal Christian view that it might be the most loving thing to help a dying person to end their suffering at the time and in the manner of their choosing. Jesus taught Christians to "love your neighbour as yourself" and as few people would want to suffer at the end of their lives, we should show love and help those who ask for it. While most Christians oppose Assisted Dying, Anglican Archbishops Desmond Tutu and George Carey both argued that it would be compassionate to legalise it when the subject was last debated in 2015.

Outline the causes and consequences of Climate Change.

Climate change is the process by which average global temperatures are rising, causing ice to melt, sea-levels to rise, deserts to expand and weather-patterns to change. The vast majority of climate-scientists argue that climate-change is being caused by the growth in CO₂ in the atmosphere, creating a "greenhouse effect" and preventing heat from being lost into space. Human beings are responsible for most of the additional CO₂, whether from burning fossil-fuels, cutting down rainforests, draining wetlands or polluting oceans, killing algae. The consensus of scientific opinion is that global temperatures have already risen more than 1 degree since pre-industrial times, and that they will go on to rise by at least 3.5 degrees in the next 80 years, causing an unprecedented climate emergency.

What exactly is analysis and evaluation?

What does AO2 look like?

60% of the marks at A Level relate to AO2, your ability to analyse and evaluate the course content.

What does it mean to **analyse**?

- to examine methodically and in detail, typically in order to interpret.

What does it mean to **evaluate**?

- to judge quality, importance or value

AO2 depends on developing your PEE paragraphs into PEEAE paragraphs.

ANALYSING the evidence such as by adding

- “this shows that”, “this suggests”, “a strength of this is... / a weakness of this is...”, “this relates to.../ this is similar to / contrasts with...”

EVALUATING the evidence by making a judgement - and ideally supporting it with some more explanation and evidence and even analysis...

“This is persuasive / not persuasive because...”, “this is a good argument / a poor argument because...”

Label or colour-code the **POINT, EXPLANATION, EVIDENCE, ANALYSIS** and **EVALUATION** in the two main paragraphs of this typical GCSE answer...

Euthanasia is always wrong! Evaluate this statement.

Euthanasia means “a good death”; it is a broad term that can be applied to different actions in different situations. Passive Euthanasia is commonly accepted, as this involves letting somebody die by withdrawing treatment, food and water, whether at their request or in their best interests. Active Euthanasia is more controversial, as this involves doing something to end somebody's life, whether at their request or in their best interests, but even this is legal in some countries like the Netherlands. Most non-religious people agree with euthanasia; recent opinion polls suggest that 85% of the British public support legalising assisted dying, and census data suggests that about half of the British public are non-religious. Some liberal Christians and Jews would also agree; Archbishop Desmond Tutu and George Carey spoke out in favour of assisted dying in 2015. As Jesus taught “love your neighbour as yourself” (Mark 12:32) and “Judge not, lest ye be judged” (Matthew 7:1). It follows that Euthanasia is not always wrong. This is because non-religious and liberal religious people believe that Euthanasia is right in some situations. Further, by definition, euthanasia concerns only good deaths. Ending someone's life against their wishes and/or interests, whether passively or actively, would be murder and so both wrong and illegal. Where somebody wishes to die or where a person who cannot express their wishes is still suffering and has no hope of this ending, it is compassionate and right to help them to end their life. Who can reasonably deny a person's autonomy or force somebody to suffer pointlessly?

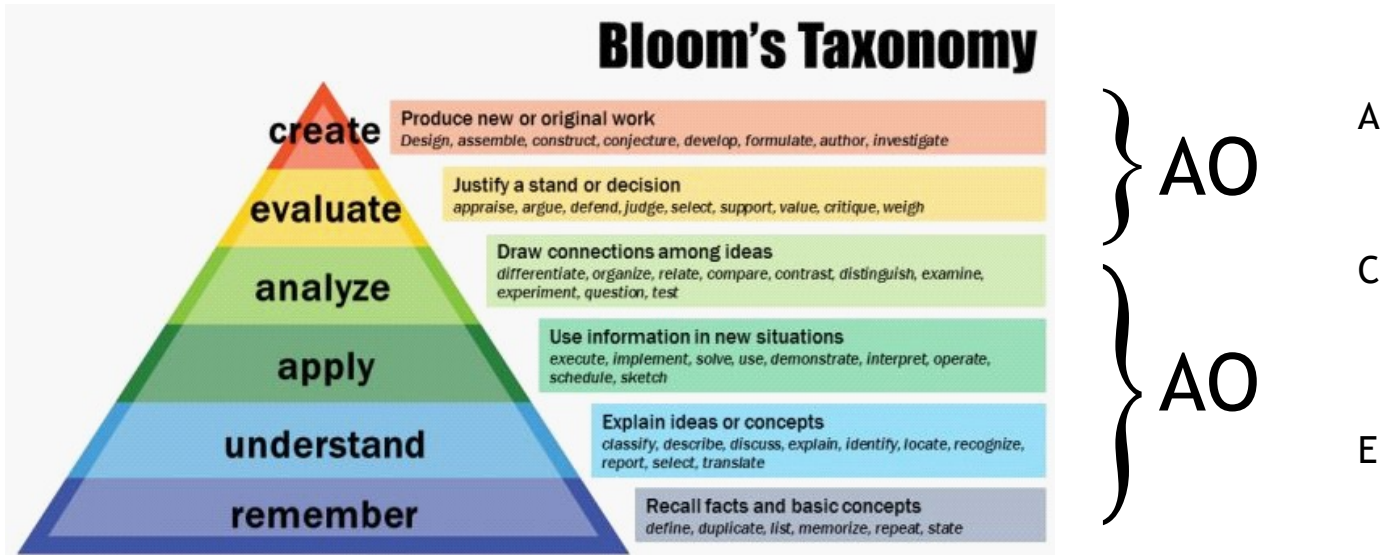
Of course, conservative Christians reject all active forms of Euthanasia, arguing that they constitute murder (“Thou shalt not murder” Exodus 20:13) and offend against the doctrine of the Sanctity of Life, based on Genesis 1:27 “in the image of God He created them”. As St Paul warned in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 “Do you not know that you yourselves are God's temple, and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.” The Roman Catholic Church has condemned all moves to legalise assisted dying, arguing that it leads to “a culture of death” and is the beginning of a slippery slope, endangering disabled and elderly people. Archbishop Justin Welby made just this point in an interview before the 2015 vote on assisted dying, as did the disabled advocate Dame Tanni Grey-Thompson. Nevertheless, as medical science advances and the population ages, it is growing increasingly impractical to keep assisted dying illegal. Legal safeguards are possible to protect vulnerable people; they are in operation in an increasing number of countries and states around the world. Further, trying to equate assisted dying with murder ignores Jesus' teaching about love, compassion and forgiveness. Would Jesus really punish somebody for wanting an easeful death?

In conclusion, Euthanasia is not always wrong. Both passive euthanasia and active euthanasia in cases of assisted dying are often the only compassionate option and the law should be changed to allow people to die with dignity.

Sounds like a fair bit of writing.
Will I have to write lots of essays?
Why?

Yes! Religious Studies is perhaps THE essay-subject... which is one of the reasons it offers such excellent preparation for university. Universities use essays as their main mode of assessment after all.

The reason A Level Religious Studies - and Universities - assess through essays is because writing an essay tests ALL the important academic skills... the unstructured essay is, therefore, the ultimate means of assessing students in Religious Studies (and many other subjects)



Label which of the two attainment objective tests which set of skills on the diagram above...

What do the A Level exam-questions look like?

Structured or unstructured essays...

Circle the exam-board you are using to discover what style of questions your board sets to assess the attainment objectives.

A Level exam-boards vary on the style of essay-questions they set to test the attainment objectives. It is VERY important to know which exam-board you are using, so that you know exactly what sort of questions you will face.

OCR, which has the largest market-share, sets only UNSTRUCTURED 40-mark essays - a choice of 3 out of 4 on each of three two-hour papers.

Both AO1 (40%) and AO2 (60%) are assessed through these essays.

“The Teleological Argument is the best argument for the existence of God.” Discuss [40 marks]

AQA sets mostly STRUCTURED essay-questions, with a part a (10 marks) testing AO1 and a part b (15 marks) testing AO2.

A) Examine Hick’s soul making theodicy and how it influences attitudes to evil and suffering. [10 marks]

B) ‘The ontological argument proves the existence of God.’ Evaluate this claim. [15 marks]

The dialogues part of Paper Two is an UNSTRUCTURED essay out of 25 marks, similar to the OCR questions (left). There is a choice of two dialogues essays, but all the other questions are compulsory on the two three-hour papers.

EdExcel sets a range of different types of questions, including two structured essays - 8 / 12 marks in section A, 10 / 20 marks in section B (rooted in a passage of text) and an unstructured 30 mark essay in section c, similar to the OCR style of question above.

The shorter-answer questions test AO1 and the longer essays test both AO1 and AO2.

All the questions are compulsory on the three two-hour papers.

Eduqas sets only STRUCTURED essays, with a part a (20 marks) testing AO1 and a part b (30 marks) testing AO2.

There is a choice of questions on all three of the two-hour papers.

a) Examine challenges to the objectivity and authenticity of religious experience. [20]

b) ‘Religious experience has more value for an individual than for a religious community.’ Evaluate this view. [30]

TIP: ALL the exam-boards ask you to write essays... so being better at them will lead to higher grades!

What exactly is an essay?

An academic essay tests (essayer) your considered academic opinion on a question by explaining it persuasively, with supporting reasons and evidence, including why other opinions and criticisms of yours are not acceptable and what reasons and evidence counts against them.



Dartmouth University in the USA advises its students that

“The purpose of the academic essay is to persuade by reasoned discourse...”

An essay is a lot like the argument a Barrister presents in court...

1. She starts by stating her case, what her argument will prove (i.e. her conclusion)... in academic writing we call this her **THESIS**... note how she doesn't spend ages giving background to the case and telling the court the personal histories of those involved!
2. She then explains the **REASONS**, the evidence in support of her case including forensic evidence, witness statements and, importantly, legal precedents (**AGREE**)...
3. She briefly reminds the jury of the other side's case (**DISAGREE**)
4. explaining how it is wrong on every point, using counter-evidence (**EVALUATION**)
5. Finally, she sums up her argument and asks the jury to acquit her client... (**CONCLUSION**)

TIP: If you want to do well at A Level, write like a Barrister (who argues her client's case persuasively), not like a Journalist (who just describes what happens)!

ACTIVITY

Label or colour-code the parts of the barrister's argument - the **THESIS** and the supporting **REASONS**, the **DISAGREE** and **EVALUATION** and the **CONCLUSION**.

It is clear that my client is innocent. Witness A has testified that my client was not at the scene of the crime, but was at dinner with four other people at the time of the murder. Exhibit X (the CCTV footage) confirmed Witness A's account. Further, Witness B testified that the injuries sustained by the victim are consistent with being inflicted by a strong, tall left-handed perpetrator. Exhibit Y proved that my client is right-handed and also lacks the strength to have inflicted the injuries. The prosecution argued that Witness A is unreliable, having a previous criminal record, and that Witness A had motive, means and opportunity to tamper with Exhibit X, however Witness A's criminal record is historic and in no way suggests that he has a dishonest character. In addition, the prosecution's attempt to discredit Witness B as an expert witness was shameful, if not unethical. Witness B has an outstanding record as a forensic pathologist and has never before had her evidence so questioned in court. In conclusion, I invite you to agree with me that my client is innocent.

(Intro) TRADE C

Intro **TRADE C** is a great way to start writing A Level essays... and we will look at this approach in more detail later in this course.



The Introductory paragraph should contain three sentences of intro...

1. Define any key-words in the question
2. Comment on the context of the question
3. State your **THESIS** (i.e your answer to the question, using the precise wording of the question)

The next 1-3 body paragraphs should each contain a clear **REASON** to support your **THESIS**, and include scholar(s) who **AGREE** with your thesis (argument) as evidence to back up the reasons.

After you have stated your thesis and explained your supporting reasons, you must explain one or more counterclaims (scholars who **DISAGREE** with your thesis) and then **EVALUATE** each, defending your thesis by showing why the counterclaim(s) are not persuasive, with evidence.

Because you have already argued your case through the whole of the essay, your **CONCLUSION** just re-states the thesis and best reason(s) for emphasis.

So, what does an A Level essay look like then?

Euthanasia is always wrong! Evaluate this statement. [40]

Euthanasia means “a good death”; it is a broad term that can be applied to different actions in different situations. Passive Euthanasia is commonly accepted, as this involves letting somebody die by withdrawing treatment, food and water, whether at their request or in their best interests. Active Euthanasia is more controversial, as this involves doing something to end somebody's life, whether at their request or in their best interests, but even this is legal in some countries like the Netherlands. Given that euthanasia is commonly accepted when it is passive, sometimes legal when it is active and always aims to reduce suffering, it follows that euthanasia is not always wrong.

Firstly and by definition, euthanasia concerns only good deaths. Ending someone's life against their wishes and/or interests, whether passively or actively, would be murder and so both wrong and illegal. However, where somebody wishes to die or where a person who cannot express their wishes is still suffering and has no hope of this ending, it is compassionate and right to help them to end their life. Taking the example of Tony Bland, the teenaged football-supporter in PVS who was allowed to die in 1994, keeping Tony alive for years in a hospital was causing suffering, if not to him then to his family and friends. Letting Tony die naturally minimised suffering and so was right in relation to Bentham's Utilitarianism. Further, in cases like these euthanasia attracts a great deal of public support. Recent opinion polls suggest that 85% of the British Public support legalising assisted dying. When Euthanasia often stops the suffering of a person, their friends and family and is supported by the majority of people it is clear that it cannot always be wrong.

Secondly, euthanasia is often consistent with Christian moral principles such as agape-love and compassion. In 2015 Archbishops Desmond Tutu and George Carey spoke out in favour of assisted dying being legalised in the UK, pointing out how difficult it is to imagine Jesus condemning terminally ill people seeking an easeful passing or insisting that peoples' low-quality lives are needlessly prolonged on a point of law. As Joseph Fletcher pointed out in “Situation Ethics: The New Morality” (1966), as Mark 12:28-32 shows, for Jesus the right action is the action which shows love. For example, in Luke 10 the Good Samaritan is shown to be good because he helped even his enemy; the Samaritan didn't stand on a point of religious law and refuse to bloody his hands as the Priest and Levite did. This shows that doing the right thing sometimes involves doing something that in other circumstances we wouldn't do; as Fletcher wrote “sometimes you have to put your principles to one side and do the right thing!” In John 5 Jesus was criticised for healing on the Sabbath, showing that he put easing suffering ahead of following absolute religious rules. While this example might be interpreted to suggest that Jesus only prioritised saving life, in Mark 2 Jesus was criticised for allowing the disciples to pluck ears of corn on the Sabbath, something which only eased their hunger-pangs. It follows that assisted dying is consistent with Christian moral principles and that euthanasia is not always wrong.

Of course, conservative Christians reject all active forms of Euthanasia, arguing that they constitute murder, breaking a God-given law (“Thou shall not murder” Exodus 20:13) and offending against the doctrine of the Sanctity of Life, based on Genesis 1:27 “in the image of God He created them”. As St Paul warned in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 “Do you not know that you yourselves are God's temple, and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.” Nevertheless, to equate euthanasia with murder is a mistake. Lots of forms of killing are not prohibited by the law against murder, including killing in war and capital punishment. Assisted dying is not murder; it serves the best interests of both individuals and society as a whole and can surely be justified proportionately. It follows that euthanasia is not always wrong and cannot be prohibited as part of the law against murder.

Further, the Roman Catholic Church has condemned all moves to legalise assisted dying, arguing that it leads to “a culture of death” and is the beginning of a slippery slope, endangering disabled and elderly people. Archbishop Justin Welby made just this point in an interview before the 2015 vote on assisted dying, as did the disabled advocate Dame Tanni Grey Thompson. Nevertheless, as medical science advances and the population ages, it is growing increasingly impractical to keep assisted dying illegal. Legal safeguards are possible to protect vulnerable people; they are in operation in an increasing number of countries and states around the world. When opposing all forms of Euthanasia strains healthcare resources in such a way as prolonging the lives of the dying means not helping children it will be impossible to sustain these objections which claim that euthanasia is always wrong.

In conclusion, Euthanasia is not always wrong. Both passive euthanasia and active euthanasia in cases of assisted dying are often the only compassionate option and the law should be changed to allow people to die with dignity.

This essay is a bit short for A Level, but still effective.

Label the parts of Intro TRADE C to get a sense of what they mean in practice, then label each of the main (body) paragraphs showing the POINT, EXPLANATION, EVIDENCE, ANALYSIS, EVALUATION

How do I write like that?

ACTIVITY

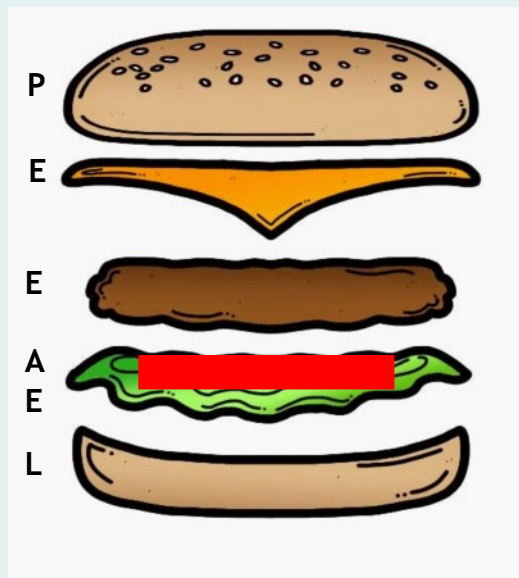
1. Going back to the essay on the previous page, label or, if you are artistic, you could draw burgers at the side of each body paragraph, showing the parts of the PEEAEL paragraph
2. Now highlight the THESIS (where the student answers the question, in a sentence, using the wording of the question... usually at the end of the intro. paragraph) and then the LINKS back to the thesis (at the end of each PEEAEL paragraph and then where the THESIS is repeated in the CONCLUSION. Notice how all these match up, showing that the student is answering the question and arguing a case. Tying your essay together like this makes it easier to follow and so more persuasive... the technique is called SIGNPOSTING and it is a characteristic of good A Level essays!

Every paragraph in your essays should follow the PEEAEL structure, containing a POINT (topic sentence), EXPLANATION, EVIDENCE, ANALYSIS, EVALUATION and a LINK to your argument.

TOP TIPS:

- If you are trying to cover more than one point in a single paragraph STOP... you need two (or three paragraphs).
- On the other hand, if you are about to start a new paragraph and are just continuing your previous point STOP... this belongs in the same paragraph.

The Perfect Paragraph



State your **POINT** (Reason), simply...

EXPLAIN your point (reason)...

Support your point with **EVIDENCE** (Scholarship, examples, statistics etc.)

ANALYSE your evidence and then

EVALUATE it, making a judgement about it ...

LINK back to your THESIS, showing how this paragraph supports it.

TIP: Paragraphs are not decorative; they are neither random breaks in text, nor the same as bullet-points. A paragraph is a developed POINT in your argument, a properly explained premise which supports the thesis (conclusion)



Did you know?

The skills you develop through writing academic essays are highly transferable and help to prepare you for a wide range of careers, from being a barrister, politician or journalist through to being a doctor, management consultant or even a salesperson. So many jobs demand that you make a considered judgement and then express it clearly and persuasively in writing.

Top 10 skills of 2025

- Analytical thinking and innovation
- Active learning and learning strategies
- Complex problem-solving
- Critical thinking and analysis
- Creativity, originality and initiative
- Leadership and social influence
- Technology use, monitoring and control
- Technology design and programming
- Resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility
- Reasoning, problem-solving and ideation

- Type of skill
- Problem-solving
 - Self-management
 - Working with people
 - Technology use and development

Source: Future of Jobs Report 2020, World Economic Forum.

Which of these top-10 skills do you develop through A Level Religious Studies... and which of these through writing essays?

Quiz

Check your knowledge and understanding of this Introductory Module by completing this True or False quiz...



- Look back in your booklet if you are not sure of an answer.

1. According to the Russell Group "Informed Choices" booklet, Religious Studies is as good as a facilitating subject, but not specifically required by many University courses.
2. Last time a survey was done, 50% of PPE students at Oxford said that they had A Level Religious Studies.
3. As well as studying a religion, usually Christianity (or the New Testament) at A Level, all students must also study Ethics and the Philosophy of Religion.
4. Three out of the four exam-boards set three, two hour examinations at the end of Year 13 and the other board, AQA, sets 2 3 hour exams.
5. There is a compulsory coursework component for A Level Religious Studies.
6. All the exam-boards have the same attainment objectives for A Level RS.
7. Attainment Objective 1 is the most important and carries 60% of the marks.
8. Attainment Objective 2 assesses your ability to analyse and evaluate what you have studied by arguing a case.
9. A purely factual, descriptive answer - so long as it is detailed and accurate - can score a top grade at A Level.
10. According to Bloom's Taxonomy, evaluation and analysis are higher-order skills, so this is why A Level RS gives more weight to them through AO2.
11. A Level Religious Studies rewards brevity, so don't bother to explain or give evidence to support your answers.
12. Evaluation can be positive - saying why something is convincing, persuasive etc - or it can be negative - saying why something is weak, incoherent etc.
13. Analysis is your ability to judge and assess what you have studied.
14. Only OCR asks students to write essays for A Level - the other boards only set short-answer questions.
15. A counterclaim is an argument which disagrees with yours - you should explain and then evaluate at least one counterclaim in each essay.
16. When writing an essay, you should imagine yourself as a court-reporter, not as a barrister.
17. The A in TRADE C asks you to explain points which agree with the title, NOT your Thesis.
18. You should start a new paragraph after every 8-10 lines, because your writing looks neater that way.
19. A paragraph is a single, developed point in your argument - which should be stated as a Point, Explained with Evidence and Analysis/Evaluation and then Linked back to your Thesis.
20. Writing essays is only important for A Levels - you won't need the skill at University or in Employment.

Self Evaluation

Before you begin the course, it is worth reflecting on the skills and knowledge you already have.

It is clear that A Level Religious Studies demands that you have strong skills in **reading comprehension** and in **writing** English (as well as discussing and debating in class).

- One measure of whether you have these skills is your GCSE English Levels.

I earned a Level ____ in GCSE English Language [and a ____ in English Literature]

- Another measure is your Level in Religious Studies (or History / Geography if you didn't take RS)

I earned a Level ____ in GCSE Religious Studies OR a Level ____ in _____.

Which areas of A Level Religious Studies will you find the most difficult? Explain your answer.

Which areas of A Level Religious Studies will you find the least difficult? Explain your answer.

Module 1: Introducing the Philosophy of Religion

Since 2016, all the English examination boards require students to study the Philosophy of Religion as part of A Level Religious Studies. What does this involve?

The Philosophy of Religion is the study of the “big questions” which underpin all religions, including

- What is reality?
- What is God?
- Can we prove that God exists?
- Can we say anything meaningful about things we can't experience through the senses?

The Philosophy of Religion encourages and enables students of Religious Studies to think deeply and critically, to analyse and evaluate different types of argument and to be precise in their use of language when speaking and writing. All of these skills are important in studying Religion, Philosophy and indeed most other subjects at University... and in becoming a well-educated, engaged and critically aware human being.

01

What does it mean to say that **God** exists?

What is God?

The first step in thinking philosophically is to be precise in your use of language.

It is clear that different people have different ideas about what “God” is, whether or not they believe that God exists.

- Clearly, if I asked you whether you believe in bloopety-blopps, you couldn't answer the question without finding out what bloopety-blopps are...

So, what does the word “God” refer to?

If you believe in God, write down what it is you believe in. If you don't believe in God (called being an ATHEIST), or if you are not sure (called being an AGNOSTIC), write down what it is that you DON'T believe in or aren't sure about.

- *TIP: If you did GCSE Religious Studies, try to use KEY WORDS in your answer.*

God is...

God

noun

1 (In Christianity and other monotheistic religions) the creator and ruler of the universe and source of all moral authority; the supreme being.

2. (in certain other religions) a superhuman being or spirit worshipped as having power over nature or human fortunes; a deity.

What is God?

GUIDED READING

This passage is taken from the NIV translation of the Book of Exodus. This passage, in its original Hebrew, is part of the TORAH, which is the Holy Book of Judaism and one of the Holy Books of Islam (Tawrat). It is also part of the Old Testament of the Christian Bible.

7. Read Exodus 3:18-21. What does this passage suggest about the nature of God?

Highlight a quotation to support your answer and join it to this box with a neat arrow.

6. Read Exodus 3:15. To what extent does God seem consistent in revealing His nature in this passage? I.e. is "I am" the same God as "the Lord, the God of your fathers... Abraham, Isaac and Jacob"?

6. Read Exodus 3:13-14. What does God say that His name is? What does that name suggest about the nature of God?

Highlight the name of God in the text.

1. Read Exodus 3:1. Where was Moses and what was he doing?

NB: Some scholars think that Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai, where Moses later received the Ten Commandments.

Moses and the Burning Bush

EXODUS 3 Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. 3 So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up."

4 When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

And Moses said, "Here I am."

5 "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." 6 Then he said, "I am the God of your father,[a] the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

7 The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. 8 So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. 9 And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. 10 So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

12 And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you[b] will worship God on this mountain."

7. Read Exodus 3:11-12. What does God suggest is the sign (evidence) that God is who He says He is?

2. Read Exodus 3:2-3. In what form did the Angel of the Lord appear to Moses?

Highlight a quotation to support your answer and join it to this box with a neat arrow.

13 Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?"

14 God said to Moses, "I am who I am.[c] This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am has sent me to you.'"

15 God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The Lord,[d] the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.'

"This is my name forever,

the name you shall call me

from generation to generation.

16 "Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. 17 And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—a land flowing with milk and honey.'

18 "The elders of Israel will listen to you. Then you and the elders are to go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Let us take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God.' 19 But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him. 20 So I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go.

21 "And I will make the Egyptians favourably disposed toward this people, so that when you leave you will not go empty-handed. 22 Every woman is to ask her neighbour and any woman living in her house for articles of silver and gold and for clothing, which you will put on your sons and daughters. And so you will plunder the Egyptians."

7. Read Exodus 3:7-10. What does this passage suggest about the nature of God?

3. Can you think of any natural explanation for a bush appearing to burn, but not being consumed?

4. What were the Lord's first words to Moses? What do they suggest about God and how God relates to human beings?

5. How does God describe Himself in Exodus 3:6? What does that suggest about the nature of God?

Highlight a quotation to support your answer and join it to this box with a neat arrow.

6. Read Exodus 3:6b. What might this suggest about the nature of God?

So, what is "God"?

The Bible seems to reveal God as having at least two aspects...

On one level God is abstract, IMPERSONAL and mysterious...

- "I AM that I AM"... the essence of being or, as the Philosopher Paul Tillich put it "the ground of our being"
- Exists eternally-timelessly before and outside Creation, and all creation depends on Him "let there be light..." God is TRANSCENDENT, IMMUTABLE, WHOLLY SIMPLE
- PERFECT... "that than which nothing greater can be conceived of"

On another level, God is PERSONAL and acts in history...

- "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." God speaks to individuals, responds to prayers and unfolding situations and works miracles to change the course of events
- God is IMMANENT, ancient and everlasting, always in the world and dynamic...
- God's Spirit is all around us and in us as RUACH... "in him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind." John 1:4

Is this the same "God"?

BLAISE PASCAL



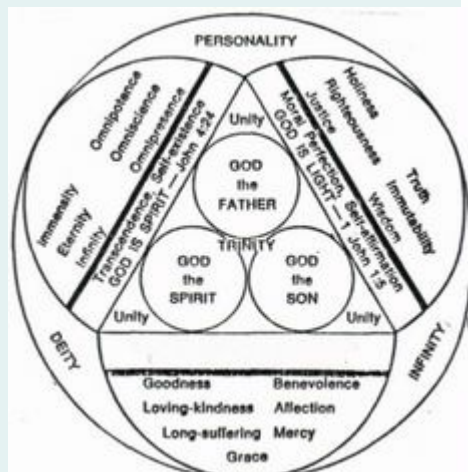
In the 17th Century, the great French mathematician Blaise Pascal had a powerful religious experience, writing this on a piece of parchment, which he then sewed into the lining of his coat, where it remained until his death.

"From about half-past ten in the evening until about half-past twelve ... FIRE ... God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, and not of the philosophers and savants. Certitude. Certitude. Feeling. Joy. Peace."

The religious experience forced Pascal to reject BOTH reason AND sense-experience as the basis for knowledge, because "Reason's last step is the recognition that there are an infinite number of things which are beyond it." For Pascal, God is personal in that He speaks directly to the heart and shows that in the end, we know nothing other than that God exists. At the same time, God is deeply abstract - something you feel rather than something you describe.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

For Christians, making sense of how God could be BOTH the eternal creator of everything AND personal in the form of Jesus AND active throughout history, working miracles, inspiring prophets etc. is not easy. It took more than 300 years for the Church to develop the doctrine of the Trinity to explain how God can be experienced in apparently contradictory ways and yet all these ways be the same One God. Even today, most Christians find the doctrine of the Trinity baffling, but it remains crucial because it makes some sense of texts like Exodus 3, where God appears to be BOTH abstract and PERSONAL, both eternal and unchanging and also dynamic and active in the world.



“

The Father is the origin of all things, the Son is the mediator of all things, and the Spirit is the one who brings every work of God to completion. Christ is the one who leads us to the Father, the Father is the one who says 'This is my beloved Son; listen to him,' and the Holy Spirit is the one who enables us to listen to Jesus and to embrace him as Savior."

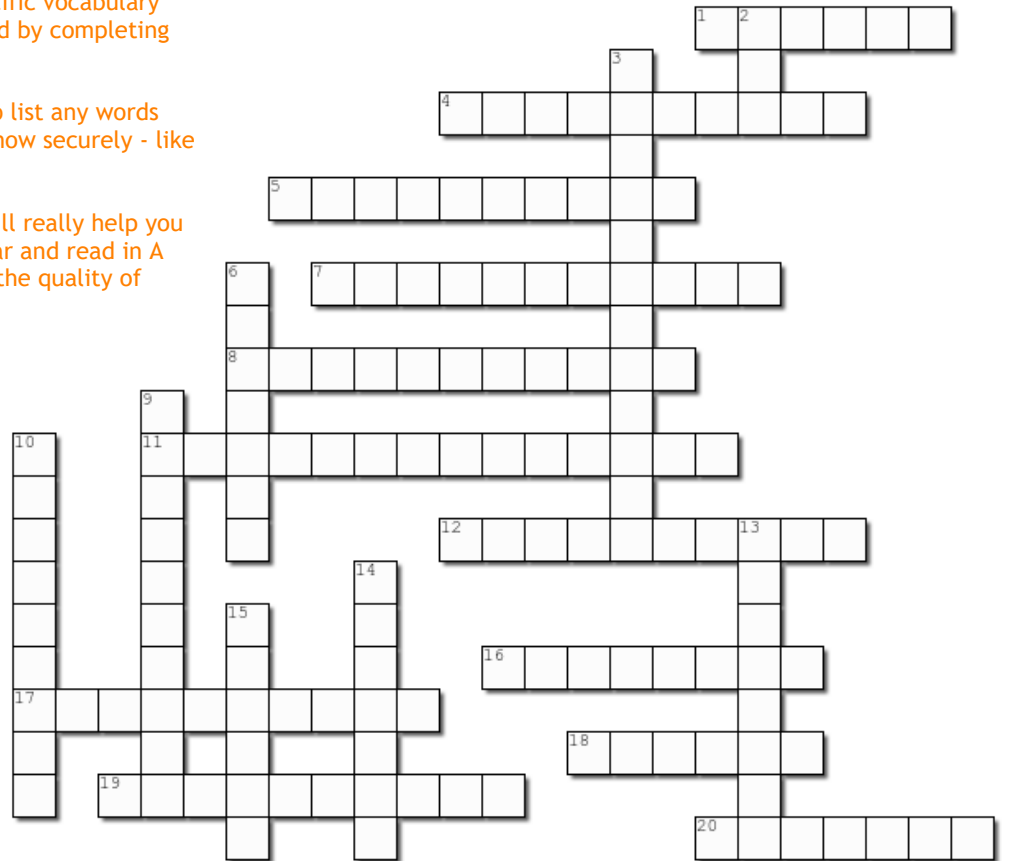
- Michael Horton

”

MODERN
REFORMATION

Revise or learn the subject-specific vocabulary you will need to write about God by completing this crossword.

- Use the space on the left to list any words and definitions you don't know securely - like a glossary.
- Learn these words - they will really help you to understand what you hear and read in A Level RS, and will improve the quality of your writing as well



Immutable	Atheism	Monotheism	Personal	Impersonal	Polytheism	Spirit	Benificent	Eternal	Omnibenevolent	Aseity
Agnosticism	Transcendent	Omniscient	Immanent	Son	Father	Everlasting	Omnipotent	Trinity		

Across

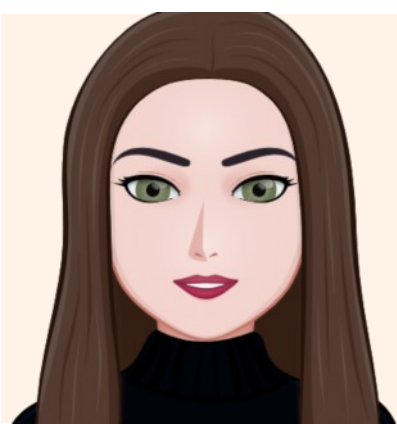
1. Word meaning that God is self-existent, having no cause
4. Word meaning that God is abstract and beyond having personal relationships
5. Word meaning all-knowing, from the Latin scientia for knowledge.
7. Believing that we don't or can't know whether God exists
8. Word meaning that God has no beginning or end
11. Word meaning all-good-wishing
12. Worshipping more than one God
16. Word meaning that God is capable of having relationships with individuals
17. Word meaning good-doing or good-making
18. The person of the Trinity associated with being the all-powerful creator
19. Word meaning all-powerful
20. Believing that there is no God

Down

2. The person of the Trinity who became incarnate in Jesus
3. Word meaning that God is above and beyond human understanding
6. Word meaning that God is outside time
9. Worshipping only one God
10. Word meaning that God is unchanging and unchangeable
13. Word meaning that God is active in the world
14. Christian doctrine that explains how God can be both personal and impersonal
15. The person of the Trinity which is active throughout history, inspiring Prophets and working miracles

DID YOU KNOW?

Using subject-specific vocabulary like this accurately and appropriately is assessed through both AO1 and AO2... you need to do this well to earn the higher levels and marks in all your written work.



So, if I said "God exists", what would it be that exists?

TIP: Try to use subject-specific vocabulary in your answer and refer to Exodus 3 and/or Pascal and/or the doctrine of the Trinity.

01

What does it mean to say that God exists?

philosophy

noun

1. the study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and existence, especially when considered as an academic discipline.

What does it mean to say that anything exists?

The Oxford English Dictionary defines existence like this:

existence

Noun: the fact or state of having objective reality.

E.g. "the school has been in existence for fifty years"

It is fairly obvious that defining "existence" as something that has reality only raises the question, so what is reality?

So what is reality?

The Oxford English Dictionary defines reality like this:

reality

noun

1. the state of things as they actually exist, as opposed to an idealistic or notional idea of them. E.g. "he refuses to face reality"

2. the state or quality of having existence or substance. E.g. "youth, when death has no reality"

So, the dictionary defines existence as having reality... and reality as having existence. We are no further forward... which just shows how useless dictionaries are when it comes to answering big questions!

OK, so if the Dictionary doesn't help, how can I understand what existence or reality really are so that I can begin to answer this question?

Good question! The answer is Philosophy, the search for wisdom, which is more than just knowledge of how to define words like existence or reality but deep understanding of what they really mean.



TIP: the meaning of words can often be explored by exploring their etymological roots. The prefix meta- means above or beyond - from the Greek - so words beginning with meta usually refer to things which transcend or ultimately explain what comes after the prefix.

What is Philosophy?



From Aristotle *Metaphysics* Book IV (c.350BC) trans. WD Ross

"There is a science which investigates being as being and the attributes which belong to this in virtue of its own nature. Now this is not the same as any of the so-called special sciences; for none of these others treats universally of being as being. They cut off a part of being and investigate the attribute of this part; this is what the mathematical sciences for instance do. Now since we are seeking the first principles and the highest causes, clearly there must be some thing to which these belong in virtue of its own nature. If then those who sought the elements of existing things were seeking these same principles, it is necessary that the elements must be elements of being not by accident but just because it is being. Therefore it is of being as being that we also must grasp the first causes...

It is evident, then... that it is the function of the philosopher to be able to investigate all things. For if it is not the function of the philosopher, who is it who will inquire whether Socrates and Socrates seated are the same thing, or whether one thing has one contrary, or what contrariety is, or how many meanings it has? and it is about these that the philosopher has to investigate the truth... Dialecticians and sophists assume the same guise as the philosopher, for sophistic is Wisdom which exists only in semblance, and dialecticians embrace all things in their dialectic, and being is common to all things; but evidently their dialectic embraces these subjects because these are proper to philosophy. For sophistic and dialectic turn on the same class of things as philosophy, but this differs from dialectic in the nature of the faculty required and from sophistic in respect of the purpose of the philosophic life. Dialectic is merely critical where philosophy claims to know, and sophistic is what appears to be philosophy but is not."

ACTIVITY

Read this extract of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, which provides an answer to the question "what is Philosophy?", and make your own annotations using the margins. Look up words you don't understand - for example "dialecticians" or "sophists" using the internet and then add the definitions to your annotations.

Check your understanding of this passage by answering these questions...

1. Give TWO examples of what Aristotle calls "special sciences", subjects which cut off and study a part of being in the way that mathematics does.
2. As the highest science, what does Philosophy investigate, according to Aristotle? Highlight a quotation in the text to support your answer and draw an arrow to it.
3. What is the function of the Philosopher, according to Aristotle? Again, support your answer by highlighting a suitable quotation from the text and drawing an arrow to it.
4. What is the difference between a true Philosopher and a Dialectician or a Sophist, according to Aristotle?

TIP: Philosophy is rarely easy to read! Understanding what Philosophers mean takes effort, so be prepared to read challenging texts and really to really think about what you read!

The word PHILOSOPHY comes from the Greek words for love (philos) and wisdom (sophia)... a philosopher is somebody who loves wisdom...

So, what is wisdom?

What is the difference between being wise and being clever?

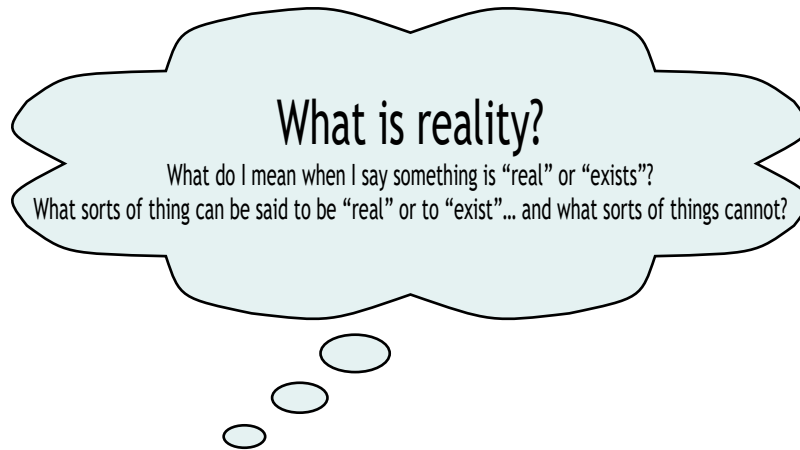
What is this wisdom Philosophers love and search for?

So, what is Philosophy then?

TIPS

- Aim to write a paragraph, following the PEEA structure.
- Try to use subject-specific vocabulary and to refer to Aristotle's metaphysics in your answer.

OK, so we have established that Philosophy is the science that investigates being in itself - what it means to be, be real or exist - and the first causes of being - what makes something real or exist. Let us now have a go at Philosophy...



ACTIVITY

Create a mind map with your ideas and possible answers to the question. If you want to have a discussion with others to generate more and more interesting ideas, so much the better...



The Thinker is a bronze sculpture by the French artist August Rodin, designed in 1880.

In trying to represent the essence of Philosophy, Rodin was inspired by the Renaissance artist Michelangelo's sculpture of Lorenzo De Medici and by the 14th Century Florentine poet Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* from the *Divine Comedy*.

- Michelangelo had chosen to represent Lorenzo, the ruthless military ruler of Florence and head of an international banking-dynasty, as a thinker and a philosopher... as if this was the most significant part of his identity and the source of his achievements.
- Dante's poem describes his philosophical struggles with the teachings of the Church as imagines a journey through the afterlife in search of the love of his life, Beatrice.

Rodin represents the Philosopher in a heroic form, showing both the struggles that philosophers must go through and the bravery and (mental) fitness they need to face the biggest and most challenging questions in life. It is NOT easy to examine and question all your own assumptions and beliefs, but that is what Philosophy is all about. After all, as the Greek philosopher Socrates said:

"The unexamined life is not worth living..."

He was not referring to GCSEs and A Levels of course, but to the sort of self-examination that Philosophy demands we undergo.

ENRICHMENT

If you were commissioned to create a piece of art representing philosophy, what would you create? Why? If you are artistic, you could even have a go at producing something...



The School of Athens

Who painted this, when and where?

What does the painting represent?

Who are the two figures in the middle of the painting, dressed in red/purple and blue/green? What can we tell about their philosophies from how they are depicted?



This painting dates from the high Italian Renaissance. At this time the authority of the Roman Catholic Church had been undermined by attempts made to control the Papacy by European Emperors, Kings... and even banking houses. Many people were disgusted with corruption in the Church and were reluctant to accept that it had all the answers to the “big questions”. At this time thinking people wanted to study ancient authorities for themselves rather than accept the Church’s interpretation of what they had said. This applied to the Bible... in 1517 Martin Luther protested for the right to read the Bible in the language of the people and so started the Protestant Reformation... but it also applied to other sources of knowledge, including science and of course, Philosophy. The Renaissance was driven by HUMANISM... in this case a desire to re-examine all sources of human knowledge from Classical Antiquity with a view both to reforming the Church and to developing new knowledge to make the world a better place.

EXTENSION: If you want to find out more about the Renaissance and how peoples’ engagement with Classical Philosophy started a process which led to the Reformation and the beginning of the Modern world, why not watch Medici, a drama series on Netflix. Of course, this is a drama so it is not 100% historically accurate, but the basic principles are not far off.

So, what does "exists" mean?



For **Aristotle** - or at least for those Philosophers who have shared his focus on reality as it presents itself to the physical senses - existence is "out there"... so saying that God exists would have to mean that there is something "out there" that **corresponds** with the concept of God.

What are the physical senses?



To what extent do you agree with Aristotle, that human knowledge and wisdom begins with what we experience through these senses?

So, what evidence - that we can experience or observe - is there supporting the existence of God?

Religious Experiences and Miracles	The Teleological Argument	The Cosmological Argument
<p>Is direct personal experience a good basis for belief that God exists?</p> <p>Are other peoples' experiences a good basis for belief?</p>	<p>Is the Teleological Argument persuasive?</p> <p>What sort of a God does the Teleological Argument support?</p>	<p>Is the Cosmological Argument persuasive?</p> <p>What sort of a God does the Cosmological Argument support?</p>

Is defining existence in terms of what we can experience and observe even sensible?

Who said “man is the measure of all things” and when?

Why might it be foolish to assume that the way experience things is the way they really are, and to assume that there is nothing beyond what we experience?

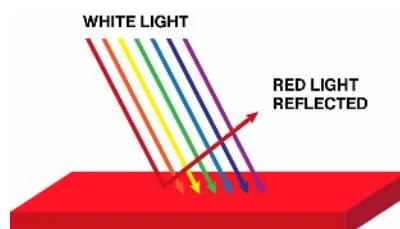
What did senior cosmologist and Anglican Priest John Polkinghorne say about scientists who focus on sense-experience and exclude other forms of experience from their search for knowledge and understanding?

For **Plato** and for those Philosophers who have shared his focus on reality as METAPHYSICAL and as it presents itself to reason, saying that God exists does not necessarily mean that there is a *thing* “out there” corresponding with the concept of God... as a concept, God exists... so if “God” is a coherent concept... God exists!

Nevertheless, for Plato our physical senses are more likely to obscure the truth than to reveal it. This is because:

1. what we see, hear, touch taste and smell is only ever a few particular instances of things which rarely if ever represent what that thing should be clearly and also change continually. Focusing on sense-experience and observations as a source of knowledge is confusing and unreliable... it is much better to focus on the concepts or ideas that we might experience and use reason to refine these.
2. what we think we see, hear, touch, taste or smell is not what is really and objectively there... but only how our brains and reason interprets the sense-data anyway. Actually, Aristotle accepted that sense-data is always interpreted by reason, but that point has been missed by some philosophers who followed him...

- The 18th Century philosopher **David Hume** used the example of a red ball - we think we see it and that red is a property of the ball... but science shows that what we see as red is only how our brains interpret a particular frequency of light reflected by the ball. Redness as a colour - and similarly heat or coldness, loudness or pitch, sweetness or sourness, scent or odour is a product of the way reason processes sense-data and not of what we experience in itself.



Although modern scientific method developed out of Aristotle’s focus on sense-observations and experience as the origin of knowledge, modern science shows that the way things appear to our senses is not really or *objectively* the way that they are.

- In the 17th century the philosopher **Rene Descartes** pointed out that when we put a stick in water it appears to bend... but that is an optical illusion. There are many other examples of optical illusions and some examples of auditory illusions, sensory illusions, olfactory illusions etc.
- Also, when we look at things more closely using scientific instruments and experiments it shows that appearances are not reality... What appears to be solid is mostly empty space... when examined under high levels of magnification. The act of observing something changes what we observe... at least on the Quantum level, but also when people are involved.

To what extent to you agree with Plato, that our senses are more likely to deceive us than to reveal what really exists?

So, what did Plato mean by a coherent concept?



Plato, and the rationalist Philosophers who followed his approach to reality, distinguished between a coherent concept - what French Philosopher **Rene Descartes** later called a “clear and distinct idea” and an incoherent concept.

- A coherent concept makes sense, like a three-sided triangle or an unmarried male bachelor
- An incoherent concept is nonsense, like a square circle.

As Plato saw it, all coherent concepts exist...

I might not be able to see, hear, touch, taste or smell the number 2 or a dodecahedron physically, in nature... but they exist metaphysically, in a much more important way than any instance of the number 2 or any particular polyhedron.

For Plato and the RATIONALIST philosophers who followed him, ideas like numbers or concepts exist in a purer, more universal, realer way than any physical thing. This is because ultimate reality is metaphysical.

- What I see, hear, touch, taste and smell is not *really* real... it is only a shadow of what *really* exists metaphysically.

So, is God a coherent concept... and does that mean that He exists?

In the 17th Century the Mathematician Rene Descartes wrote...

“By the word ‘God’ I understand a substance that is infinite, eternal, unchangeable, independent, supremely intelligent, supremely powerful, which created myself and anything else that may exist. The more carefully I concentrate on these attributes, the less possible it seems that any of them could have originated from me alone. So this whole discussion implies that God necessarily exists.” MEDITATION 3



Like Aquinas, Descartes started his argument for God’s existence from experience, but unlike Aquinas, Descartes started with his inner-experience, from the world of thought, ideas and REASON...

“The idea of God (that is, of a supremely perfect being) is certainly one that I find within me, just as I find the ideas of shapes and numbers; and I understand from this idea that it belongs to God’s nature that he always exists. This understanding is just as clear and distinct as what is involved in mathematical proofs of the properties of shapes and numbers.” MEDITATION 5

For Descartes, existence is to God as three-sidedness is to a triangle... A triangle NECESSARILY has three sides, because three-sidedness is part of the concept of a triangle and the inevitable result of having only three (tri) angles. Saying “this is a four-sided triangle” is incoherent... nonsense, impossible, meaningless.

Descartes reasoned that existence is part of the concept of God, because God is supremely perfect and existence is a perfection.

So, is existence a perfection? Is it better and more perfect to exist than not to exist? Is God’s existence logically necessary... even if there is no-thing that is God?

Write down your answer to this question here...



What is reality, really?

To use a modern example, what really is Android 9.0? Is it the source-code or how I experience the operating system running on my phone on 10th June 2021 at 2.32pm? The source-code is Android 9.0 - it is the same on every phone running the operating system in every country and at every time - what I experience on my phone changes second by second and what I experience won’t be the same as what you experience. What I experience through my senses is a snapshot of how things appear to me at a particular time and in a particular place... it is not what really and objectively exists.

ENRICHMENT

Watch a film which questions the nature of reality - maybe *The Matrix*, *The Truman Show* or *Source Code* and then discuss what reality really is and what it means to say that something exists? Did the film change your mind about Plato’s metaphysical understanding of reality - why? Why not?

So, what does it mean to “mean”?

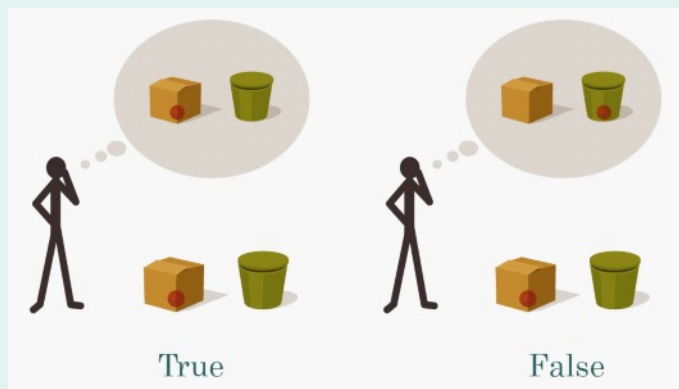
The ultimate in Philosophical questions! (Very meta!)

MODERNISM

Meaning comes from REFERENCE

For both Plato and Aristotle, words are like SIGNS, pointing towards a meaning beyond themselves.

- If the word-sign points to something that exists “out there” in terms of what we experience through the senses, or “in her” in terms of a concept or idea, then the word-sign has meaning.
- If the word-sign doesn't point towards anything, it is meaningless.



POSTMODERNISM

Meaning comes from USAGE

In the 1920s, Ludwig Wittgenstein realised that this approach to meaning in language is inadequate.

He used a thought-experiment to explain why... the beetle in the box.

Wittgenstein concluded that words take their meaning from how we use them, not from what they do or don't refer to...

- If I say “God exists” that could be true and meaningful within a community of people who believe that God exists, and use the words “God” and “exists” in the same way as I do.
- If I say “God exists” that could at the same time be false and meaningless within a community of atheists, who don't use the words “God” and/or the word “exists” in the same way as I do.

What does it mean to say that God exists?

Try to structure your answer as a PEEAEL paragraph, and to use subject-specific vocabulary and to refer to the content of this module in your answer.

02

Is murder always wrong?

Module 2: Introducing Ethics

Since 2016, all the English examination boards require students to study Ethics as part of A Level Religious Studies.

So, what does this involve?

Ethics, or moral philosophy as it is sometimes called, considers how we should live, and includes...

- **Descriptive Ethics** - studying how different (groups of) people make moral decisions. As this is an A Level In Religious Studies, you will study the moral principles of one religion and how one or more believers have put those principles into action, as well as religious teaching about issues like Sex.

As well as the three branches of Ethics studied by Philosophers in Universities:

1. **Meta-Ethics** - asking the “big questions” that all ethical discussions rely on, such as:
 - what ethical claims like “murder is wrong” mean
 - whether moral laws are universal and ABSOLUTE or RELATIVE to the situation or consequences
 - how we know whether an action is right or wrong
2. **Normative Ethics** - evaluating different systems for developing moral rules (norms).
 - Examples of normative systems that you might have come across at GCSE include Natural Law, Utilitarianism and Situation Ethics.
3. **Applied Ethics** - considering how a range of religious and non-religious normative approaches can be applied to issues such as Euthanasia, then evaluating which approach is most useful.

Students often think that Ethics is the easiest part of the A Level, because they have already studied some topics at GCSE... but there is a huge difference between GCSE and A Level! It might be easy to write something in response to an ethics question like “Euthanasia is wrong!” **Discuss...** but it is not easy to get a high grade.

Ethics

noun

1. moral principles that govern a person's behaviour or the conducting of an activity.
2. the branch of knowledge that deals with moral principles.

Sort the essays into the correct folder...

Evaluate the view that everybody knows what is right and what is wrong!

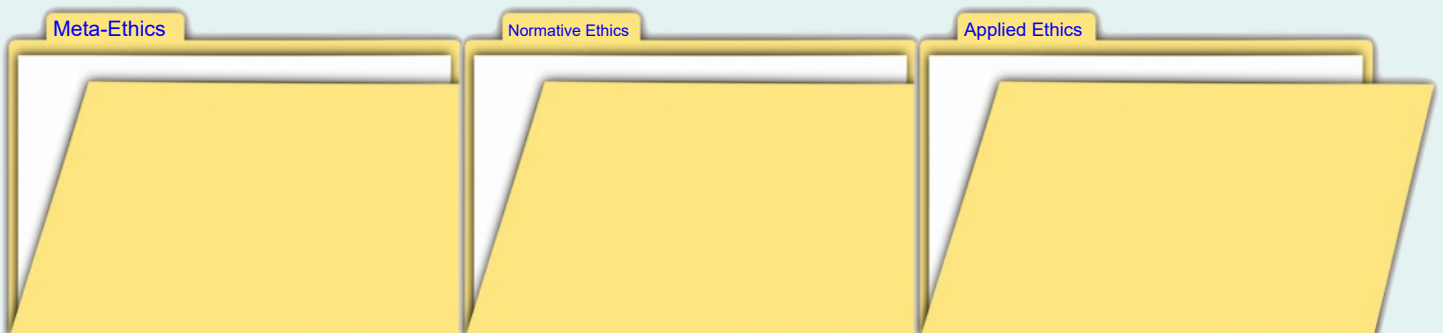
Euthanasia is wrong! Discuss

Utilitarianism is the most useful approach to making moral decisions in the 21st Century. Critically assess this claim

Critically evaluate Joseph Fletcher's Situation Ethics as an approach to decision-making.

A Utilitarian approach to sexual ethics is inadequate in the 21st century. Assess this view.

Critically compare Natural Law and Situation Ethics as approaches to making complex moral decisions.



Is murder always wrong?

To be able to answer this question – as good philosophers - we need to define the word MURDER and also the word WRONG.

So, what is murder?

According to the law in England and Wales (the Homicide Act 1957), murder is defined as the unlawful killing of a human being.

So, When is killing a human being lawful then?

Complete this page by adding examples to illustrate the types of lawful killing below...

It is legal for soldiers to kill people during wars, subject to the rules of engagement. This is NOT murder.

It is sometimes legal for military commanders and politicians to allow lots of people to die, when this will save more lives in the long-run. This is NOT murder.

It is legal for police officers to shoot people who pose an immediate threat to others. This is NOT murder.

It is legal for a doctor to abort a pregnancy and so to kill an unborn child at any point until birth, providing that the conditions set out in the Abortion Act 1967 (as amended by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990) have been met.

It is legal for anyone to use reasonable force to defend themselves or another person, which might include killing if the person is threatening to kill themselves. This is NOT murder.

Committing suicide was decriminalised in 1961 and anybody in sound mind over the age of 16 has the right to refuse medical treatment, including switching off life-support machines and refusing food and water or artificial feeding, even if that causes their death.

There are also cases when killing another person is a crime, but still not murder...

Complete this section with your own notes on the cases which involve killing a human being which are a crime, but not murder...

It is clear from these examples, that killing human beings is quite often lawful and so is not murder in a **legal** sense. Nevertheless, on a **moral** level you might still think that some instances of legal killing should count as murder and/or are wrong.

Do you agree with the limited, legal definition of murder?

- Explain your answer with reference to the examples on these pages.

What does it mean to say that an action is *WRONG*?

Saying that an action is wrong suggests that it is **unjust** or **immoral**.

Wrong

adjective

This implies that there must be a standard of justice or morality for the action to break.

1. not correct or true; incorrect.

2. unjust, dishonest, or immoral.

Where might the standard of justice or morality come from?

1. DIVINE COMMAND ETHICS

For many religious believers, God REVEALS the standard of justice and morality, determining which actions are right and wrong. This is called a DIVINE COMMAND approach to ethics. But, this approach raises the question: where does God get the standard of justice and morality from?

THE EUTHYPHRO DILEMMA



Plato identified a problem here in his dialogue EUTHYPHRO.

- If God sets the standards of justice and morality arbitrarily (for no good reason) then God is like a tyrant. There is nothing that makes an action right, or wrong, except for God's say-so. This does not support the idea that God is all-good and just!
- On the other hand, if God sets the standards of justice and morality by following some external standard, then God is not all-powerful or really the source of justice and morality, meaning that he is not all-good and just either.

In the 20th Century, the atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell used this EUTHYPHRO DILEMMA as an argument against the existence of God, reasoning that it showed that God cannot be both all-good and all-powerful when the Christian concept of God demands that He is.

HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT GOD COMMANDS?

Even if we ignore that problem, if God is the source of the standard of justice and morality and so what makes an action right or wrong, then there is the problem of how we know what God's standards are...

- For those Protestant Christians - as well as for Muslims and Orthodox Jews - who base their faith sola scriptura, SCRIPTURE - as in the Bible, Torah or Qur'an - is the revealed source of morality... but this is controversial! On what basis is Scripture authoritative? Rationally, it is difficult to justify the claim that a book contains the actual words of God and that these are not subject to different interpretations.
- Other Protestant Christians focus on their personal relationship with God and on CONSCIENCE as the voice of God, the means by which God reveals the moral law, which actions are right and which wrong. This is even more controversial, as there is no way of anybody else checking what God has or has not revealed in this way.

It follows then that a DIVINE COMMAND explanation of what wrong means won't be acceptable outside of its specific faith-community.

Outline what is meant by a Divine Command approach to Ethics.

To what extent do you think it is reasonable to say that murder is wrong because God says so?

Does Scripture say that murder is always wrong?

Within that faith-community, it is not clear that murder is ALWAYS wrong, because while both the Torah/Bible and Qur'an clearly state that murder is wrong, elsewhere in the Scriptures God positively orders people to kill

"You shall not murder."

Exodus 20:13

"And do not kill one another, for God is indeed merciful unto you," Qur'an 4:29

"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image..."

Genesis 9:6

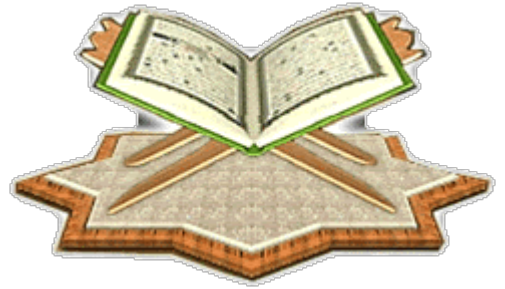
"The punishment of those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger, and strive with might and main for mischief through the land is: execution, or crucifixion, or the cutting off of hands and feet from opposite sides, or exile from the land..." Qur'an 5:33

"Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants..."

1 Samuel 15:3

"kill the polytheists wherever you find them and capture them and besiege them and sit in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they should repent, establish prayer, and give zakāh, let them [go] on their way."

Qur'an 9:5



It seems that neither capital punishment nor killing in war – even non-combatants and people with different religions – counts as murder or is wrong in Scripture.

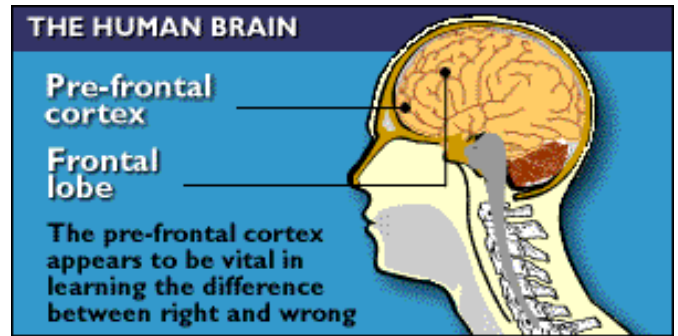
Is it fair to say that Scripture teaches that murder is wrong?

- Explain your answer with reference to the quotations above... and be careful to consider what the word "murder" means?

Where else might the standard of justice and morality come from?

For moral philosophers outside a faith-tradition, saying that an action is wrong means that it breaks a standard of justice or morality that is known through REASON.

THINK: Do you think we can work out right and wrong rationally? Explain your answer.



2. KANTIAN ETHICS

For German Philosopher Immanuel Kant, and for those who follow a Kantian approach to Ethics today, reason shows that only those actions which can be universalised, those actions which treat all persons as ends in themselves and not as means to an end and which set a good precedent are right. In other words, this means that inconsistency – one law for me and another for you - using people and acting in a way that shouldn't be copied by others is irrational and so ALWAYS wrong.



Kantian Ethics is an ABSOLUTIST system of Ethics, so if Murder is wrong in principle, it is always wrong and for everybody everywhere.

For Kant and those using Kantian Ethics murder is ALWAYS wrong, because it always uses the murder-victim as the means to attain another end – whether that is popular or not. Also, allowing murder can't be a universal law or acceptable precedent. Nevertheless, even with Kantian Ethics there may be exceptions... after all, what counts as a person?

Is abortion murder? Is an unborn child a person deserving of being treated as an end in itself?

What about allowing a terminal patient to die or killing someone with advanced dementia? Is a dying person or a person with no ability to think rationally really a person whose life must be protected?

What about capital punishment for criminals whose actions have shown them to be incapable of acting morally towards others?

3. UTILITARIANISM



For British Philosopher Jeremy Bentham, the only way to determine who counts in a moral calculation is their ability to pursue pleasure and avoid pain. Later utilitarians like the Australian Philosopher Peter Singer refer to this in terms of being able to express a preference and so to have interests.

For Bentham, “nature has placed mankind under two sovereign masters, the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain”, so right actions are those which maximise pleasure (and minimise pain) and wrong actions are those which do not maximise pleasure (or minimise pain). As rational beings, we are capable of acting in the interests of others rather just being selfish and hedonistic, so Bentham wrote “always act so as to produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number”... and today this is called the UTILITARIAN MAXIM.

It is clear that in most situations, murder would offend against the Utilitarian Maxim and so would be wrong... but not ALWAYS.

Utilitarianism is a RELATIVIST system of Ethics, so murder could be justified relative to its consequences IF a murder causes more pleasure and less pain overall.

During WWII Lutheran Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer got involved in a plot to assassinate Hitler... clearly his actions couldn't be universalised as Kant demanded, yet many people would agree that the huge positive consequences for humanity if the plot had succeeded justified the attempt.

Murder is always wrong. Discuss



Intro

1. Start by defining your key-term - what definition of murder will you use in your answer?

T

2. Then answer the question in a sentence, using the wording of the question e.g. "Murder is always wrong". This is your THESIS - what you will argue.

RA

3. Then justify your THESIS with several REASONS, including evidence and which scholars would AGREE with your argument.

D

4. Then explain at least one counterclaim - an argument that DISAGREES with yours, referring to evidence and scholarship to support your explanation.

E

5. Then EVALUATE the counterclaim, defending your THESIS and explaining why you don't accept this other argument. Use reasons and evidence to support your evaluation.

C

6. Finally, write "in conclusion" and re-state your thesis for emphasis.

Activities

Write up your answer to the question using the TRADE C structure.

When you have finished, draw arrows from these instructions to identify the different parts of TRADE C

Quiz



Check your knowledge and understanding of Module 2 by completing these comprehension questions...

- Look back in your booklet if you are not sure of an answer.

1. All English A Level Specifications require students to study Ethics as part of A Level Religious Studies. True or False?
2. Which branch of Ethics develops and evaluates systems for making moral decisions?
3. Which branch of Ethics would I be engaged in if I was exploring what the word "good" really meant?
4. Which branch of Ethics evaluates different approaches to contemporary issues such as Euthanasia?
5. For A Level Religious Studies students also study religious moral principles and teachings and how these have been put into action. True or False?
6. In which year was the Homicide Act passed?
7. In which year was suicide decriminalised?
8. In which year was abortion legalised?
9. Give a good example of it being legal for soldiers to kill people in war, providing the rules of engagement have been followed.
10. Give a good example of it being legal for police to shoot a suspect in order to protect the public.
11. If somebody caused the death of another person while committing a crime - but without directly intending to - that would be the crime of...
12. What offence does a mother commit if she kills her baby (less than 1 year old) because the balance of her mind has been affected?
13. Most cases of mercy-killing are tried as cases of...
14. What crime is it when a company causes the death of one or more people because of negligence?
15. Which Philosopher pointed out the so-called Euthyphro Dilemma as a problem with saying that right and wrong are the result of God's commands?
16. Which Atheist Philosopher used the Euthyphro Dilemma as an argument against the existence of God?
17. Which sort of Christians often base their Ethics sola scriptura?
18. Which sort of Christians are most likely to see conscience as the voice of God and the way we know what God commands?
19. Why would it be misleading to translate Exodus 20:13 as "do not kill"?
20. When does the Bible or Qur'an allow people to kill human beings? Justify your answer with references and/or quotations.
21. Non-religious people usually see moral standards as originating in what?
22. Explain ONE absolutist approach to making ethical decisions.
23. Explain ONE relativist approach to making ethical decisions.
24. What is the "Utilitarian Maxim"?

Total:

/24

03

What is Christianity?

Module 3: Introducing Theology

Since 2016, all the English examination boards require students to study a Religion as part of A Level Religious Studies. Most schools have chosen to study Christianity, although some still study the New Testament or another religion such as Islam or Buddhism.

So, what does studying a Religion involve at A Level?

Don't worry, studying religion at A Level is not like studying religion at GCSE! You won't have to learn lists of beliefs and practices with a view to describing and explaining them. The focus at A Level is on

1. ANALYSING religious thought and so understanding why there is such diversity and debate on key issues including how to respond to the development of science, atheism or communism or the liberalisation of society in terms of homosexuality.
2. EVALUATING religious thought, making well reasoned, scholarly judgements on a range of religious issues and developing persuasive arguments in response to perennial questions.

The world is changing, fast. In studying a Religion at A Level you will gain a greater appreciation of the magnitude of the changes that are taking place and the reasons for these changes, as well as for the conflicts that such change has, is and will continue to seed. The course brings together elements of Ancient History, History, Politics, Sociology and Psychology and helps you to become a well-informed and engaged citizen of the 21st century world.

In the space below, explain why studying Christianity is of value in the 21st century world.

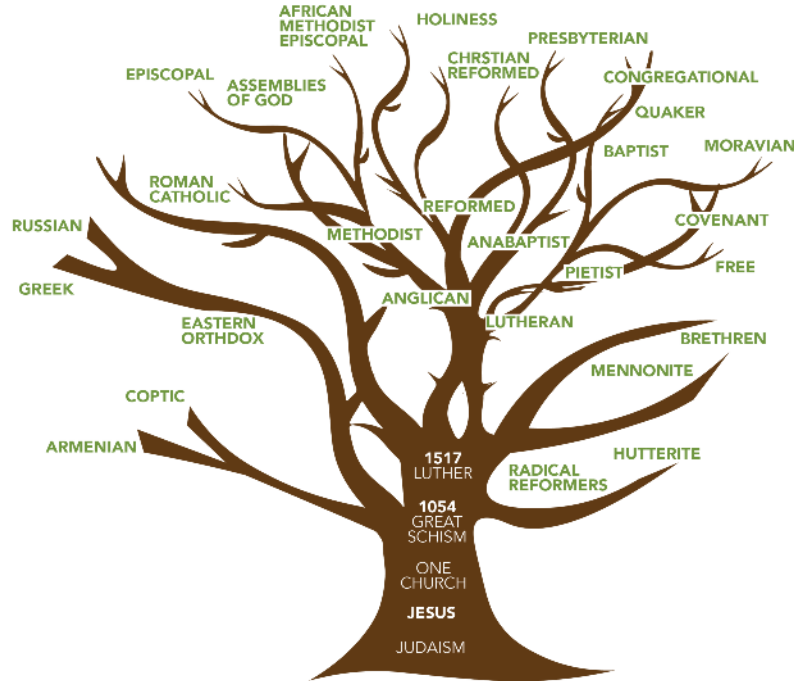
- Try to structure your answer as one or two PEEA paragraphs, using examples as evidence to support the point(s) you make.

So, what is Christianity?

Activities

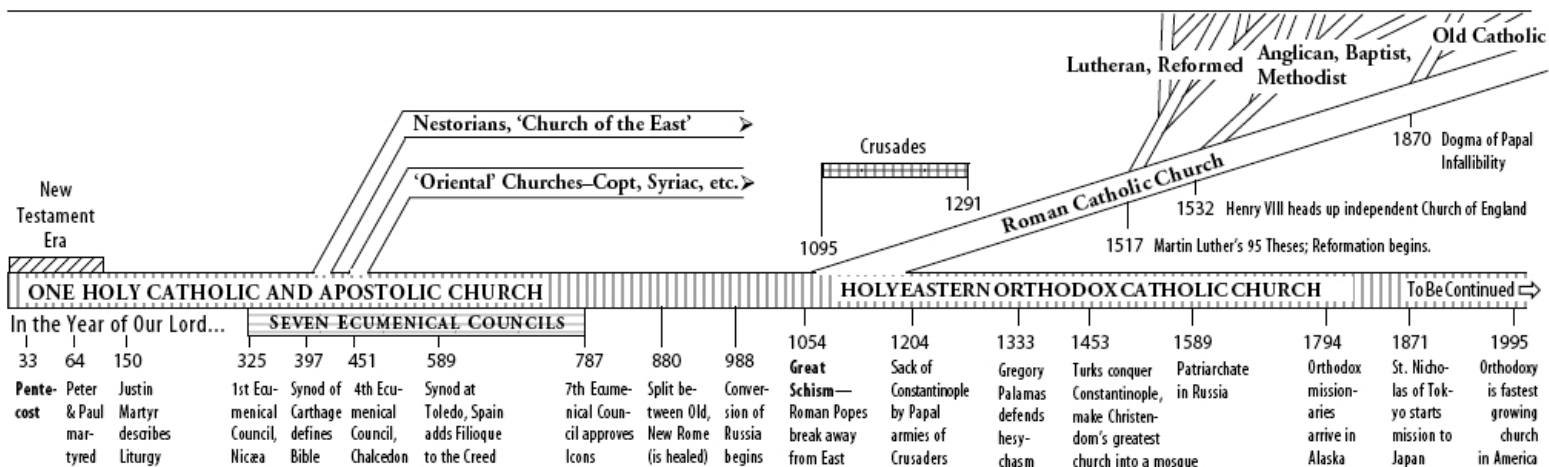
This diagram tries to show how Christianity is both a single religion and incredibly diverse. It shows how the many DENOMINATIONS that exist today are all connected back to the same roots.

1. Find out more about the GREAT SCHISM (1054) and the REFORMATION (1517) and use the space on either side of the diagram to explain how these events contributed to the diversity within Christianity that exists today.
2. Look closely at the two diagrams on this page - can you work out what type of Christian might have created each? How?



TIMELINE OF CHURCH HISTORY

inspired by a timeline from Conciliar Press

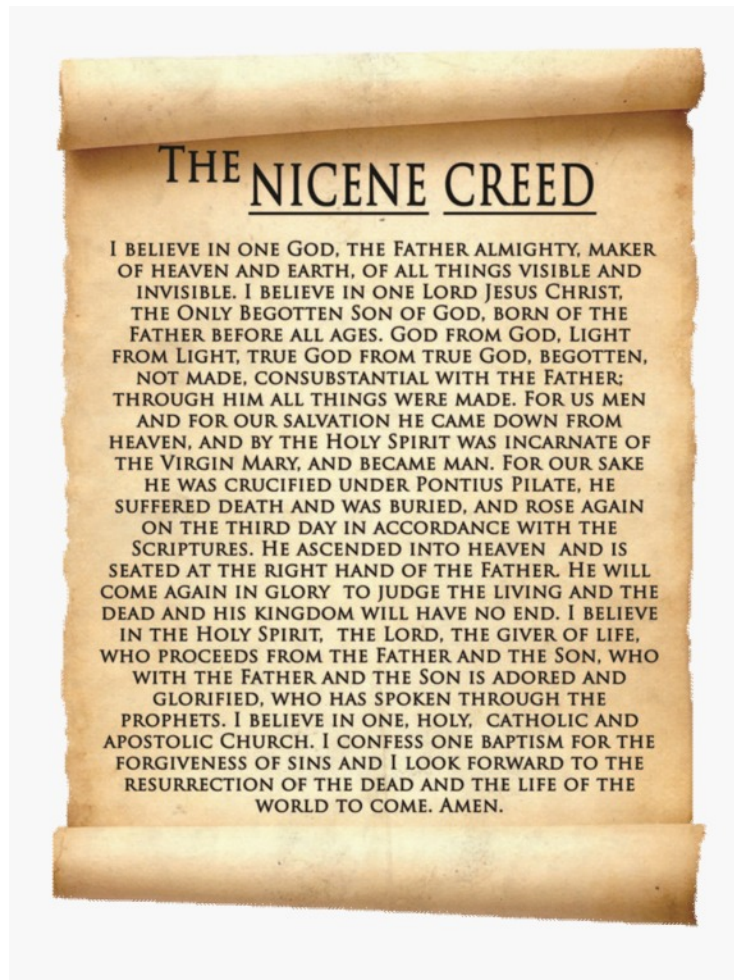


Note: All Christian churches can be traced back historically to the Orthodox Church founded by the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, what must Christians believe?

Activity

Use the space around the creed to label as many core Christian beliefs as you can find.



The Nicene Creed (from credo (Latin) = I believe) is based on the text agreed at the Council of Nicaea in 325AD.

This Church Council was convened in Nicaea, Turkey by Emperor Constantine I (the first Christian Roman Emperor) in response to the ARIAN heresy, which claimed that Jesus (the Son) was created by God (the Father) and so not of one substance with Him. The Council aimed to agree on the nature of God and particularly on how Jesus related to God (known as CHRISTOLOGY), as well as to reaffirm other core Christian beliefs in order to establish UNITY.

Even today the Nicene Creed is often used to define mainstream Christianity, and is recited as part of Church services within many different denominations.

BOOK TITLE & AUTHOR <i>Bible Matters by Peter and Charlotte Vardy</i>
PAGES pgs: 47-74

DATE

Key Words and Questions

Notes

SUMMARY

BOOK TITLE

PAGES

Key Words and Questions

Notes

SUMMARY

So, what does it mean to call Jesus the Christ (Messiah)?

Drawing on your notes, and on the video, answer this question in the space below.

- Try to use subject-specific vocabulary and to refer to the Bible in your answer, which should be structured as a PEEA paragraph.

So, what else do Christians believe about Jesus?

Drawing on the video and your notes on the Nicene Creed, answer this question in the space below.

- Try to use subject-specific vocabulary and to refer to the Bible in your answer, which should be structured as a PEEA paragraph.

So, what binds Christians together?

Many Christians say that what binds Christians together into “one body” are their core beliefs in _____ God and in Jesus as the Christ (Hebrew _____) and _____ of God. Most Christians accept and use these beliefs, as expressed in the _____ Creed, and see them defining mainstream Christianity. Moreover, Christian beliefs about Jesus differentiate Christianity from Judaism and _____, which otherwise share beliefs in _____ God.

Nevertheless, not all Christians accept or use the _____ Creed.

- Jehovah’s Witnesses and Unitarian Christians don’t use the doctrine of the Trinity, the belief that God exists in three persons of _____ substance.
- David Jenkins, who was Anglican Archbishop of Durham until 1994 rejected the beliefs in the Virgin Birth and Resurrection.

Further, Christians i_____ the beliefs expressed in the Creed differently.

- Orthodox Christians reject the so-called filioque clause - the words “and the son” that were added to change how the Holy _____ is understood to relate to the other persons of the T_____.
- More Liberal Christians might say they believe, but take some beliefs like those in God as creator as metaphorically rather than literally true.

Still other Christians say they believe and do little to put these beliefs into p_____.

So, while St Paul taught that Christians are justified (saved) by faith and what they believe in:

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.” Romans 5:1-2

And while both Luther and Calvin - the founders of P_____ Christianity - focused on St Paul’s teaching and on faith as what defines and saves Christians, it is not clear that beliefs are what binds Christians together today.

Complete these notes and then answer the question.

James (the b_____ of Jesus) wrote:

14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? 15 Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

18 But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.”

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. 19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

20 You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? 21 Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. 23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. 24 You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

25 In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? 26 As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. (James 2:14-26)

Suggesting that _____ are more important than _____ in defining and saving a Christian.

Yet, saying that Christianity is bound together by practices and what Christians do is problematic. Firstly, many non-Christians and non-believers are good people, while many Christians are not! For examples...

If Christians are saved by works and practices, not by what they believe, then Christianity is not the world’s _____ religion... and what is the point of being a Christian?

What do you think? Is what somebody believes or what somebody does more important in making them a Christian? Explain your answer with reference to scripture.

Test your knowledge and understanding of the third module by taking this quiz...



1. Which is the world's largest religion?
Islam
Christianity
Hinduism
Buddhism
Folk Religions
2. Which is the world's second largest religion?
Islam
Christianity
Hinduism
Buddhism
Folk Religions
3. Religion tends to be most important to followers of which religion?
Islam
Christianity
Hinduism
Buddhism
Folk Religions
4. Amongst Christians, Christianity is most important to Christians outside of Europe.
True
False
5. The process whereby a society becomes less and less religious is called...
Programmatic Secularism
Philosophical Secularism
Secularisation
Enlightenment
Reformation
6. Which type of secularism is the separation of Church and state?
Programmatic Secularism
Philosophical Secularism
7. Which type of secularism criticises religion?
Programmatic Secularism
Philosophical Secularism
8. The secularisation hypothesis argues that what is the result of secularisation and the decline of religious influence in a society?
Increasing crime-rates
Rising birth-rates
Economic prosperity
Worse weather-patterns
No result
9. Christianity is growing most quickly where Christians are persecuted most.
True
False
10. In 1910 what % of Christians came from Europe?
10%
26%
50%
66%
90%
11. In 2010 what % of Christians came from Europe?
10%
26%
50%
66%
90%
12. By 2050 which will be the largest world religion, according to the latest projections?
Islam
Christianity
13. Which religion did the tree of Christianity grow out of?
Hinduism
Islam
Judaism
Buddhism
Roman Religion
14. In what year did Emperor Constantine call the Council of Nicaea to agree on core Christian beliefs?
180AD
236AD
325AD
416AD
1054AD
15. Which type of Christians do NOT accept the doctrine of the Trinity?
Roman Catholics
Orthodox
Anglicans
Methodists
Unitarians
16. Which word refers to how the Son of God became human in Jesus of Nazareth?
Atonement
Redemption
Salvation
Incarnation
Resurrection
17. Which TWO beliefs did Anglican Archbishop David Jenkins famously reject?
The Trinity
God as Creator
Virgin Birth
Crucifixion
Resurrection
18. Christians believe that all three persons of the Trinity were present in creation.
True
False
19. Which of the four Gospels suggests that Jesus is the WORD (Logos) of God?
Matthew
Mark
Luke
John
20. Which TWO groups of Greek Philosophers argued that the Logos was the generative principle behind the universe, influencing this Gospel-writer?
Sophists
Stoics
Epicureans
Neoplatonists
Aristotelians
21. Which early Christian writer argued that Christians are justified by faith in his letter to the Romans?
John
Paul
James
Calvin
Luther
22. Which type of Christians follow St Paul and focus on justification by faith today?
Orthodox
Roman Catholic
Protestant
Coptic
Non-Conformists
23. According to Acts, in what city were the disciples of Jesus first called Christians?
Jerusalem
Rome
Antioch
Ephesus
Corinth
24. Younger people are more likely to be religious than older people in Europe.
True
False
25. Which event started in 1517 and led to Protestant Churches splitting from the Roman Catholic Church?
Great Schism
Reformation
Enlightenment
Vatican Council
Great Awakening

7 STUDY SKILLS

The step up from GCSE to A Level is a big one in every subject, but perhaps particularly in Religious Studies.

You may well have done GCSE RS as a core subject, in large mixed-ability classes including many who didn't want to do the subject and perhaps even with a teacher who doesn't love teaching the course... but at A Level the classes are likely to be smaller, the students want to be there and the teachers adore teaching the course. This means that discussion and debate are likely to be part of every lesson... the more of these you do, the more you will enjoy the lessons, come to understand the content and feel confident in forming judgements and advancing arguments... meaning you will write better essays and earn higher grades.

SKILL 1

Take a full part in discussion and debate, which means BOTH listening AND contributing i.e. don't dominate and don't be passive - be an engaged participant.

SKILL 2

Think deeply about what you learn and make a habit of forming a reasoned opinion about things, while still being willing to revise that opinion as you go on...

While the focus of the lessons may be on discussion and debate, that does NOT mean that written work is unimportant. To make time for quality discussion and debate, RS students must be super-organised and must be dedicated to completing all their work to the best of their ability, both inside and outside of lessons.

SKILL 3

Be organised, which means:

1. buy lever-arch files and multi-part dividers and use them to file all handouts, notes, essays and other work neatly by topic and date.

2. Bring the correct equipment to every lesson and private study session - including paper, pens/pencils, highlighters, planner/diary and the relevant section of your file including previous' handouts.

3. Attend every lesson if you possibly can... and remember that it is YOUR responsibility to catch up any written work you miss, for whatever reason, so be proactive and tell teachers in advance if you can't be there if possible. You won't be able to catch up discussion work, so that is why attendance is SO important in RS.

4. Plan your time so that you keep up to date with every assignment and don't miss deadlines.

Few Schools and colleges provide the full number of guided learning hours needed to teach the A Level course in terms of lessons. They expect students to spend at least the number of hours they have in lessons working independently on guided learning i.e. assigned work. You need to do these extra hours to fulfil your potential and attain your forecast grades... if you want to do better, then you will need to put in extra extra hours, going beyond the work assigned by reviewing and learning your work week by week, reading widely, watching supporting films and documentaries etc.

SKILL 4

Be realistic about the amount of independent work involved and put in the hours consistently and from the beginning of Year 12.

The A Level course is packed with content, which means that there will not be time to explore every idea fully within the lessons, let alone to go beyond the specification as you need to do to develop the synoptic understanding you will need for the very top grades and for University. This is why your teachers may offer you enrichment and extension tasks, co-curricular activities, trips and visits.

SKILL 5

Take every opportunity to extend and enrich your studies outside the classroom, both independently and as part of organised tasks and activities.

Finally, the A Level course often surprises people. You might struggle when you have always found things easy before... or equally you might find yourself doing much better than you have done in the past. See this as a new beginning - show yourself, and your teachers what you can do and how you respond to a challenge.

SKILL 6

Be a positive, open-minded, resilient and ambitious student.

SKILL 7

Ask for help as and when you need it.



So, what does the “ideal pupil” like in *A Level Religious Studies*?



Use this page to create a mind-map explaining the qualities and habits that “ideal pupils” would have in *A Level Religious Studies*...

WRITING YOUR FIRST ESSAY

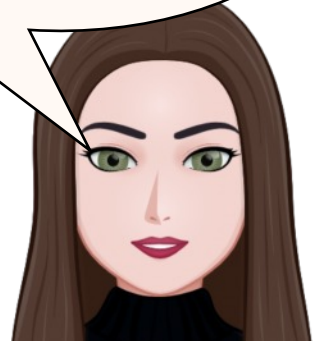
Don't Panic! Nobody is good at writing essays the first few times they do it! Whatever anybody might claim to the contrary, essay-writing is a skill you have to learn and develop through years of practice.

Of course, it takes a long time and effort to write an essay - let alone a good essay - so some students are reluctant to practice essay-writing very often. Don't let that be you! The more you put in to practicing your essay-skills - time and effort - the better marks and overall grades you will get.

- As you get better at writing essays, the writing starts to be positively enjoyable. It is very satisfying to make a judgement and have an opinion about the topics you study and then to develop a persuasive argument. As I have already said, writing a good essay has a rhythm or shape to it, a bit like writing a good pop-song. As you get better and better at writing essays, you get a real feeling for when they are going well.

For more detailed guidance on writing essays for A Level RS, why not do our MASTERCLASS online course on essay-writing, once you have started the course... <https://www.tickettailor.com/events/candleconferences/511812>

The more you write essays the better you will get. I set my students an essay every two weeks through the whole A Level RS course - one week to prepare and then one week to write. They start off getting awful marks... but soon improve and then keep on improving, because it is true... practice does make (more) perfect..



OK, so I have been set an essay by my teacher. What should I do?

1. **DO THE READING!** The quality of an essay tests the quality of an argument and, by implication, the quality of the student who wrote it. Your argument is bound to be poor if you don't have detailed knowledge and understanding of the topic and of what a range of scholars have already argued. An A* essay is ACCURATE, ENGAGED and DETAILED... if you don't do the reading your essay won't be!
2. **TAKE USEFUL NOTES.** Making notes is as much of a skill as writing an essay, and one that is almost as important when you go to University. Useful notes aren't just a fair copy or even a summary of what you have read... Rather, the process of taking notes should be one which supports you in...
 - i. Knowing and understanding the text and particularly the argument the scholar is advancing
 - ii. Analysing the argument and appreciating its connection(s) with other argument(s), its strengths and weaknesses
 - iii. Evaluating and forming a reasoned judgement about the argument the scholar is advancing, and the topic as a whole.

You may find that the CORNELL system of noting works for you, and you will find a template for Cornell notes on pages 35-36 of this booklet.

4. WRITE UP YOUR ESSAY...

- I. Start by **BUGGING THE QUESTION** - which means boxing the instruction word(s), underlining the key-words and then constantly glancing back at the question to make sure you are answering the question (not answering the question exactly as set will immediately limit you to a C grade at most).
- II. Then **PLAN** your essay carefully. Spend at least 10% of the available write-up time on planning, even in an exam, because as the saying goes "fail to plan and you plan to fail."
- III. Develop your argument using the (Intro) **TRADE C** framework. Write your introduction, ending with your **THESIS**. Then **PEEAEL** each of your reasons as a separate body-paragraph and then your counterclaim (disagreeing argument and evaluation) as separate body-paragraph(s). Signpost your conclusion, repeat your thesis and then summarize your best reason(s). Acknowledge the limitations of your argument and highlight its implications.

5. CHECK YOUR WORK.

When your essay is complete, go back and check it carefully for errors and typos. Read it to yourself, aloud if you are not in an exam... you can often hear errors where you can't see them.

- If it is a weekly essay, run spell-check if you are typing. Your teacher's valuable time is better directed towards giving you feedback on your argument than in correcting your spelling!
- In a weekly essay, analyse your overall essay-structure and each individual paragraph - labelling the parts of **TRADE C** and then **PEEAEL** and adding any parts that are missing, analysing your language for descriptive, explanatory, analytical and evaluative words and phrases to help with this.

6. IMPROVE YOUR WORK.

Check and change up some of the connectives, ensuring that they are varied and used precisely to add something to what you are communicating and not to detract from it.