

# **An introduction to Philosophy of Religion**



**"Wisest is she who knows she does not know."  
— Jostein Gaarder, *Sophie's World***

## **Religious Studies**

# PREPARING FOR A LEVEL RELIGIOUS STUDIES



Dear Year 11 students,

We know that some of you are thinking of studying A Level **Religious Studies** (sometimes also called '**Philosophy and Ethics**', but this is a little misleading, see below). We hope that this document will help you to get started in your studies and give you an idea of what to expect from the subject.

The specification of the course we study can be found here:

<https://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/242913-specification-accredited-a-level-gce-religious-studies-h573.pdf>

We study three components spread over the two years:

- Philosophy of Religion
- Religion and Ethics
- Developments in Christian Thought (also called Christian Theology).

You will be assessed in three two-hour exams at the end of the course and there is no coursework.

Religious Studies is an exciting subject that makes you think about the deepest questions in life. It is also very relevant for many university courses: past students doing courses such as science, history, politics or geography have often told us that they have found Religious Studies very useful because it has given them some understanding of the concepts they come across at university.

The following are partly recommendations, partly assignments to be handed in when you take up the course. Please scroll down as there are seven pages to this document.

We hope that you find the work interesting and worthwhile and that we will see you in September!

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## Philosophy of Religion:

Philosophy of Religion asks and tries to answer questions such as 'Is there more to reality than meets the eye? Is there a God? What do we mean by God? What are the arguments for and against God's existence? How can we justify God in the face of suffering and evil? Is there a soul? How can we talk about God? ...'

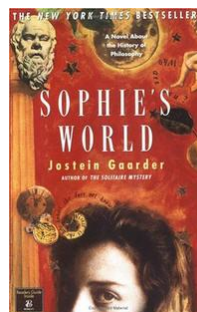
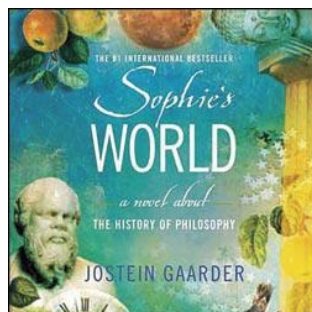
You have partly covered the same material in simple form in Years 7 – 11, but for A Level you have to go much deeper and also know and evaluate the views of various scholars in order to develop your own reasoned views.

One of the great advantages of studying Religious Studies is that you dip into the history of Western philosophy (starting with the Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle), and you cannot really call yourself an educated person if you do not know a little about it.

## **Strongly recommended reading:**

**Sophie's World** by Jostein Gaarder.

This is an easily accessible history of philosophy for young people, and especially the first few chapters on Greek philosophy are very relevant for our course.



You don't need to buy the book as there is an online pdf version

(<http://vidyaonline.org/dl/sophiesworld.pdf>)

and an audio version

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDDpx0DQWPM> Chapter 1) –

you could listen to and read the text at the same time.

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## **Religion and Ethics:**

Religion and ethics asks and tries to answer questions such as ‘How do we make moral decisions? What do we mean by ‘good’ and ‘bad’? Are there moral absolutes, or does everything depend on the circumstances? What approaches have great thinkers suggested? How do we reach the right moral decisions in areas such as euthanasia, business and sexual ethics? Is there such a thing as conscience?...’

## **Recommended reading:**

**Would you kill the fat man?** by David Edmonds.



You don't have to buy the book but you should look up the 'Trolley problems' online which are ethical thought experiments.

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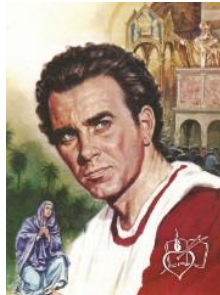
## Developments in Christian Thought (= Christian Theology):

This component looks at the Christian faith from the inside and asks and tries to answer questions such as 'What do Christians think about how we can be saved? life after death? how we should make moral decisions? whether we can find out about God through our reason or need revelation? What do Christians really believe about Jesus Christ? Is Christianity still relevant in today's largely secular culture? Can people be saved in other religions? What is Liberation Theology? Is Christianity irredeemably sexist? ...'

### **Recommended watching:**

Feature film 'Restless heart' on **St. Augustine of Hippo**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FSbtpkP1pTY>



and a documentary on **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQA7P-kh0hM>



as they are two theologians you will need to know quite a lot about.

### **Recommended reading:**

On feminist theology: **Is there a place for feminists in a Christian Church?**



**Daphne Hampson**

and

**Rosemary Radford Ruether**



<file:///G:/New%20RS%20A%20Level/6%20Yr13%20DEVELOPMENTS%20IN%20CHRISTIAN%20THOUGHT/4%20GENDER%20AND%20THEOLOGY/GENDER%20AND%20THEOLOGY%202019/Is%20there%20a%20place%20for%20feminists%20in%20a%20Christian%20Church%20Hampson%20versus%20Ruether.pdf>

# PREPARING FOR A LEVEL RELIGIOUS STUDIES



**This is a wider READING LIST of useful books if any of you want to dip more deeply into the subject already:**

## Textbooks

- Ahluwalia, Libby & Bowie, Robert, *Oxford A Level Religious Studies for OCR: AS and Year 1 Student Book : Christianity, Philosophy and Ethics* (OUP, 2016);
- Campbell, Hugh, Wilkinson, Michael & Wilcockson, Michael, *OCR Religious Studies A Level Year 1 and AS* (Hodder, 2016).

**N.B. One of these textbooks will be the main textbook we will be using. You will be given a copy of this textbook. There is no need to buy it!**

## Philosophy of Religion

- Blackburn, Simon, *Think* (OUP, 2001);;
- Blackmore, Susan, *Consciousness: An Introduction* (Routledge, 2010), chapters 1, 2 & 17;
- Dawkins, Richard, *The Blind Watchmaker* (Penguin, 2006), chapter 1;
- Palmer, Michael, *The Question of God: An Introductory Commentary and Sourcebook* (Routledge, 2001), chapters 2 and 3;
- Quinn, Phillip L. (ed.), *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (Blackwell, 1999);
- Stump, Eleonore & Murray, Michael J., *Philosophy of Religion: The Big Questions* (Blackwell, 1999);
- Vardy, Peter, *The Puzzle of God* (Collins, 1999);
- Vardy, Peter, *The Thinker's Guide to God* (O Books, 2003);
- Warburton, Nigel, *A Little History of Philosophy* (Yale, 2012);
- Warburton, Nigel *Philosophy: the Basics* (Routledge, 2012);
- <http://plato.stanford.edu/>

## Religion and Ethics

- Blackburn, Simon, *Ethics: A Very Short Introduction* (OUP, 2003);
- Bowie, Robert, *Ethical Studies* (OUP, 2004);
- Crane, Andrew & Matten, Dirk, *Business Ethics: Managing Corporate Citizenship and Sustainability in the Age of Globalization* (OUP, 2015);
- Glover, Jonathan, *Causing Death and Saving Lives: The Moral Problems of Abortion, Infanticide, Suicide, Euthanasia, Capital Punishment, War and Other Life-or-death Choices* (Penguin, 1990);
- Pojman, Louis P., *Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong* (Wadsworth, 2001);
- Messer, Neil, *SCM Studyguide: Christian Ethics* (SCM, 2006);
- Singer, Peter (ed.), *A Companion to Ethics* (Blackwell, 1993);
- Singer, Peter, *Rethinking Life and Death: The Collapse of Our Traditional Ethics* (OUP, 1995);
- Thompson, Mel, *Ethics Made Easy* (Hodder, 2011);
- Vardy, Peter & Grosch, Paul, *The Puzzle of Ethics* (Collins, 1999);
- <http://plato.stanford.edu/>

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## Theology

- *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Continuum, 1994);
- Bockemuehl, Markus, *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus* (CUP, 2001);
- Ford, David, *Theology: A Very Short Introduction* (OUP, 2013);
- Gunton, Colin, *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine* (CUP, 1999);
- Higon, M., *SCM Core Text: Christian Doctrine* (SCM, 2008);
- Markham, I., *Understanding Christian Doctrine* (Blackwell, 2007);
- McGrath, Alister, *Theology: An Introduction* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010);
- McGrath, Alister, *Theology: The Basics* (Blackwell, 2011);
- Theissen, Gerd, *The Shadow of the Galilean* (SCM, 2010);
- Vermes, Geza, *Jesus the Jew* (SCM, 2014).

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**Assignment: This task is essential and you will have to hand it in in your first RS lesson in September.**

*(You can write this by hand or word process it.)*

## **IMPORTANT SCHOLARS ON THE OCR RELIGIOUS STUDIES SPECIFICATION**

Draw up a table with the following columns:

<u>Name</u>	<u>When did s/he live?</u>	<u>Some biographical details</u>	<u>Famous books / publications</u>	<u>Main philosophical / ethical / theological concerns</u>	<u>Famous quotes / concepts</u>
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and fill it in with the main scholars on the OCR Religious Studies Syllabus, i.e.:

Plato  
 Aristotle  
 Irenaeus  
 Augustine of Hippo  
 Boethius  
 Anselm of Canterbury  
 Gaunilo  
 Thomas Aquinas  
 René Descartes  
 Jean Calvin  
 Jeremy Bentham  
 David Hume  
 Immanuel Kant  
 John Stuart Mill  
 William Paley  
 William James

Karl Marx  
 Sigmund Freud  
 Dietrich Bonhoeffer  
 Ludwig Wittgenstein  
 A.J. Ayer  
 Joseph Fletcher  
 Paul Tillich  
 G.E. Moore  
 Antony Flew  
 R.M. Hare  
 Basil Mitchell  
 John Hick  
 Richard Swinburne  
 Richard Dawkins  
 Rosemary Radford Ruether  
 Mary Daly

Have fun with all these tasks and keep well!

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## An Introduction to Philosophy of Religion

Richard Dawkins became famous for his writings on evolutionary biology, but he is now mostly known for his views on religion. His most popular book *The God Delusion* has sold over 2 million copies. In it he argues that God is a fantasy. Dawkins is proud of his atheism; he believes that it is indicative of a healthy mind.

*'If anybody wants to believe in God or the Easter Bunny or the Tooth Fairy, it's up to them to provide the evidence for it.*

*Human minds, in general, are brought up to believe that faith is a virtue, that you don't have to have evidence for something, that you can positively retreat behind faith and say, "Don't ask, me about that, you've no right to ask me. That's my faith. It's private. It's mine. I believe it and you've got to respect it."*

*Well I don't respect it. What I respect are beliefs that are based on evidence'.*

**Do you agree?**

**Use what we have learnt about epistemology (what can we know?) and metaphysics (what exists) in your analysis.**


φιλοσοφία

'Philosophy' comes from the Ancient Greek 'Philosophia' which literally means 'love of wisdom'.

Philosophy is 'thinking about thinking'. Philosophers consider fundamental questions. They do not merely ponder over ultimate questions and offer different theories as answers; but they examine whether the question is the right one as well as its implications.

Philosophy of religion is a branch of philosophy concerned with questions regarding religion, including the **nature and existence of God**, the examination of religious experience, analysis of religious vocabulary and texts, and the relationship of religion and science.

# 'Does God exist?'

[illegible]

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## Philosophy Through Film

### *The Matrix* (1999)

What is REAL and how do we KNOW?

#### An Introduction to METAPHYSICS and EPISTEMOLOGY



In **The Matrix** (Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999) Keanu Reeves plays a computer programmer who leads a double life as a hacker called Neo. After receiving cryptic messages on his computer monitor, Neo begins to search for Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne), the leader of a resistance group, who he believes is responsible for the messages. Eventually, Neo finds Morpheus, and is then told that **reality is actually very different from what he perceives it to be**.

Morpheus tells Neo that **human existence is merely an illusion**. In reality, humans are being 'farmed' as a source of energy by a race of sentient, malevolent machines. People actually live their entire lives in pods, with their brains being fed sensory stimuli which give them the illusion of leading 'ordinary' lives. Morpheus explains that, up until then, the 'reality' perceived by Neo is actually 'a computer-generated dream world...a neural interactive simulation' called *The Matrix*.

Watch the clips from *The Matrix* and think about the following three questions:

- What is REAL?
- What can we KNOW?
- If this film is meant to teach us something about life, what is its message?

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Read the quotations and answer the questions in the space provided.

### 1) What is 'real' for Neo? Is he right?

*"What is real? How do you define 'real'? If you're talking about what you can feel, what you can smell, what you can taste and see, then 'real' is simply electrical signals interpreted by your brain". (Morpheus- the Matrix, 1999)*


### 2) How do you know that this world is not a dream?

*"Let us suppose, that we are dreaming, and that all these particulars – namely, the opening of the eyes, the motion of the head, the forth-putting of the hands – are merely illusions". (Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy, 1641).*


In his *Meditations*, **Descartes (1596-1650)** is trying to work out whether there is any knowledge we can have which is absolutely certain. He doubts the reliability of the senses postulating that **all we experience could be a trick of an evil demon**. By **doubting the reliability of the senses** and **dissolving all his knowledge as uncertainty** he starts afresh in order to try to prove that objects are much as we perceive them to be.

His famous words '**cogito ergo sum**' - 'I think therefore I am'- sum up his position that because we are thinking beings able to think about our own existence, proves in itself that an 'I' exists to do the thinking. Or as Descartes explains '*We cannot doubt of our existence while we doubt*'.

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3) How can you link *The Matrix* to Descartes' ideas?
