

Philosophy, Religion, and Ethics

**Welcome to Philosophy, Religion and Ethics!**

Human beings have always thought about the big questions in life:

*Why is there so much suffering in the world?*

*Is there a God?*

*What is the difference between right and wrong?*

In this subject you will be able to explore some of these thoughts as well as developing your own! You will learn how to write persuasively in an academic context, whilst also learning about complex philosophical and ethical theories and gaining an understanding of different cultures. You will also have the opportunity to visit Buddhist monasteries and centres and to listen to visiting speakers talking about their specialism.

**COURSE OVERVIEW: What kinds of questions will we discuss?**

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| **Year 1** | **Year 2** |
| **Philosophy of Religion**  Who are Plato and Aristotle? Do humans have a soul? Does God exist? Why do people believe in miracles? Why is there evil in the world? | **Developments in Buddhist Thought**  Is all life dependent on each other? Does everyone have the capacity to be a Buddha? What is Zen Buddhism? Is Western Buddhism still Buddhism? Can women become Buddhas? |
| **Religion and Ethics**  How should we make moral decisions – using nature? Love? Duty? The greatest pleasure for the greatest number? Is euthanasia murder? Is good ethics good business? | **Philosophy of Religion**  If God is all knowing, how can human beings have free will? Can God be limited or self-limiting? Is language adequate when talking about God? Is language adequate when talking about anything? |
| **Developments in Buddhist Thought**  Is the life of the Buddha important? Why do human beings suffer? What decides how humans are reborn? Is meditation the pathway to better mental health? | **Religion and Ethics**  What does ‘good’ actually mean? Do humans have a conscience that comes from outside of ourselves, or is it psychological? Does religion have a role in sexual relationships or are our choices solely private? |

**OCR A LEVEL RELIGIOUS STUDIES ASSESSMENT:**

There are three, two-hour examinations, one on Philosophy, one on Ethics, and one on Buddhism. Each exam requires you to write three essays from a choice of four questions.

**PROGRESSION:**

Students of PRE often progress onto degrees or careers related to working with people. Popular degree courses include Philosophy, Religious Studies, Sociology, Theology, History, Politics, Psychology, Social Care and Anthropology. This subject lends itself to many careers, for example in politics, teaching, law, marketing, theology, diversity and inclusion, and business.

**Tasks for this summer**

**Task 1: Scenarios**

Please complete these tasks so that you start the course familiar with some of the questions we ask on the course and some of the material we use. **Write a response to each of these questions (at least 200 words each) and bring it with you when you come to college after the summer.**

1. In the second world war, the British Government broke the enigma code and which meant they could know what the Nazis were going to do. They discovered that the Nazis were planning to bomb the city of Coventry. They could have stopped the bombing raid & saved 10,000 lives. But if they did the Germans would realise that the code had been broken and they would devise a new one which the British couldn’t read. Or should they let the raid take place and wait for an opportunity to read the Germans’ intentions and maybe take steps towards winning the war. What do you think? Should the 10,000 lives be lost in the hope of a greater victory?
2. Do religious experiences such as seeing an angel, or having a dream which foretells the future prove the existence of God? Or is the existence of beauty in art and nature the sign that points to a divine designer? Why do we even believe that there is a point to existence?
3. How important is it that stories of religious leaders having a miraculous experience such as the virgin birth, the revelation of the Qu’ran or the birth of the Buddha are literally true? Is religion factual like history or science, or is it imaginative like art or literature, and does it matter?
4. In Japan because of an ageing population, the government is spending billions of yen on the design and manufacture of robots in work in old people’s care homes. Would it be a good thing if *robots* could understand our feelings and care for us in the way other *people* should do? Are there any thing you wouldn’t want a robot to be able to do?
5. What are drawbacks in allowing people with serious, even terminal illnesses to end their own life? Is it OK to NOT treat someone and thus bringing their life to an end rather acting to do so? What is the “slippery slope” argument and how relevant is it?
6. Research the benefits and drawbacks of meditation. Are there any extra benefits in linking Meditation to religion as in Buddhism, or could it just as good for you without the statues, incense and robes?

**Task 2: Reading and Watching**

There are a lot of interesting books, films, video and podcasts available that we refer to on the course. A small list is below.

**Pick one of them to read/ watch/ listen to and write a review of it. Bring your review with you when you come to college after the summer.**

* What was the philosophical content?
* How do you think it will link to the course?
* What questions did it raise?
* Did you enjoy it?

**Stretch and challenge**: Pick one from each column and see whether you can link all three of them together? Are there any similar philosophical themes?

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| **Films** | **Podcasts/ Youtube philosophy** | **Books** |
| * Groundhog Day * The Matrix * The Good place (tv series) * The Truman Show * Million Dollar Baby (2004 version) | * The PanPsyCast – pick any episode [The Panpsycast Philosophy Podcast](https://thepanpsycast.com/) * Beyond belief (radio 4 programme) – pick any episode [BBC Radio 4 - Beyond Belief - Downloads](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006s6p6/episodes/downloads) * In Our Time (radio 4 programme) – pick any episode [BBC Radio 4 - In Our Time, Philosophy](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01f0vzr) * Ted Talks [TED - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/@TED/search?query=ethics) Search the Ted channel for ethics, philosophy or Buddhism * Crash course philosophy - pick any episode [Philosophy - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8dPuuaLjXtNgK6MZucdYldNkMybYIHKR) | * Douglas Adams – The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy * Richard Dawkins – The God Delusion * Nigel Warburton – A little history of philosophy * Jostein Gaarder - Sophie’s world * Yuval Noah Harari – Sapiens: A brief history of humankind * Robert M. Persig – Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance * Margaret Atwood – The Handmaid’s tale |

We look forward to seeing you at Huish!