



St Mary Redcliffe  
and Temple School

# Philosophy



# Philosophy

Exam board: AQA

Specification no.: 7171 (AS) / 7172 (A Level)

**This is a two year linear A level course** - The AS content forms the first half of the A level content and can be assessed at the end of Year 12 to provide an AS Level qualification if the student is dropping the subject and believes they can get a strong grade. Otherwise the two years of content are assessed at the end of Year 13 to give the A level grade.

## AS level

Topics	Assessment
Epistemology	Exam : One 3 hour paper, equally weighted between the two topics, containing a range of question styles from sentence answers to short essays.
Moral Philosophy	

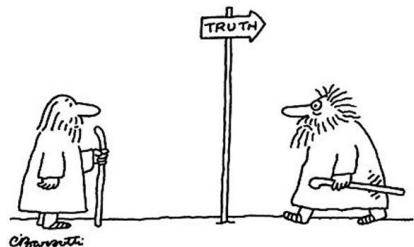
## A level

Topics	Assessment
Epistemology	Exam : One 3 hour paper, equally weighted between the two topics, containing a range of question styles from short paragraphs to longer extended essays.
Moral Philosophy	
Metaphysics of God	Exam : One 3 hour paper, equally weighted between the two topics, containing a range of question styles from short paragraphs to longer extended essays.
Metaphysics of Mind	

## Course Delivery:

A level Philosophy is taught to a large extent through exercises and discussion and through some guided reading of texts.

We have a very well constructed virtual learning environment which contains many extension resources. Where appropriate, video and Internet research are used, but students must be prepared for a close study of set texts and some hard thinking about what they mean. Homework tasks will also include structured written tasks and short essays, particularly as we prepare for the longer pieces of writing required in the final A Level exams.



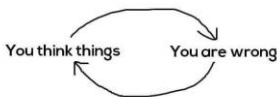
# What is philosophy?

Philosophy is the oldest academic subject and the one that asks the deepest questions – not just about life and how we should live it but also about how the various other subjects work - so the Philosophy or Art, Philosophy of Science, Maths, History, Politics etc. ask what kind of truth or other goal these subjects engage with, how they discover or pursue it, and what different approaches could be taken to it.

What makes something 'good Art'? What is the difference between a mathematical truth and a scientific one?



How philosophy works.



Philosophy is also a particular approach to the pursuit of truth – it seeks for clarity in the way that we use language and in the definition of words such as God, mind or goodness so as to avoid confusion, and it tries to analyse viewpoints critically and to build arguments with a sound logical structure. Philosophy is not just sounding off on what you think about the world.

Philosophy is also about engaging with a long tradition of thought and thinkers who have wrestled with these questions, and so will involve the study of texts, mostly (but not all) written by long dead people. Both the AS and A Level will involve reading of extracts from primary philosophical texts, although detailed questions on these will not be asked in the exams

## Course Content:

**Epistemology and Perception:** asks the basic philosophical questions “What do we know?”, “How do we know it?” and, “What do we even mean by the word knowledge?”. Socrates was extremely pessimistic on this front, claiming that all he knew was that he knew nothing! In this module we discuss whether such scepticism is warranted, whether the world as we think it is is really an illusion, and what ultimate justification we can offer for our beliefs. Is it enough to say that knowledge can be justified from experience, or is there any truth that can be reached purely by reason. Do all of our ideas derive from experience or are any ideas innate (built into us from birth). The module also considers the nature of our perceptions – do these really tell us how the world is or is any of this purely inside our head? What about colour or sound? Is the world really colourful and noisy or is that just what your brain turns light and sound waves in to? What is the difference between a perception and a hallucination or optical illusion?

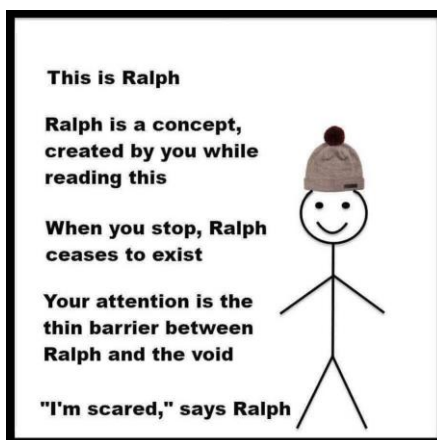
**Moral Philosophy:** asks what is the 'good' for man? What ideals and ends should we pursue and why? Why do I often fail to do the things that I feel I ought to do? What makes our actions right or wrong? Is there anything ultimate that we should value, any absolute moral truths? We consider a number of moral theories and apply them to issues such as poverty, euthanasia, animal



rights and killing people in video games. Some philosophers argue that what makes things right or wrong is a matter of the consequences of our actions and whether more people are happy or unhappy, others believe that there are some things which are absolutely right or wrong regardless of the consequences. Meta-ethics asks the deeper question of whether our moral language really refers to any truths at all or whether our moral feelings are just a matter of taste and personal preference.

**Metaphysics of God:** discusses what we mean by the word God, considering whether the notions of omniscience, omnipotence and benevolence are coherent and compatible, and discussing God's relationship to time. We then consider a range of arguments for the existence of God, including design and causation, and challenges to belief in God including the problem of evil and the nature of religious language. The deeper underlying question is whether belief in God is something that we can reason about and about which there are 'right answers' or whether faith is fundamentally a non-rational commitment or serves some other function in human life and society.

**Metaphysics of Mind:** asks what is the mind? Is it a different substance from the body and how do the two relate to one another? What are the elements of conscious thought and how do they relate to the processes within my brain? Is consciousness merely a function of brain-processes or something with real power? Are we basically machines running programmes or is there some difference between humans and computers or robots? Will we ever make a conscious robot and how would we know if we had?



## Frequently asked questions:

Q: What is the difference between Philosophy and RE?

A: There is quite a significant overlap in content between the two subjects, so while it is not forbidden to study both it is not normally a good idea. Both subjects include units on Moral Philosophy and Philosophy of Religion which include roughly the same arguments and theories. Philosophy tends to require more logical structure and precision in its presentation of arguments than RE, as this is what the assessment objectives are looking to see. Some would say that Philosophy is the 'harder' subject but that really depends on what your skills are. It is perfectly OK to start four subjects including Philosophy and RE to see which one is more suited to you.

Q: How do you get marked in an exam where there are no 'right answers'?

A: First of all – how do you know there isn't a right answer! Just because people disagree doesn't mean some of them aren't wrong. You do have a point though – there isn't an agreed 'right answer' as in a maths question, but then there often isn't in a History or English essay either. In reality philosophy exams ask a mix of question types with very clear marking criteria. Some are shorter answer questions which ask you for key definitions or arguments and the marks are given for how accurately you can reproduce these. Essay questions will ask something more open, such as 'Do we have any innate knowledge?', which definitely does have different possible answers, but the examiner doesn't care which answer you give, only that you have explained the arguments in support of it clearly and why the arguments against it don't work for you. We will teach you all this stuff. It really isn't that different from any other humanities or essay based subject.

Q: This sounds really cool and I really like arguing with people, so do you think I will enjoy philosophy?

A: Maybe, but maybe not. It is a subject which it is very easy to make sound cool but the reality of grinding through the rationalist arguments of innate ideas and evaluating each of the empiricist objections is much more dry and abstract. You will only know if this is for you by doing some proper philosophical reading in advance. Lots of people like an argument because they are opinionated and enjoy trading opinions with people, but on lots of the issues on the syllabus you will have no clue what you think, so this isn't easily done unless you take the time to really get into the subject for yourself. Some people love it, but others think they will and then spend the first few weeks looking like a rabbit in headlights before deciding they would be better elsewhere!

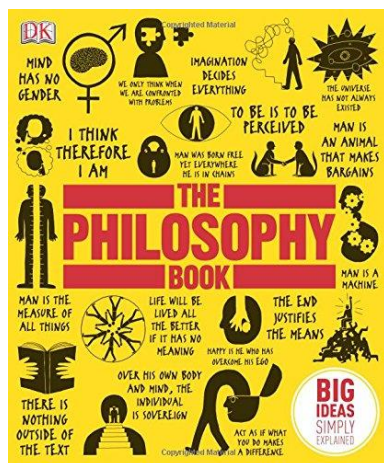
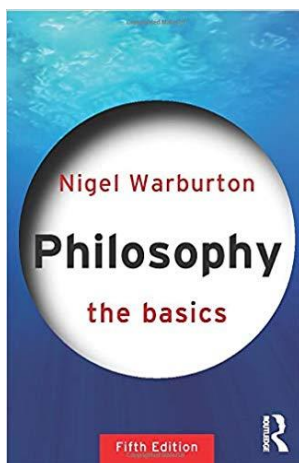
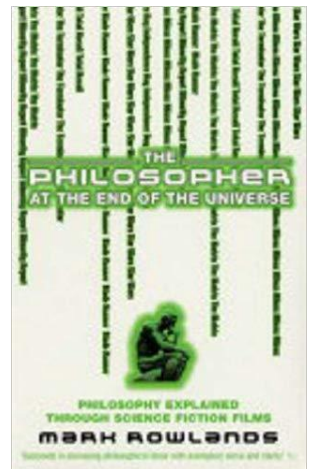
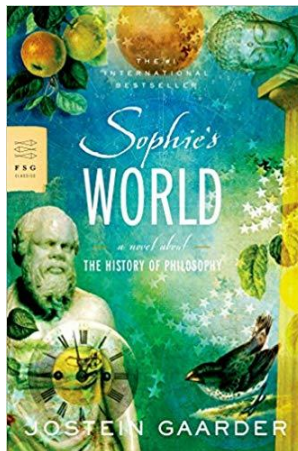
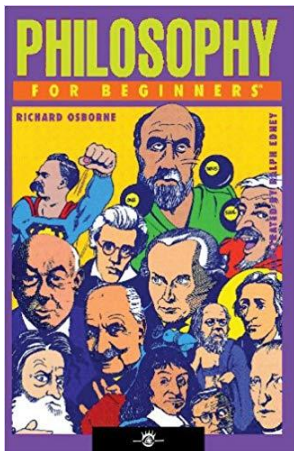
**Entry requirements:** At least one English/Humanities/Social Science subject should be passed with a grade 6.

### **Skills & personal qualities required / developed by course:**

Students will need to enjoy reading and thinking for themselves. A good philosopher will like asking questions and challenging ideas. They will also, however, need to be able listen carefully to the views of others and not jump to conclusions. Students will learn to present a coherent argument in writing and in oral presentations to the group.

**Resources:** All students will be issued with a textbook and the library is has a broad range of wider reading resources.

### **Recommended reading / websites:**



- Mark Rowlands      **The Philosopher at the End of the Universe**  
 (a brilliant book - philosophical problems through science fiction films)
- Buckingham / King      **The philosophy book: Big ideas simply explained**
- Nigel Warburton      **Philosophy: The basics**
- R.Osbourne      **Philosophy for Beginners**
- Jostein Gaarder      **Sophie's World**  
 (a bit of a marmite book – written to introduce young people through a cunningly constructed narrative – the best selling philosophy book of the last forty years)

There are some excellent web resources that will introduce you to philosophy:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04bwydw>

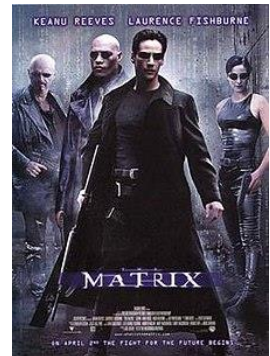
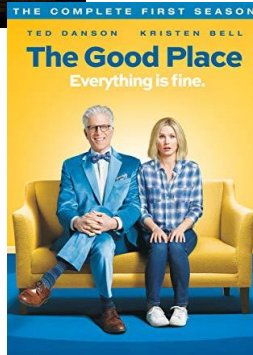
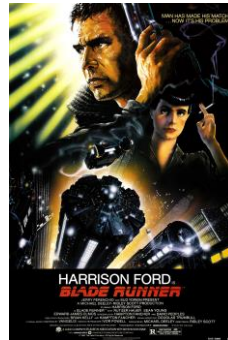


Youtube: Crash Course Philosophy





And there is loads of great film and TV that will introduce you to philosophical ideas, just so long as you don't think that trudging through the nitty gritty of the arguments is going to be as much fun as watching the films!



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