

# Philosophy

Exam board : AQA

Specification no : 7172

Link to the Specification:

<https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/philosophy/a-level/philosophy-7172/specification-at-a-glance>

**This is a two year linear A level course** - The two years of content are assessed at the end of Year 13 to give the A level grade. Unfortunately there is no longer an AS Level qualification in Philosophy.



## Content:

Topic	Assessment	A Level %
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.	25%
Moral Philosophy		25%
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.	25%
Metaphysics of Mind		25%

## 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?

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?

**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 to 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 has a broad range of wider reading resources.

## Recommended reading / websites:

Mark Rowlands	<b>The Philosopher at the End of the Universe</b>
Buckingham / King	<b>The philosophy book: Big ideas simply explained</b>
Nigel Warburton	<b>Philosophy: The basics</b>
R.Osbourne	<b>Philosophy for Beginners</b>
Jostein Gaarder	<b>Sophie’s World</b>

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