Hereford Sixth Form College
Philosophy and Ethics Department

A level Philosophy and Ethics at Hereford Sixth Form College is a rigorous academic subject. You will be challenged to read difficult texts, to analyse different ways of thinking and to write in a more sophisticated way. In your two years with us you will cover three compulsory papers. These are: Component 1 – A Study of Christianity, Component 2 – Philosophy of Religion and Component 3 – Religious Ethics. At the end of the two years, you will be examined on all three of these papers through written essays. An interest in all three of these areas of study is vital for your success and enjoyment of the course. When you join us in September, we will begin with the study of Philosophy and Religion. Completing the following work in advance of your arrival is important so that you have a good grasp of the kinds of vocabulary that we will be using and the process of analysing and evaluating a philosophical argument.

Introduction to Component 2 – Philosophy of Religion

The word 'philosophy' literally means 'love of wisdom'. The actual subject area is disputed and rages from linguistic analysis to questions about ultimate reality.

Peter Cole in his book 'Philosophy of Religion' quotes the famous philosopher A.J. Ayer as saying that the business of philosophy is to clarify and analyse. We must accept that philosophy can challenge truths that we might hold very dear, and that it never claims to provide answer to the ultimate questions. We might even feel that we know less than when we started!

Another important thing about philosophy is the subject specific language. We must make sure that we understand and use the right language from the very start, or we could be making further problems for ourselves. Please don't worry if you don't grasp the arguments straight away. Usually, it is helpful to take notes and even write out the arguments for yourself, so that you can be clear about the path of reasoning. You may find that you have to read over things several times in order to make sense of them. This is quite normal and not a sign of failure on your part.

Philosophy will sharpen your mind; you will become aware of what does and does not constitute a valid argument. You will also develop the skill of following and evaluating an argument. You will gain an insight into the history of ideas and the debates that have accompanied them. It will force you to examine your own ideas and presuppositions. As Socrates (470BCE – 399 BCE) concluded in his defence of philosophy:

'The unexamined life is not worth living.'

Activity 1

Continue reading the text below and find out the meaning of the following words. In your own words, write a glossary definition for each one into the chart below:

Word	Definition
Valid	
Sound	

Syllogism	
Deductive	
Inductive	
A priori	
A posteriori	

Two concerns of philosophy are to clarify the meaning of words and to identify ways of testing for logical coherency. The philosophy of religion examines the general philosophical problems about God and religion. It analyses concepts such as 'God' and 'eternal life', tries to determine the meaning of religious 'talk' and examines the nature and existence of a God or gods and the way in which he / she or they relate to the world.

Philosophy of religion courses vary widely but it has always been traditional to include an examination of the classical arguments for the existence of God. There are generally considered to be five classical arguments, although we know there are numerous others. The first four (of which you will study two) all involve claims about the world that can be investigated empirically (by the senses) or be verified by experience, they are called **a posteriori** arguments. These arguments are based upon experience, such as order in the world (**teleological argument**) or cause and effect (**cosmological argument**). The fifth argument is **a priori**. Such arguments are prior to any experience of the world and are not verified by experience. This argument for the existence of God claims that God's definition entails His existence (**ontological argument**). But before we discuss these **theistic proofs** (an attempt to prove by argument that God exists) we need to learn and know what constitutes a good or bad argument.

What is an argument?

An argument can be defined as a set of statements, which is such that one of them, i.e., the conclusion, is supported or implied by the others, i.e. the premises. Let's look at Cole's example. This particular example takes the form of a simple **syllogism** (a three line argument in which the conclusion is drawn from two premises):

- The Eiffel tower is in Paris
- Paris is in France
- Therefore, the Eiffel tower is in France

The first two statements in this syllogism are the premises, and the third is the conclusion. A **valid** argument is one where there are no mistakes in logic. This means that the information in the premises logically lead to the conclusion. So, the above argument is a valid argument. But beware! Not all valid arguments are true! Let's look at this example:

- The Eiffel tower is in Worthing
- Worthing is in England
- Therefore, the Eiffel tower is in England

Note that there is nothing wrong with the logic here, but there seems to be plenty wrong with the conclusion. What is the problem? Well, one of the premises is untrue. Hence even if the logic is impeccable, it doesn't mean to say that the conclusion is true. To take account of this problem, philosophers refer to an argument where the logic is correct, *and* the premises are true as a **sound** argument.

Activity 2

Using the PowerPoint provided alongside this worksheet, read the syllogisms on slides 5-12 and decide:

- Which are valid / not valid and why?
- Which are sound / not sound and why?

Write your answers in the grid below.

Question	Valid?	Sound?	Reasoning
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			

A sound argument is what we really mean by a philosophical proof. A definition or proof is that which results from a valid argument constructed from a set of true premises. To be compelling, or persuasive, the premises would have to be known to be true by those presenting the argument and by those to whom it was directed. A proof is such that if you agree with the premises, then you must agree with the conclusion. If you accept the premises but deny the conclusion you would be

contradicting yourself. Now let's look at another type of argument which is less persuasive but more common.

- If it rains, I shall get wet
- I get wet
- Therefore, it rained.

We know, or could imagine, an instance where I might get wet and it has not rained, in other words although I agreed with the premises, I did not agree with the conclusion.

There are more ways of getting wet than just by being in the rain. Putting this more formally we say that the conclusion does not necessarily follow from the premises. The premises provide some, but not absolute, support for the conclusion. In this example to accept the premises and not accept the conclusion would not be self-contradictory.

So, we now must distinguish between two types of argument presented above. The first type is known as a **deductive** argument. A deductive argument is one in which if the premises are true, and the logic is valid, then the conclusion must be true. The second type is known as an **inductive** argument. An inductive argument is one in which if the premises are true and the logic is valid, then the conclusion is a logical possibility. This can lead to confusion, however, so be careful. Cole points out that even the great Sherlock Holmes got confused between deduction and induction. Homes prided himself on his deductive reasoning, but in fact he was inductive in his approach. For example, to conclude that someone has a dog because you observe they have dog hair on their trousers is not deduction but is induction. After all, the person could have brushed up against a dog on the way in!

The biggest problem with inductive arguments is that they are always open to doubt and uncertainly. The biggest problem with deductive arguments is it is difficult to establish the original premises, and the conclusions reached are often obvious from the original premises. In fact, the original premises must already contain the conclusion.

Identifying the key premises of a complex argument is a vital task and setting out argument in a formal way of premises and conclusions is also important for clarity. Cole's basic checklist give us a clue about what we should watch out for:

- ✓ Are the premises true
- ✓ Is the argument valid (without logical error)
- ✓ If inductive, how persuasive is it?

One problem we need to note regarding inductive arguments is levels of persuasiveness. Something that is convincing to one person might not be convincing to another. We need to be conscious of the various presuppositions each of us holds and how these affect the way we might interpret the evidence.

We must note also that different types of evidence are appropriate to the differing areas under investigation. Think of science. The evidence there involves observation from which an hypothesis, i.e. a suggested explanation, is formed. This is then tested by a series of experiments. If the expected results do not occur, a modified hypothesis is formulated taking into account the new observations, which have come from the experiments. However, if the expected results do occur, it doesn't mean that the hypothesis is actually proven, but rather that it hasn't been disproved. Obviously, the more times the hypothesis escapes disproof the more certain we can become of its truth.

In contrast, historical evidence involves assessing such things as documents, artefacts, and circumstantial evidence, as well as interpreting the evidence. The conclusion reached will be on the scale of different degrees of certainty:

Even the scientific method has become modest in its claims of proof. Scientific laws are increasingly seen as description of what we expect to happen rather than what must happen. Some would argue that nothing could be proved by experimental means since an infinite number of tests would be required. Cole gives the example of iron. Every time we heat it expands. But what about the iron we have not heated? How can we be certain that it will expand? To be certain we would have to heat every bit of iron and even then, we could never be certain that the next time we heat it will expand!

Now you should understand the difference between a deductive argument and an inductive argument, as well as the various connotation of the word proof. It is always important to comment on the different shades of meaning of the word proof in the exam especially in relationship to the topic on what a particular question is focused.

Deductive	**Inductive**
If the premises are true, then the conclusion must be too	If the premises are true, then the conclusion could still be false
The premises provide absolute support for the conclusion	The premises provide some, but not absolute support for the conclusion
The information contained in the conclusion is completely contained in the premises	

An argument is either deductive or inductive if the premises provide no support for the conclusion, then it is a **non-argument**.

Degree of Premises' Support for Conclusion		
Non-arguments	**Inductive arguments**	**Deductive arguments**
None	weak	absolute
	reasonable	
	strong	

Traditionally, all the arguments for the existence of God that were mentioned earlier, are considered to be deductive and therefore flawed. However, in more recent years, the a posteriori arguments have been presented as inductive and can therefore be assessed in terms of persuasiveness. The a priori argument remains deductive in its form.

Activity 3

Read the extract below from St. Thomas Aquinas in his Summa Theologica:

Extract:

In the world of sense we find there is an order of efficient causes. There is no case known (neither is it, indeed, possible) in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself; for so

it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. Now in efficient causes it is not possible to go on to infinity, because in all efficient causes following in order, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate is the cause of the ultimate cause, whether the intermediate cause be several, or only one. Now to take away the cause is to take away the effect. Therefore, if there be no first cause among efficient causes, there will be no ultimate, nor any intermediate cause. But if in efficient causes it is possible to go on to infinity, there will be no first efficient cause, neither will there be an ultimate effect, nor any intermediate efficient causes; all of which is plainly false. Therefore it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God. ***ST I.2.3***

Aquinas' argument can be summarised in the form of the following syllogism:

- Every effect has a cause
- There is no such thing as infinite regress
- Therefore, there must be a first cause (God)

a.) Write at least two paragraphs explaining what type of argument you consider this to be (deductive / inductive / a priori / a posteriori). **Make sure you give reasons and examples or short quotes from the extract as evidence for your claims.** Use a new page if you need to.

b.) Write an essay style response to the following question. Your answer should be a continuous piece of prose with a clear conclusion and should be about 500 words long.

'Aquinas' argument proves that God exists' Evaluate this view.

Hints: Consider whether you think this argument is valid / sound / a non-argument. Think about how persuasive you find Aquinas' argument if we treat it as inductive. Try and include recognition of another point of view and say why you reject it. **Make sure you give reasons for your judgements and examples or short quotes from the extract as evidence for your claims.** Use a new page if you need to.