

Philosophy and Ethics A Level

This A level course provides a great opportunity to help you build a wide range of skills, including improving your skills as a writer, speaker and thinker.

Even though you haven't been able to finish your Year 11 course this year, you can still practice and develop Philosophy and Ethics skills at home. You can read, watch and listen to interesting ideas and think about the opinions expressed. How far do they match your own views? What might someone say if they had a very different opinion? Keep up your writing skills by putting your ideas down on paper – try, if you can, to handwrite, just to keep up the practice of handwriting so that your writing isn't completely illegible by the time you come up to College.

READING.

Good quality writing is the best way of improving your own writing. As you read a good writer, you will gain a better understanding of the meanings of new words and the ways in which carefully chosen words and punctuation can add real emphasis to someone's argument. Different writers express themselves in different ways, and by reading them you will develop your own 'voice'. Reading also helps with more basic skills such as spelling, because if you see a word written down often enough, you will know when it 'looks right' when you write the same word yourself.

THINKING SKILLS.

These can be developed if you try to take a questioning attitude to the things you watch, hear and read. Do you agree with what's being said? If you watch a film where people have different attitudes towards something, which do you agree with most, or least, and why?

Here are some different activities and exercises for you try if you're learning from home. In Philosophy and Ethics, some of the topics can be quite sensitive, so if the activity involves an issue that might make you upset, choose a different one. These times are already difficult enough; nobody wants you to be upset when there's no teacher there to talk you through your feelings.

Reading activities

Here are some books and some online resources you could try, if you can get hold of them. *Don't worry if they're not available or you can't get on the computer for very long – you won't be at a disadvantage.*

Reading *anything* of good quality, even if it's a novel or a book about an entirely different topic, is always helpful for improving your skills, because you are practising your comprehension skills as well as practising understanding different ways in which writers express their ideas. Your own writing will improve, the more you read.

These are just *some* ideas – you don't have to choose any of these if you'd rather read something else, and there are so many good things to read in the world that this list could go on for ever but it's a start:

Good quality newspapers, The Guardian, The Times, The Telegraph and the Sunday papers, Observer, Sunday Times, Sunday Telegraph.

Look for any articles related to our subject, think of moral issues, poverty, natural disasters, articles about religious affairs.

The Brothers Karamazov – Fyodor Dostoevsky: a huge and important 'classic' book, which takes time and effort and is well worth both. Raises issues of God, evil, rivalry, loyalty ...

To Kill a Mockingbird – Harper Lee – another classic and should be on everyone's 'must read' list

The Puzzle of... - Peter Vardy – this series of non-fiction books is about issues in religion and philosophy, very readable and you don't have to be an expert to enjoy them. You can dip in and out of different chapters rather than having to start at the beginning and work through to the end.

Candide – Voltaire – another 'classic', this one takes a philosophical view of people's approaches to evil and natural disaster. It's a great book but the topics might be too difficult for you to cope with in the current circumstances, so try it if you want to but save it for more stable times if you don't.

Critical thinking skills

Here are a couple of activities to try, to start you off, and then a selection of other directions you might like to take:

Activity 1.

This is the first episode of a documentary about attitudes towards homosexuality.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMPl25oraVc>

This is the first episode of Stephen Fry's series 'Out There', where he explores attitudes to homosexuality in different parts of the world.

Questions to think about and/or write about – try to support your answers with reasoning:

1. Do you think there is a 'right' attitude and a 'wrong' attitude towards homosexuality? What is it that makes these attitudes right or wrong?

2. Some people might argue that different cultures have different ideas about morality, and that these different cultural beliefs should be respected even if we don't agree with them. Do you think we should always respect the beliefs and attitudes of cultures different from our own, or should we try to persuade them to adopt our own beliefs instead?
3. What do you think are the aims of this television series? Do you think they are good aims? Do you think this first episode is successful in achieving its aims?
4. What religious reasons do people sometimes give for opposing homosexual relationships? How would you support or oppose these views?

Activity 2

ETHICAL FALLACIES

Ethics is the philosophical study of good and bad/right and wrong. People often do not have logical reasons for what they believe about ethical issues. A fallacy, then, is a mistake, error, misconception. The following are a list of examples of how not to arrive at a belief.

- A belief based on the mistaken idea that a rule which is generally true is without exceptions. EG: ***'suicide is killing - killing is murder, I'm opposed to assisted suicide.'***
- A belief based on peer-pressure, herd mentality, xenophobia (fear of the strange). EG: ***most people oppose euthanasia, so it's probably wrong.'***
- A belief simply based on sympathy. EG: ***'It's horrible to use those poor apes for drug testing, so I'm against it.'***
- An argument based on the assumptions that there are fewer alternatives than there actually are. EG: ***'It's either euthanasia or a horrible, slow, painful death.'***
- An argument based on only the positive part of the story. EG: ***'Animal research has saved lots of lives, so I'm for it.'***

- Basing arguments on a misrepresentative sample. EG: *'my teachers agree with euthanasia; therefore, most adults probably think it is right.'*
- Basing arguments on exaggeration. EG: *'We owe all our medical advances to animal testing, so I think it's a good thing.'*
- The slippery slope argument. EG: *'If we legalise euthanasia, it will inevitably lead to killing all old people.'*
- An argument based on tradition. EG: *'We've done fine without gay marriage until now, we shouldn't change it.'*

Hopefully the examples above are making you think about the way that we often argue. Philosophy and Ethics will require you to argue in a much more sophisticated way than this!

Activity 3

Watch these clips about the Resurrection of Jesus.

<https://youtu.be/lwPA5iFEreQ>

<https://youtu.be/evoOaIQwITg>

1. Read the accounts in the gospels of the resurrection of Jesus (you could use biblegateway.com if you don't have a Bible at home)

Matthew 28:1 – 10

Mark 16: 1 – 8

Luke 24: 1 – 10

John 20: 1 – 18

2. Do you find these stories convincing? Why, or why not?

3. Do you think the stories contradict each other, or are they just told from different points of view, in your opinion? What might account for the differences and the similarities between the stories?

Now some books to help develop your thinking skills:

The Pig That Wants to be Eaten – Julian Baggini

50 Philosophy Ideas you must know -

Think – Simon Blackburn

The Blind Watchmaker, and/or The God Delusion – Richard Dawkins

These suggestions are only a few of the very many available, so don't worry if you can't get hold of these specific titles.

And some online resources:

The Philosophy Man - thephilosophyman.com

this website gives you lots of different ideas to think about. Some are for younger children, but you could try the 'brain squeezers'. These are good if you don't have too much time, or if you're finding it difficult to settle to anything more concentrated.

Philosophers Magazine – philosophersmag.com

Try the games on this website and read the commentaries that go with them. Lots to think about!

Peped – peped.org

This website has a lot of good resources that you might use once you start, you're a level course; you could dip in and start exploring some of the ideas you will meet next year.

Some things to watch and think about:

All kinds of films and series have philosophical and religious ideas in them, so follow your own interests! You could try these, or choose something else, but try and use them as a stimulus for thinking and writing, rather than just sitting in front of them:

The Good Place

The Matrix

Unorthodox

Twelve Angry Men

The following YouTube links are by a young man called Ben Wardle. He followed a different exam board to the one we do, but that does not matter as all the content is the same, it's just the style of assessment that is different. He is very entertaining, and he achieved an A* at A level!!

<https://youtu.be/R76GvsIQFNA>

<https://youtu.be/RCo8Ag9sqNg>

<https://youtu.be/AvtXtyut4Q>

<https://youtu.be/1jLqs3Vjjk>

TED talks – these are usually wonderful, with plenty to stimulate your questioning and reasoning skills.

Some favourites:

Elizabeth Loftus – how reliable is your memory?

Dan Gilbert – why we make bad decisions

Richard Dawkins – militant atheism

There are loads of talks on here, so use the search engine to find topics that interest you. Practise note-taking; write notes as you listen, just as you would if you were listening to a real-life lecture, and practise the skill of jotting down key points at speed. Ask yourself questions when you get to the end: what were the speaker's key messages? Do you agree with the speaker? What might someone who disagreed say, and what might their reasons be?

Research skills

There are all kinds of resources on line and in books to help you, if you want to start to learn a little more about some of the philosophers you will meet during your A Level course.

Use Wikipedia as a starting point and follow some of the links in the articles. You could do some research about:

Aristotle
Aquinas
Bentham
Mill
Hume

Practice using a range of sources to find out about a single person. When you have gathered together a range of information, try and synthesise it into a single piece of writing of your own.

The BBC has some great podcasts available:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01f0vzr>

(They are quite long and heavyweight, don't worry if this activity isn't for you)

Practice your note-making skills by pausing and writing a summary of what you've heard so far. Think about whether you agree with what the philosopher is saying.

Listen to whatever takes your interest. For the A level course specifically, you could concentrate on the ones listed below.

St Thomas Aquinas

Augustine

The Ontological Argument

Relativism

Utilitarianism

William James

Al-Ghazali

Duty

Good and Evil

Altruism

Evil

David Hume

Logical Positivism

Mill

There is a fair bit to keep you busy here, so good luck and do the best you can. If you want to gain a more detailed view of what we will be studying, then go to the Eduqas website, [www. Eduqas.co.uk](http://www.Eduqas.co.uk) and search for Religious Studies Advanced Level Specification.

Please do not hesitate to contact me, **Mrs. Long**, via email if you want to ask any questions or just share some ideas.

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PHILOSOPHY & ETHICS

Read the following information carefully and then write a full essay-style answer to the set question at the end of this document. We are looking for a minimum of 500 words. You may wish to research the work of Sallie McFague further, to enhance your answer.

Is God male?

The original languages of the Bible (Hebrew and Greek) consistently speak of God as 'Father'. They also refer to God by the masculine personal pronoun 'he'. Jesus, the Son of God, is a male, and the Holy Spirit of God is referred to as a 'he'. God is likened to a human father. He provides for his children, disciplines them and loves them. This does not mean however, that he *is* a male, any more than referring to 'Mother Earth' means that the earth *is* a female. God exists in a form that defies male and female categories. Jesus is spoken of as the 'Son of God' and the 'Son of Man'. During his life on earth, he was clearly a man. However, Christians believe that before he ever became Incarnate, (God made flesh) he was 'with God and was God' (John's gospel), and therefore was neither male nor female. The Bible consistently refers to the Holy Spirit in masculine terms, as a person with insight, knowledge and a will. This does not mean that the Holy Spirit is a male, however. As the name implies, he is a spirit.

God as Father

In the New Testament, God's fatherhood conveys two distinct ideas:

- (1) God as Creator of the world (John 1:3 implies Jesus was creator as well).
- (2) The relationship between God and Jesus. Jesus called God 'Father' and taught his disciples to do the same. The term conveys an approachable and personal deity.

The title 'Father', therefore, suggests two different characteristics of God: his lordship over creation and his loving kindness. There are also several passages in the Bible portraying God in female terms. In Isaiah 66: 13, God is described as a comforting mother. In Matthew 23:37 (Luke 13:34), Jesus uses a motherly illustration of himself, and in Luke 15:8—10, he compares God to a woman searching for a lost coin. (Look these Bible references up...www.biblestudytools.com). However, the Bible is clear that God is neither male nor female. Jesus himself said: '*God is spirit*' (John 4:24). He can identify with the needs of all people, male and female, because he created them in his own image: '*male and*

female he created them' (Genesis 1:27). As Paul wrote in his Epistle to the Galatians (3:28): *'there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus'*. Although the Bible is clear that God values both men and women equally, some theologians have expressed concern about its consistent use of male language about God.

Sallie McFague: God as Mother

Sallie McFague is an American theologian who writes from an **ecofeminist** perspective.

In her *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (1982) she maintains that all language about God is metaphorical. Names and titles ('father', 'king', etc.) are simply ways in which we think about God. They say very little about God's true nature. The metaphors used often turn into idols: we end up worshipping the metaphor instead of God. However, all metaphors miss the mark and many metaphors become outdated with time. McFague wants to provide new metaphors for understanding God in ways that are meaningful today. By using the metaphor of God as Mother, she is not saying that God is a Mother (or even female) but that the image of 'mother' highlights certain characteristics of God (such as love for the world). McFague develops a metaphor of the world as God's body. She goes on to develop three metaphors for God's relationship with the world. The metaphors correspond to three Christian doctrines, three ethical elements and three types of love:

Mother: corresponding to the traditional title, 'Father'; the doctrine of creation; the ethical element of justice; and *agape* love (selfless love), the type of love God has for the world.

Lover: corresponding to the traditional title 'Son'; the doctrine of salvation, the ethical element of healing; and *eros* (desire), the way in which God's love works in the world.

Friend: corresponding to the traditional title 'Spirit'; the doctrine of eschatology; the ethical element of companionship; and *philia* (companionship), the way in which humans should interact in the world.

According to McFague, masculine language conveying God's unilateral, sovereign rule has led to the abuse of the natural world and the domination of women by men. If God is called 'Mother', it follows, for McFague that the world is no longer ruled over by God, but is part of God's body or womb. Thus to harm nature is to harm God. This belief is known as **panentheism**. McFague argues that maternal images of God 'giving birth, nursing, comforting, and caring' highlight humanity's complete reliance on God. It is important, however, that God should be

seen in female, not feminine terms, because 'the first refers to gender while the second refers to qualities conventionally associated with women. Thus, the feminine side of God is taken to comprise the tender, nurturing, passive, healing aspects of Divine activity, whereas those activities in which God creates, redeems, establishes peace, administers justice, and so on, are called masculine'

She also warns against sentimentalising maternal imagery. We cannot suppose that mothers are 'naturally' loving, comforting or self-sacrificing. These qualities are in fact social constructions: society wants women to think that they are biologically programmed to be these things. Rather, the metaphor of God as mother focuses 'on the most basic things that females (as mothers) do: ... give birth, feed and protect the young, want the young to flourish'.

While some theologians have welcomed McFague's concept of God as mother, others have rejected it as unbiblical. Jesus asserted that God was 'Father'. If he was wrong on this fundamental point, how can we trust him on anything? Moreover, in specific relation to Jesus, the terms 'father' and 'mother' are not interchangeable terms, because clearly Jesus' mother was Mary.

Answer the following in an essay-style, (a continuous piece of prose with a clear conclusion).

A minimum of 500 words is expected.

'It is now, more valid, to refer to God as Mother.'
Evaluate this view.