

## A Level Engagement Work

Course Name: <b>Religion, Philosophy and Ethics</b>
Exam board and qualification: OCR
Text Book: Oxford A Level Religious Studies for OCR: Christianity, Philosophy and Ethics Paperback – 15 Jun. 2017 by Libby Ahluwalia (Author), Robert Bowie
If available online link to it: <a href="https://www.amazon.co.uk/Oxford-Level-Religious-Studies-OCR/dp/0198375336">https://www.amazon.co.uk/Oxford-Level-Religious-Studies-OCR/dp/0198375336</a>
Recommended Reading <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>50 Philosophy Ideas you really need to know</i> by Ben Dupré</li><li>• <i>Think</i> by Simon Blackburn</li><li>• <i>Animal Farm</i> or <i>1984</i> by George Orwell</li><li>• <i>The Blind Watchmaker</i>, and/or <i>The God Delusion</i> by Richard Dawkins</li></ul>
Relevant Websites: <a href="https://www.thephilosophyman.com/">https://www.thephilosophyman.com/</a> <a href="http://www.philosophersmag.com/">http://www.philosophersmag.com/</a>
<b>Netflix/Movies:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Good Place</li><li>• The Matrix</li><li>• Unorthodox</li><li>• Twelve Angry Men</li><li>• Messiah</li></ul> <b>Youtube channels/vids:</b> <p>‘Crash-course’ (e.g. their intro to philosophy - <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1A_CAKYt3GY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1A_CAKYt3GY</a>)</p> <p>Ryan Holiday’s ‘The Daily Stoic’ <a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCkUaT0T03TJvafYkfATM2Ag">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCkUaT0T03TJvafYkfATM2Ag</a></p> <p>Richard Dawkins &amp; Fr George Coyne interview: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=po0ZMfkSNxc">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=po0ZMfkSNxc</a></p> <b>TED Talks – <a href="http://www.ted.com">www.ted.com</a></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Elizabeth Loftus – ‘How reliable is your memory?’</li><li>• Dan Gilbert – ‘Why we make bad decisions’</li><li>• Richard Dawkins – ‘Militant atheism’</li><li>• Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie – ‘We should all be feminists’</li><li>• Damon Horowitz – ‘Philosophy in prison’</li></ul>

**Tasks:****Planning on starting A Level Religious Studies next year?**

Religious Studies is a great subject 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 Religious Studies 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 write by hand, just to keep up the practice so that your handwriting isn't completely illegible by the time you go back to school.

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 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 to try if you're learning from home. In Religious Studies, 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.

**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=IMPI25oraVc>

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

### What is ethics?

Ethics is the study of right and wrong or good and bad. It is an enormous philosophical subject ranging from an exercise in deciding how people should act towards each other to how they should act in certain situations. For some, ethics is about how people seek to justify their action and for others it is about how we use words such as right and wrong. But the vast majority of philosophers agree that almost every aspect of our lives not only informs our ethical decision making but is also subject to it.

The words 'Ethics' and 'Morality' are often used to mean the same thing; ethics is often called moral philosophy, and many authors use both words to mean the same thing. However, the two words should be used in different ways to refer to different things. The word 'moral' is often used to refer to what is good or bad/right or wrong in human character or actions. It has its origins in the work of the Roman philosopher Cicero, who used the word *moralis* (which he took from the Latin *mos* meaning custom) to correspond to the Greek *ethos* meaning habit or custom.

However, Ethics (from the Greek *ethos* meaning habit or custom) is used to describe a philosophical activity, this comes in different formats:

- Descriptive Ethics describes the ethical actions and values of a particular group of people or society. This does not attempt to answer ethical questions it just shows how others have addressed it.
- Normative Ethics is a term used to describe different ethical theories or moral codes of behaviour. Normative ethical theories attempt to provide rules by which people can make ethical decisions.
- Applied ethics is how we would most commonly use ethical ideas. This area of ethical inquiry applies normative ethical theories to situations such as medical advances, the environment, business etc.
- Meta-ethics is a term used to describe the discussion surrounding the meaning of the words good and bad, right and wrong. It does not attempt to give ethical rules, instead it tries to make sense of the language used in those ethical rules.

### Ethical Relativism

**Relativism** maintains that different people and different cultures at different times vary their value systems and ethical theory should reflect that.

Protagoras, Ancient Greek philosopher

*'Man is the measure of all things.'*

A moral judgement that takes circumstances and consequences into account is **relativist** because it is related to the situation and no fixed rules. It also means that



no action is good or bad in itself, only by weighing up the whole situation, can a judgement be made! Supporters of ethical relativism would argue that there is no absolute or universal morality.

### **Cultural relativism**

William Graham Sumner, anthropologist

*'The notion of right is in the folkways'*

Cultural relativism states that morality is a code handed from one generation to the next, it is simply 'socially approved habits'. According to this school of thought, moral codes are an expression of the culture and nothing else. Cultural relativism celebrates diversity and acknowledges the importance of time/eras.



### **Modern relativism**

J. L. Mackie, Ethical Scholar

*'There are no objective values'*

According to modern relativists, people live differently because they follow different moral codes according to their own values. There are no such things as moral absolutes.

### **Questions:**

1. Give 3 examples of things which happen in other cultures that we would find unacceptable in Britain
2. Give 3 examples of things that were acceptable once in our society in the past but are not now. Explain how and why this has changed.
3. Give 3 examples of things that were not acceptable in our society in the past but are now. Explain how and why this has changed,

**Absolutism** is a command that is true for all time, in all places and in all situations. Certain things are right or wrong from an objective point of view and cannot change according to culture.

Ethical absolutists believe:

- There are eternal moral values applicable everywhere
- Certain actions are *intrinsically* right or wrong which means they are right or wrong in themselves

This is a popular position for those who believe in a God who establishes a moral order in the universe. Proponents of absolutism are NOT necessarily always religious however.

- Values, goodness, rightness, wrongness etc don't exist as fabric of this world. This is because of the diverse ethical values which exist across different cultures and different times.
- Mackie believes that people live in different ways because they follow different codes.
- Mackie agrees with Plato that if moral rules existed they would have to be entities which were uniquely different from all other things. Mackie finds this idea unconvincing.

**Questions:**

1. Suggest 3 examples of moral rules/commands which you believe apply to all people everywhere. Explain your views.
2. Give 3 examples of absolute rules which exist in our world which you think are unjust. Explain your views.