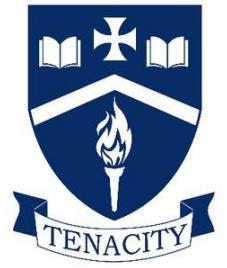




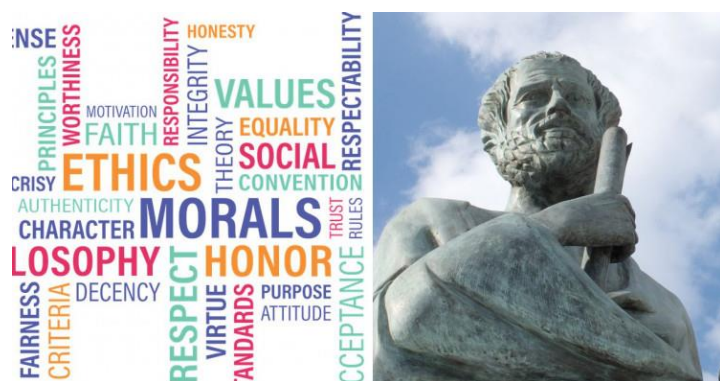
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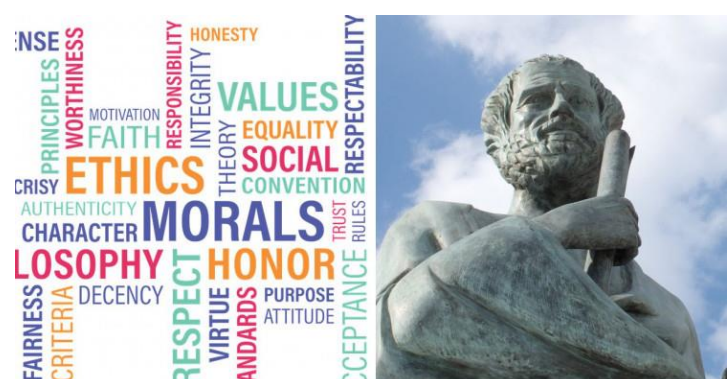
An Introduction to A-level Philosophy, Ethics and Christianity Transition tasks 2022

Mandatory Tasks

Task	Pages	Completed ✓
<i>Philosophy</i>		
1.	11	
2.	12	
3.	15	
<i>Ethics</i>		
1.	19	
2.	21	
3.	21	



1



Introduction

During A-level Religious studies we study three main components: Philosophy and Ethics which will be taught by Ms Elliot and the study of Buddhism taught by Miss Jenkins. If you have any questions about the different components, please contact:

Ms Elliot-Smith: cae@churchdownschool.com

Miss Jenkins: klj@churchdownschool.com

You will need:

- 3 x lever arch 'archive folders' (for Philosophy, Ethics and Buddhism) with dividers named with the units covered
- 3 x ring binder 'working folders' with a sufficient amount of lined paper inside it for note taking (This is the folder the students carry with them to and from school and has the notes from the unit currently being studied)
- At least two working ball point or biro pens
- Coloured highlighters
- General personal stationary as preferred – suggested items to include pencils, ruler etc.

Things to consider:

Read 'Sophie's World' by Jostein Gaardner as an overview of Philosophy; watch the news regularly to keep up-to-date with current ethical affairs.

The exam board we study for Religious Studies is AQA and our chosen religion is Christianity. [Please see link below]



2022

A set of notes and tasks to help you
with the move from GCSE to A Level
Religious Studies

An introduction to Philosophy of Religion, Ethics and Christianity

C. A. Elliot-Smith
(Philosophy & Ethics)
K. L. Jenkins
(Buddhism)
Churchdown School
Academy

An introduction to philosophical arguments for the existence of God

Introduction

Certain questions seem to be asked by almost all individuals e.g. 'Who am I?' 'What is the meaning and purpose of life?' 'Is there a life after death?' 'Is there a God?' etc. Such questions involve serious thinking of a reflective and critical nature. To embark on such a course is to 'do philosophy'. The word 'philosophy' means 'love of wisdom' and hopefully you will find that this discipline will sharpen your mind by dealing with a variety of concepts and problems. You should become more aware of what does and does not constitute a valid argument. By studying philosophy you will also develop the skill of following and evaluating arguments.

A further benefit of the discipline of philosophy is that it will provide you with an insight into the 'history of ideas' and the critical debates that have accompanied them. In one sense the study of philosophy is not a neutral discipline. It will force you to examine your own ideas and presuppositions. It may also raise questions where before you thought that there was none, and answer others that you thought were unanswerable. As the ancient Greek philosopher **Socrates** (d.399 BC) concluded: "**A life that is not examined is a life not worth living.**"

Does belief in God really matter?

People who believe in God or some forms of a divinity are said to be **theists**. Christianity, Judaism, Islam etc. are typical examples of what we would call theistic religions. Their believers assert faith in an all-powerful, creative, loving and eternal God who is guiding the journey of life. A person who denies all possibility of there being any God is an **atheist**. An **agnostic** is not convinced by an argument for or against the existence of God and is open to persuasion.

There are clearly a number of different attitudes towards the question of God's existence. Some of us will have no doubts whatsoever concerning the existence of a Supreme Being, whereas others will find such a notion as being either unverifiable (beyond all forms of proof) or totally illogical in a modern world. However, whatever our

conviction we have all given the question thought even if it has only been in a Religious Studies lesson.

It is interesting that **Blasé Paschal**, a 17th Century mathematician and religious philosopher once described the question of God's existence as the most important issue that any individual could face in his life and one which should receive the highest priority. Of course we may all personally disagree with Paschal but the point is that the problem of demonstrating the existence of God has (and still is) taken very seriously within philosophical and academic circles.

The philosophical concept of proof

If I claimed that my dog can do 'A' level maths you would rightly all regard my claim as absurd and dismiss it outright. Unless of course I was able to 'prove' beyond all reasonable doubt that my dog was indeed an able mathematician. I would imagine, though, that you would only accept as 'proof' a good, compelling and logical argument. Although my illustration is clearly an absurd one the principle applies to all quests to prove God's existence since what we are attempting to establish is that God's existence can be verified by logical argument. Arguments for the existence of God, then, should always be thought of in terms of proofs.

But what do we actually mean by the term 'proof'? Here we should note that within the context of philosophical arguments for the existence of God there are different types of proofs some of which are more convincing than others. For a simple definition of the word 'proof' we would all agree that a proof consists of statements which cannot be false e.g. $4+4=8$, London is the capital of England, all circles are round etc. Such a proof is therefore logically necessary i.e. it could not be anything else. A logically necessary proof, then, consists of a set of premises (statements) and a conclusion, which cannot be disputed e.g. mathematical statements as above, or statements such as 'the angles of all triangles add up to 180° ' etc.

Some proofs, however, are only proofs in so far that they lead to conclusions, which are only possible or probable. The evidence points towards a certain conclusion but it is still possible for there to be a different conclusion e.g.

- P1: The sun is shining today.
- P2: The sun shone yesterday.
- C: The sun will shine tomorrow.

Although it is possible that the sun will shine tomorrow there is still a possibility that it will not. Forecasts may prove inaccurate and so it would be a 'probable' conclusion, and not a logically necessary one. Proofs of this kind, then, often work from a specific example to a more general conclusion. However, the conclusion is not necessarily conclusive or true. These examples illustrate perfectly the difference between 'a posteriori'; and 'a priori' proofs, both of which are important in the context of proofs about the existence of God. Let us now examine them more closely.

The difference between 'a posteriori' and 'a priori' proofs

An '**a posteriori**' proof can be described as '**inductive**' proofs. By this we mean that they are proofs which are based on premises which can be argued or drawn from experience but which do not lead to a conclusion that is logically necessary i.e. cannot be false. The more evidence-stating factors we have, the greater the likelihood may be of the conclusion being correct. However, a posteriori proofs can be disproved. They do not conclusively prove it to be the case. We have all seen those films where the obvious suspect turns out to be innocent despite fingerprints at the crime scene, having a motive for murder etc.

An a posteriori argument, then, can be powerful, even probable, but not necessarily conclusive for there remains the remote possibility that the conclusion reached is false even though all the evidence suggests that the conclusion is sound. The following are two examples of 'a posteriori' and inductive proofs:

- P1: England has not won a major football tournament since 1966.
- P2: England will compete in the European Championships next summer.
- C: England will win their first trophy since 1966.

- P1: The best scientists are men.
P2: I am a man.
C: I am a good scientist.

On the other hand, 'a priori' proofs are **analytic** and **deductive** arguments. By this we mean that they are based on premises or statements that cannot be false.

The conclusion, then, must be logically necessary i.e. true. A priori proofs (unlike a posteriori proofs) are not drawn from experience.

With a priori proofs both the premises and the conclusion cannot be misinterpreted. If we agree with the premises in a deductive or a priori argument then we would have to accept the conclusion. To agree the premise and not the conclusion would be a contradiction. The conclusion follows on logically and is necessary. The following are two examples of 'a priori' and deductive proofs:

- P1: All teachers have a degree.
P2: Mr Smith is a teacher.
C: Mr Smith has a degree.

- P1: A bachelor is an unmarried man.
P2: James has not married.
C: James is a bachelor.

Proving God's existence

Arguments for the existence of God traditionally move from premises to conclusion using inductive (a posteriori) or deductive (a priori) reasoning. An example of a traditional deductive argument put forward for the existence of God is the **ontological argument** introduced by **St Anselm of Canterbury** in the 11th Century AD. Anselm's

argument is a challenging one and will be considered in detail in Year 13; however the deductive nature of its presentation can be outlined as follows:

- P1: God is 'that being than which nothing greater can be conceived'.
- P2: 'That being than which nothing greater can be conceived' possesses (has) all perfections i.e. greatness, power, love, knowledge etc.
- P3: To be perfect and not exist is a contradiction.
- C: God must therefore exist.

The ontological proof demands that if we accept the definition of God as 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived', we must accept that along with perfection, omniscience (all knowledge), omnipotence (all power) etc. God must also necessarily possess existence. If God does not possess existence i.e. exist, then how could He be 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived'? This is a toughie (no need to worry about it in Year 12) but illustrates perfectly one argument for the existence of God that uses 'a priori' and deductive reasoning.

Now compare the ontological (a priori) argument with the following a posteriori (inductive) argument:

- P1: All events require a cause.
- P2: The universe is an event.
- C: God is the cause of the universe.

This proof is the basis of the **cosmological argument**. It is a proof, which leads only to a 'probable' conclusion because there is no logically necessary, a priori reason why we should conclude that God is indeed the cause of the universe and not anything else. Neither are the premises logically necessary-there is no compelling reason to agree conclusively that 'all events require a cause'. It is only on the basis of our regular experience that we assert that all events have a cause, and experience can be deceptive, limited and open to many interpretations.

The design (or teleological) argument, the moral argument and the argument from religious experience for the existence of God are also inductive and 'a posteriori'.

The strengths and weaknesses of inductive ('a posteriori') and deductive ('a priori') proofs

Both types of reasoning have their strengths and weaknesses. **Inductive reasoning** (i.e. 'a posteriori' arguments) can be considered as **strong** for the following reasons:

- They rely on experience, which may be universal and testable.
- 'A posteriori' proofs are also flexible in that more than one possible conclusion can be reached.
- 'A posteriori' proofs do not demand that we accept the premises as fixed.

However, the **weakness** with inductive or 'a posteriori' reasoning is equally evident e.g.

- Alternative conclusions can be just as convincing. For instance the 'Big Bang' can be a plausible reason for the existence of our universe. We do not necessarily have to postulate a 'God'.
- 'A posteriori' arguments only convince if we accept the nature of the evidence. However, the evidence can be ambiguous or open to interpretation.
- For an 'a posteriori' argument to succeed there has to be overwhelming good reasons for accepting that its conclusion is the most likely.

The strength of **deductive reasoning** (i.e. 'a priori' arguments) can be set out as follows:

- 'A priori' proofs do not depend on variable or misunderstood experience.
- 'A priori' proofs accept that words and definitions have fixed and agreed meanings.
- There are no alternative conclusions with 'a priori' arguments.

However, the **weakness** with deductive reasoning lies in the fact that:

- It only works if we accept the premises as being analytically and necessarily true e.g. all circles are round, all angles of a triangle add up to 180° , all bachelors are men etc.
- However, is it necessarily true to say that God is 'that being than which nothing greater to be conceived'?
- Thus, when establishing the existence of God, the conclusions of 'a priori' arguments only lead to apparently logically necessary conclusions.

Why have scholars offered proofs for the existence of God?

Although we may well live in a society in which God is viewed as being dead or non-existent the indisputable fact is that man has always had a sense of something greater than himself and who is responsible for his very own existence. Both the philosopher and the believers from all the great religious faiths have sought an explanation for certain phenomena within the universe, which are not self-explanatory and require an external explanation. They may interpret evidence in terms of God rather than something else. Since the universe is ambiguous, it can be interpreted in religious or non-religious ways. The traditional arguments for the existence of God that we will be studying in Year 12 will seek to demonstrate that the most satisfactory way of interpreting the universe is best done by reference to God.

Problems with attempts to 'prove' the existence of God

Proofs, particularly in the context of arguments for the existence of God are problematic. As we have seen the evidence of our senses and experiences can be deceptive. There is also a difficulty in relying on the testimony of others. Their interpretation of the evidence may well be misguided. There is also a considerable degree of subjectivity about traditional arguments for the existence of God. The men that put them forward believed in God anyway. They did not come to believe in God through their rational and academic arguments. Furthermore, it could be argued that it is only inevitable that a person with a belief in God will see in a beautiful sunset or night sky the work of an all-powerful and all-knowing God. The rest of us will probably see no more than a beautiful sunset or night sky.

The weakness with these so-called proofs then is that they appeal to the believer and not necessarily to the atheist or agnostic.

Atheists may argue that since believers do not allow anything to count against their belief in God, then all proofs for His existence are flawed because the criticisms raised against them will not be allowed to carry any real weight. Atheists may also claim that their conclusions are just as likely as the conclusions of theists, and there is no way of verifying or falsifying either of them. In view of this **John Hick** argues that **eschatological verification** could be the solution to establishing whether the atheist's or the theist's claims are valid. This means that verification (i.e. proof) as to whether or not God exists will come at the end of time. Hick draws an analogy between two travellers who are heading down the same road. One of the travellers does not know where the road leads to, but the other traveller believes that it leads to the 'Celestial City'. He will be proven right or wrong when he gets to the end of the journey, but in the meantime he has to live by faith.

Of course such faith may be criticised as being anti-intellectual (**Richard Dawkins** is one such scientist who has no time for religious faith in a rational world) and the believer as having failed to weigh and balance evidence in a rational way. However, just as we draw conclusions on non-religious matters through testing the evidence, why can't it be said that the same skills are also used in matters of faith as well? The theist may well be misguided in concluding that there is a God but who is to say that his faith has not involved some process of testing, assessing and evaluating. People just don't conclude that there is a God without some form of rationalisation. If they did then their faith is no more than unsubstantiated opinion.

Conclusions

It can be argued that we do have ways in which we can prove God's existence although we have to be clear about what we mean by the term 'prove'. We could amass evidence that makes it look increasingly likely that God does exist (inductive or 'a posteriori' reasoning) or we could argue deductively ('a priori' reasoning) from certain premises that, if accepted, would make God's existence more certain. Clearly, proof of this type is more preferable but as we shall see most traditional arguments for the existence of God are of an inductive type and throughout this course you will need to establish whether this weakens the theistic claim that God does indeed exist.

TASK ONE

Getting used to the language

Using the notes above create a definition list of the following useful philosophical words.

Word or phrase	Meaning or explanation
Agnostic	
Analytic	
A posteriori	

A priori	
Atheist	
Deductive	
Inductive	
Logically necessary	
Proof	
Theist	

TASK TWO

In our philosophy course we will be looking at two **types** of philosophers:

Empiricists -believe that we gain knowledge is through using empirical evidence. Empirical evidence is evidence we experience using your five senses. The more evidence you have the stronger the proof.

Rationalists -believe that the knowledge we have is within us when we are born. It is unlocked by our experiences - we rationalise our experiences.

Investigating the scholars

<https://www.the-philosophy.com/famous-philosophers>

<https://thebestschools.org/magazine/major-philosopher-ideas/>

<https://www.invaluable.com/blog/famous-philosophers>

Or simply Google the individual names of the scholars.

Complete the table below. Not all boxes will be relevant to every scholar.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Nationality</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Belief about God</u>	<u>Ideas known for</u>
Richard Dawkins					
John Hick					
Blasé Pascal					
St Anselm of Canterbury					

Socrates					
Plato					
David Hume					
Immanuel Kant					
Thomas Aquinas					

William Paley					
Rene Descartes					
St. Augustine					

TASK THREE

The skills of philosophy are numerous. A philosopher needs to identify and analyse good methods of attaining reliable forms knowledge and sources of knowledge. They need to question and evaluate all they come across. Essentially philosophy will improve your critical thinking and problem solving skills. You can gain these skills through any subject but we are looking at and practising philosophy through Religious Studies. To help us learn these skills we will be looking at the following across the next two years:

- Arguments for and against the existence of God (hence our need to understand proofs from the beginning of this document);
- Religious experience such as miracles;
- The existence of Evil and Suffering;
- How we use language in relation to religion;
- Philosophy in relation to science, politics, psychology and sociology.

When we deal with religion there is one big character we have to address - *GOD*. As *God* means things to different people and people have different beliefs about his existence we have to establish a few key definitions from which we all can work. It does not matter what you believe about *God* to be a philosopher but you must acknowledge what you believe, how you acquired that belief and how does that belief affect the way in which you approach particular subjects. Here are the three key beliefs about *God*:

THEIST - someone who believes in the existence of *God* and it is possible to prove that. A theist does not have to belong to a particular religion they could simply believe in *God* as a higher force in the universe.

ATHEIST - someone who does not believe in the existence of *God* and says it is not possible to prove the existence of *God*.

AGNOSTIC - someone who believes that it is impossible to either prove or disprove the existence of *God*. An agnostic is not someone who is in two minds about the existence of *God*. Essentially they have looked at all the arguments and decided that nothing can be proved one way or the other.

In the space below explain your position on the concept of *God* and your reasons/evidence for supporting this view.

An Introduction to the Study of Ethics

In ethics we look at the ways in which society determines what is right and wrong, good and bad, who decides this and the processes and influences behind these decisions. We will identify key theories and methods used to unravel ethical dilemmas and then apply them to particular situations. Ethics is a universal topic but we are going to learn the skills and processes using the medium of Religious Studies. Below is a list of some of the theories and situations we are going to explore:

- Teleological Ethics
- Deontological Ethics
- Utilitarianism
- Situation Ethics
- Sexual Ethics
- Environmental Ethics
- Ethics of War
- Virtue Ethics
- Medical Ethics
- Religion and morality

To help you make the move between GCSE and A Level this document will look at the ways in which we make decisions and two particular ethical theories for you to practise.

Normative Ethics

Normative ethics is the branch of ethics which looks specifically at how we decide whether something is right or wrong, good or bad. Normative ethics is easily divided into two ways of deciding.

Deontological Decision Making – Sometimes we follow rules and principles and we consider something wrong if it breaks this rule or principle. E.g. I will never tell a lie; I will always keep my promises; I will never tell another person's secret; Killing someone is always wrong.

Teleological Decision Making – At other times we decide what the right or wrong thing to do is by looking at the possible outcomes or the individual situations. E.g. Is it wrong not to do my homework; Is it right for someone to take a human life

in self-defence; Should someone have an abortion because the pregnancy gets in the way of a holiday?

TASK ONE

Look at these different dilemmas. Work out what you would do in each situation, why you would do it and whether or not you have acted in a teleological way or deontological way.

On the Wilderness trail in the pioneering days in America many people lost their lives to the Indians. On one occasion a woman had a crying baby which threatened to give her party's hiding position away. Should she strangle the baby?

Your best friend has told you a secret that could prevent an innocent person going to prison. Do you tell the police?

You are a high court judge. In front of you is an innocent man but the jury have just found him guilty of murder. If you overturn the jury's verdict many people in the country will riot in protest. Do you send the innocent man to prison?

Teleological Ethical Theories

There are both strengths and weaknesses to teleological theories and we will identify them as we investigate. We shall start by looking at **Utilitarianism**.

Utilitarianism which literally translates as **usefulness** has its origins in the Greek philosophical movement **Hedonism**. Hedonists believed that the aim in life was to pursue pleasure and avoid pain. Hedonists believed an action was morally okay if pleasure was the outcome and pain was minimised.

Jeremy Bentham (18th century philanthropist and social reformer) is often referred to as the founding father of utilitarianism (in particular a form of it called Act Utilitarianism). He said that a decision should be based on the quantity of pleasure an action will provide and devised a formula to help people make their decision. This formula is known as the **Hedonic Calculus**.

The Hedonic Calculus has 7 main criteria:

1. Intensity—How intense will the pleasure be?
2. Duration—How long will the pleasure last?
3. Certainty—Is it certain to bring pleasure?
4. Fecundity—Will the pleasure be repeated?
5. Propinquity—Is the pleasure near to you?
6. Purity—Is it free from pain?
7. Extent—How many will experience the pleasure?

The quote that is often used to summarise Bentham's theory is 'The greatest happiness for the greatest number.'

TASK TWO

What would Jeremy Bentham have said should happen in the following situations? What do you think of his decisions?

Two men are drowning in a river. You see that one is your father and the other is a well-known scientist close to a solution for cancer. You can only save one; the one you can't save will drown. Who should be saved?

You are the Prime Minister. The armed forces have captured a prisoner of war who holds vital information which could bring about the end of the war that your country is involved in. Do you give permission for the prisoner to be tortured to get this information?

Rule Utilitarianism

John Stuart Mill (19th century radical M.P.) He agreed that people should pursue pleasure and avoid pain. However, he said that pleasure should be judged on its quality and not its quantity. He argued that if something brings pleasure to someone they should do it as long as it does not bring about harm to anyone else. This is known as The Harm Principle.

TASK THREE

Modern day uses of Utilitarianism.

The current British political system is based on utilitarian ethics. Laws should

be based around what brings about the greatest happiness for the greatest number. An example of this would be the referendum on BREXIT. In 2016 the British public were given the opportunity to leave or remain within the European Union. By a small majority, Britain voted to leave. This is an example of Act Utilitarianism in practise.

The NHS also uses Act Utilitarianism in its decision making. Look at the two examples below. Do you agree with what happened? Give your reasons. Explain what you think the strengths and weaknesses of utilitarianism are shown in these examples.

Jaymee Bowen



Jaymee had a rare type of blood cancer. At the age of 11, after having beaten it twice already, the oncology doctor said she had a 2.5% chance of beating it again.

The doctor said that to treat her would cost the NHS £75,000 and the money would be better spent on patients with a better chance of recovery. This is what the NHS did.

The NHS has access to a treatment for terminally ill breast cancer patients. In the UK 3000 women each year are diagnosed with Stage 4 breast cancer.



Whilst Herceptin does not cure it, it gives the patient on average extra two years of life with their families. The NHS have decided to give only 1000 patients this treatment per year as it would cost £17 million to treat 3000 women with it. The NHS claim that the money saved is better spent elsewhere.
