



A Level Religious Studies– Ancient Philosophical Influences



West Kirby
Grammar School

Learning about this topic is important because: Ancient philosophical influences provide the foundations for later Christian thought and philosophy of religion. Understanding Plato and Aristotle enables students to evaluate key ideas about reality, knowledge and human purpose.

This builds on GCSE studies of philosophy and religion. Concepts of God, morality and human nature. Critical thinking and argument analysis.

We will learn:

- Plato's Theory of Forms.
- The Form of the Good.
- The analogy of the cave.
- Aristotle's understanding of causation and purpose.
- The four causes.
- Prime Mover.
- Influence of Plato and Aristotle on Christianity.
- Strengths and criticisms of their ideas.

We will discuss

The comparison and evaluation of Plato's form of the Good and Aristotle's Prime Mover.
The comparison and evaluation of Plato's reliance on reason(rationalism) and Aristotle's use of the senses (empiricism) in their attempts to make sense of reality.

Some of the vocabulary that we will use includes:

Forms, Form of the Good, idealism, empiricism, four causes, Prime Mover, telos, essence.

We will develop/practise skills including:

AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding

- Demonstrate detailed knowledge and understanding of Plato and Aristotle.
- Explain key concepts and terminology accurately.
- Apply philosophical concepts to religious ideas.
- Select and organise relevant material to develop coherent lines of argument.

AO2 – Analysis and Evaluation

- Analyse and evaluate arguments and interpretations.
- Compare Platonic and Aristotelian ideas.
- Assess strengths, weaknesses and scholarly criticisms.
- Develop reasoned, evidence-based judgements and justified conclusions.
- Communicate balanced arguments clearly and logically.

You could learn more about this topic by:

OCR A Level Religious Studies (Wilkinson, Wilcockson & Campbell)
Oxford A Level Religious Studies for OCR (Ahluwalia & Bowie)
OCR AS Religious Studies (Taylor, Eyre & Knight)
Philosophy of Religion AS (Wilkinson & Campbell)
Plato's Republic book 7 514-521c
Stephen Law 'Philosophy Files' – What is real is an engaging introduction to the cave and the forms.
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato/>
<http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.8.vii.html>
<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/physics.2.ii.html>



A Level Religious Studies– Arguments based on observation.



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Learning about this topic is important because: Arguments based on observation attempt to demonstrate God's existence through evidence found in the natural world.

This builds on. Ancient philosophical influences. Reason and evidence. Concepts of causation and purpose.

We will learn:

- The Teleological argument/Aquinas' Fifth Way
- Paley's Design Argument.
- The Cosmological Argument and Aquinas' three ways
- Challenges from Hume.
- Darwin and evolution.
- Modern developments of the design argument.

We will discuss:

Whether a posteriori or a priori is the more persuasive style of argument. Whether or not teleological arguments can be defended against the challenge of 'chance'.

Whether cosmological arguments simply jump to the conclusion of a transcendent creator, without sufficient explanation. Whether or not there are logical fallacies in these arguments that cannot be overcome.

We will develop/practise skills including:

AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding

- Demonstrate detailed knowledge and understanding of design arguments and scholarship.
- Explain key concepts and terminology accurately.
- Apply philosophical concepts to arguments for God's existence.
- Select and organise relevant material to develop coherent lines of argument.

AO2 – Analysis and Evaluation

- Analyse and evaluate arguments and interpretations.
- Assess strengths, weaknesses and scholarly criticisms.
- Compare traditional and modern approaches.
- Develop reasoned, evidence-based judgements and justified conclusions.
- Communicate balanced arguments clearly and logically.

Some of the vocabulary that we will use includes:

Teleological argument, design, analogy, probability, evolution, anthropic principle.

You could learn more about this topic by reading:

OCR A Level Religious Studies (Wilkinson, Wilcockson & Campbell)
Oxford A Level Religious Studies for OCR (Ahluwalia & Bowie)
OCR AS & A2 Philosophy of Religion (M Taylor)

- Aquinas, Summa Theologica, I.2.3
- Paley, Natural Theology Chapters 1 and 2
- Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion Part II

<http://naturaltheology.us/state-of-the-argument/192.html>
<http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1002.htm>
<http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1002.htm>





A Level Religious Studies– Arguments from reason



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Learning about this topic is important because: Arguments based on reason explore whether God's existence can be demonstrated through logic and rational thought alone.

This builds on : Plato and Aristotle. Reason and deductive argument. Concepts of causation.

We will learn:

- Ontological Argument.
- Anselm's arguments.
- Descartes' version.
- Gaunilo's criticisms.
- Kant's objections.

We will discuss:

Whether a posteriori or a priori is the more persuasive style of argument. Whether or not existence can be treated as a predicate. Whether or not the ontological argument justifies belief. Whether or not there are logical fallacies in this argument that cannot be overcome.

We will develop/practise skills including:

AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding

- Demonstrate detailed knowledge and understanding of arguments based on reason.
- Explain key concepts and terminology accurately.
- Apply philosophical concepts to questions about God.
- Select and organise relevant material to develop coherent lines of argument.

AO2 – Analysis and Evaluation

- Analyse and evaluate arguments and interpretations.
- Assess strengths, weaknesses and scholarly criticisms.
- Compare cosmological and ontological arguments.
- Develop reasoned, evidence-based judgements and justified conclusions.
- Communicate balanced arguments clearly and logically.

Some of the vocabulary that we will use includes:

Cosmological argument, ontological argument, contingency, necessity, sufficient reason, deductive, a priori.

You could learn more about this topic by reading:

Anselm's argument in Proslogion chapter 2 and 3
<http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/anselm-proslogium.asp>
Gaunilo's objection and Anselm's reply
<http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/anselm-gaunilo.asp>
Gaunilo, In behalf of the fool
Kant, A critique of pure reason, Second Division III.IV
Psalm 14.1
Van Inwagen, P. 'Necessary Being: the Ontological Argument' in Stump, E and Murray, M. J. (ed) (1999) Philosophy of Religion: The Big Questions, I
Plantinga, A. (1978) God, Freedom and Evil, Grand Rapids, II.c





A Level Religious Studies–The Nature and Attributes of God



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Learning about this topic is important because: Understanding the nature and attributes of God is central to Philosophy of Religion and underpins debates about God's existence, the problem of evil and religious belief.

This builds on : Ancient philosophical influences. Arguments for God's existence. Christian beliefs about God.

We will learn:

- God's omnipotence.
- God's omniscience.
- God's omnibenevolence. (including Boethius, divine foreknowledge, eternity and free will)
- Eternity and everlastingness. (Anselm's four-dimensional approach)
- God's relationship with time.
- Boethius' understanding of eternity.
- Free will (including Boethius, Anselm and Swinburne)
- Strengths and weaknesses of different interpretations.

We will discuss:

• whether or not it is possible, or necessary, to resolve the apparent conflicts between divine attributes • whether Boethius, Anselm or Swinburne provides the most useful understanding of the relationship between divinity and time • whether or not any of these thinkers are successful in resolving the problems of divine knowledge, benevolence, justice, eternity and human free will • whether the attributes should be understood as subject to the limits of logical possibility or of divine self-limitation

We will develop/practise skills including:

AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding

- Demonstrate detailed knowledge and understanding of the nature and attributes of God and scholarship.
- Explain key concepts and use specialist terminology accurately.
- Apply philosophical concepts to questions concerning God's nature.
- Select and organise relevant material to develop coherent lines of argument.

AO2 – Analysis and Evaluation

- Analyse and evaluate arguments and interpretations.
- Compare classical and alternative understandings of God.
- Assess strengths, weaknesses and scholarly criticisms.
- Develop reasoned, evidence-based judgements and justified conclusions.
- Communicate balanced arguments clearly and logically.

Some of the vocabulary that we will use includes:

Omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence, eternity, everlastingness, immutable, transcendent, immanent.

You could learn more about this topic by reading:

Vardy, P The Puzzle of God contains a good chapter on omnipotence.
Swinburne, R The coherence of Theism Part II
Anselm, De Concordia
Matthew 19:23–26
Macquarrie, J. (1966) Principles of Christian Theology, SCM Press, Chapter 11
Boethius, Consolation of Philosophy Book V
<http://www.exclassics.com/consol/consol.pdf>



A Level Religious Studies– The Problem of Evil



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Learning about this topic is important because: The problem of evil challenges belief in an omnipotent, omnibenevolent God and lies at the heart of debates about the rationality of religious belief.

This builds on: Arguments for God's existence. Concepts of God's nature and attributes. Religious experience and philosophical reasoning.

We will learn:

- Logical and evidential evil
- The Inconsistent Triad.
- Moral evil and natural evil.
- Augustine's Theodicy.
- Irenaean Theodicy and John Hick's Soul-Making Theodicy.
- Challenges posed by suffering.
- Strengths and weaknesses of different responses.

We will discuss:

- whether or not Augustine's view of the origins of moral and natural evils is enough to spare God from blame for evils in the world
- whether or not the need to create a 'vale of soul-making' can justify the existence or extent of evils
- which of the logical or evidential aspects of the problem of evil pose the greater challenge to belief
- whether or not it is possible to successfully defend monotheism in the face of evil

Some of the vocabulary that we will use includes: Theodicy, moral evil, natural evil, omnipotent, omnibenevolent, omniscient, soul-making, privation, Process Theology.

We will develop/practise skills including:

AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding

- Demonstrate detailed knowledge and understanding of the problem of evil and scholarship.
- Explain key concepts and terminology accurately.
- Apply philosophical concepts to issues concerning suffering and God's nature.
- Select and organise relevant material to develop coherent lines of argument.

AO2 – Analysis and Evaluation

- Analyse and evaluate arguments and interpretations.
- Assess strengths, weaknesses and scholarly criticisms.
- Compare different theodicies and solutions.
- Develop reasoned, evidence-based judgements and justified conclusions.
- Communicate balanced arguments clearly and logically.

You could learn more about this topic by reading: OCR A Level Religious Studies (Wilkinson, Wilcockson & Campbell) Oxford A Level Religious Studies for OCR (Ahluwalia & Bowie)
Hick, J 'Evil and the God of Love' Part 4.
Swinburne, R 'Is there a God?'
Mackie, J 'The Miracle of Theism'
Augustine, The City of God Part II
Genesis 2:4–25, 3:1–24
Romans 5:12–13
Augustine, 'What is evil?' in Davies, B. (2000) Philosophy of Religion: a guide and anthology, Oxford University Press



A Level Religious Studies– Religious Experience



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Learning about this topic is important because: Religious experiences provide an important source of belief and raise questions about whether experiences can be evidence for God.

This builds on: Arguments for God's existence. Psychology and philosophy. Faith and reason.

We will learn:

- Mystical experiences.
- Conversion experiences.
- William James views and conclusions
- Corporate religious experiences.
- William James' characteristics.
- Different ways in which individual religious experiences can be understood.
- Challenges from Freud and physiological explanations.

We will discuss:

Whether personal testimony or witness is enough to support the validity of religious experiences. Whether or not corporate religious experiences might be considered more reliable or valid than individual experiences. Whether or not religious experience provides a basis for belief in God or a greater power.

We will develop/practise skills including:

AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding

- Demonstrate detailed knowledge and understanding of religious experience and scholarship.
- Explain key concepts and terminology accurately.
- Apply philosophical concepts to religious belief.
- Select and organise relevant material to develop coherent lines of argument.

AO2 – Analysis and Evaluation

- Analyse and evaluate arguments and interpretations.
- Assess strengths, weaknesses and scholarly criticisms.
- Develop reasoned, evidence-based judgements and justified conclusions.
- Communicate balanced arguments clearly and logically.

Some of the vocabulary that we will use includes:

Numinous, mystical, conversion, testimony, credulity, ineffable, transcendent.

You could learn more about this topic by reading:

OCR A Level Religious Studies (Wilkinson, Wilcockson & Campbell)
OCR A2 Religious Studies (Eyre, Knight & Rowe) Hay, D 'Religious Experience Today'
Otto, R The idea of the Holy chapter 4 & 5
James, W 'The Varieties of Religious Experience.' Lectures 9,10,16,17 and 20
Example of a religious experience: Davey Falcus <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbvPnotaZYw>
The God helmet
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_O_aGlm9QjU



A Level Religious Studies– Religious Language: Negative, analogical or symbolic



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Learning about this topic is important because: Religious language explores whether humans can speak meaningfully about God and how language shapes belief.

This builds on: Nature of God. Ancient philosophical influences. Religious experience.

We will learn:

- Via negativa.
- Aquinas-analogy of attribution and analogy of proportion.
- Symbol with reference to Paul Tillich's theory of symbols.
- Strengths and weaknesses of symbolic and analogical language.

We will discuss:

comparison of the usefulness of the above approaches to religious language • whether or not the apophatic way enables effective understanding of theological discussion • whether or not Aquinas' analogical approaches support effective expression of language about God • whether or not religious discourse is comprehensible if religious language is understood as symbolic

We will develop/practise skills including:

AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding

- Demonstrate detailed knowledge and understanding of approaches to religious language and scholarship.
- Explain key concepts and terminology accurately.
- Apply philosophical concepts to discussions about God.
- Select and organise relevant material to develop coherent lines of argument.

AO2 – Analysis and Evaluation

- Analyse and evaluate arguments and interpretations.
- Compare different approaches to religious language.
- Assess strengths, weaknesses and scholarly criticisms.
- Develop reasoned, evidence-based judgements and justified conclusions.
- Communicate balanced arguments clearly and logically.

Some of the vocabulary that we will use includes:

Via negativa, analogy, attribution, proportion, symbol, myth, participation, transcendence.

You could learn more about this topic by reading:

Tillich, P Dynamics of Faith part 3

Aquinas on analogy

<http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1013.htm#article10>

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/rel-lang/>

Aquinas, Summa Theologiae I.13

Ayer, A. J. (2001) Language, Truth and Logic, Dover Publications

Swinburne, R. (1997) 'God-talk is not evidently nonsense' in

Davies, B. (2000) Philosophy of Religion: a guide and anthology, Oxford University Press



A Level Religious Studies— Twentieth century perspectives and philosophical comparisons

Learning about this topic is important because: Twentieth-century perspectives raise important questions about meaning, verification and falsification, challenging the validity of religious belief.

This builds on: Religious language. Philosophy of language. Meta-ethics.

We will learn:

We will learn:

- Logical Positivism.
- Verification Principle.
- A.J. Ayer.
- Falsification Principle.
- Antony Flew.
- Hare's bliks.
- Basil Mitchell's response.
- Language games and Wittgenstein and Forms of Life
- Strengths and weaknesses of twentieth-century approaches.

We will discuss:

- whether or not any version of the verification principle successfully renders religious language as meaningless
- whether or not any participant in the falsification symposium presented a convincing approach to the understanding of religious language
 - a comparison of the ideas of Aquinas and Wittgenstein, including:
 - whether a cognitive approach (such as Aquinas's thinking on analogy) or a non-cognitive approach (such as the language games concept of Wittgenstein) present better ways of making sense of religious language - the influence of non-cognitive approaches on the interpretation of religious texts - how far Aquinas' analogical view of theological language remains valuable in philosophy of religion

Some of the vocabulary that we will use includes:

Verification, falsification, blik, language games, cognitive, non-cognitive, logical positivism.

We will develop/practise skills including:

AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding

- Demonstrate detailed knowledge and understanding of twentieth-century perspectives and scholarship.
- Explain key concepts and terminology accurately.
- Apply philosophical concepts to questions concerning meaning.
- Select and organise relevant material to develop coherent lines of argument.

AO2 – Analysis and Evaluation

- Analyse and evaluate arguments and interpretations.
- Compare verification, falsification and language games.
- Assess strengths, weaknesses and scholarly criticisms.
- Develop reasoned, evidence-based judgements and justified conclusions.
- Communicate balanced arguments clearly and logically.

You could learn more about this topic by reading:

OCR A2 Religious Studies (Eyre, Knight & Rowe)
Philosophy of Religion A2 (Wilkinson & Campbell)
Ayer, A J Language, Truth and Logic
Ayer A J 'God talk is evidently nonsense.' And Swinburne, R 'God talk is not evidently nonsense.' Both in Davies, B (2000)
Philosophy of Religion: a guide and anthology.
Wittgenstein, L Philosophical Investigations
<http://www.iep.utm.edu/rel-lang/>
Swinburne, R. (1993) The Coherence of Theism, Oxford University Press, Part I



A Level Religious Studies– Soul, mind and body.

Learning about this topic is important because: Debates about the soul, mind and body explore what it means to be human and underpin beliefs about life after death and personal identity.

This builds on. Human nature and religious beliefs. Plato and Aristotle. Scientific and philosophical approaches to personhood.

We will learn:

- Plato's dualism.
- Aristotle's understanding of the soul.
- Metaphysics of consciousness including Descartes and substance Dualism
- Materialism and physicalism.
- Dawkins and Richard Swinburne.
- Mind-brain identity theory.
- Challenges posed by science.
- Personal identity and survival after death.

We will discuss:

Materialist critiques of dualism, and dualist responses to materialism. Whether the concept of 'soul' is best understood metaphorically or as a reality. The idea that any discussion about the mind-body distinction is a category error

We will develop/practise skills including:

AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding

- Demonstrate detailed knowledge and understanding of different views of the soul.
- Explain key concepts and terminology accurately.
- Apply philosophical concepts to issues concerning human nature.
- Select and organise relevant material to develop coherent lines of argument.

AO2 – Analysis and Evaluation

- Analyse and evaluate arguments and interpretations.
- Compare dualist and materialist approaches.
- Assess strengths, weaknesses and scholarly criticisms.
- Develop reasoned, evidence-based judgements and justified conclusions.
- Communicate balanced arguments clearly and logically.

Some of the vocabulary that we will use includes:

Dualism, materialism, physicalism, monism, soul, mind, body, substance, identity.

You could learn more about this topic by:

OCR A Level Religious Studies (Wilkinson, Wilcockson & Campbell)

Oxford A Level Religious Studies for OCR (Ahluwalia & Bowie)

Descartes, The Meditations chapter 2 and chapter 6

Descartes, Principles of Philosophy 1.60-65

OCR A2 Religious Studies (Eyre, Knight & Rowe)

Blackmore, S (2010) Consciousness chapter 1 & 2

Ryle, G (1949) The concept of mind chapter 1.

<http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/descartes1641.pdf>

<http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/descartes1644part1.pdf>

https://www.edge.org/conversation/richard_dawkins-steven_pinker-is-science-killing-the-soul