**Religious Studies A Level**

Religious Studies does not require religious belief but an enquiring mind where critical thinking, questioning and reflection are key skills that support your learning. For example, do you think that questions, theories and situations need to be considered to attempt to reach a generally accepted morality which is meaningful and able to be applied to a diverse population in terms which are supportive of human rights, legally applicable with values that promote positive community relations, such as justice, safety and equality? Further, are we really free, where do our morals come from, is nature or nurture more important, do we need moral theories to help us make decisions?

Taking Religious Studies is the start of examining the idea of having purpose in life which is fundamental to living to the best of our ability. So, philosophical theories and ethical dilemmas demand a personal response as well as encourage tolerance of different viewpoints and a systematic approach to ideas and counter-arguments.

**What makes a good Philosopher?**

*Curiosity* – the very best students are the ones who take an interest in ideas, people and the world around them.

Analysis*–* they can spot strengths and weaknesses in the different theories and ethical dilemmas that we study.

Criticality *–* the very best Philosophers query the value of systems and can form their own viewpoint and critically evaluate it and the views of others.

**Course outline (each component is assessed by a two-hour examination):**

**Component 01- Philosophy of Religion:**

* Study of philosophical arguments about the existence of God: Religious Experience; Ontological; non-existence of God.
* Problems in philosophy: evil and suffering, life after death; reincarnation; immortality of the soul.

**Component 02- Religion and Ethics:**

* Critiques of the relationship between morality and religion; deontology; natural law, virtue ethics.
* Meaning of ethical language; Justice; law and punishment.
* Debates surrounding the significant idea of conscience.
* Sexual ethics and the influence on ethical thought of developments in religious beliefs.

**Component 03: Developments in religious thought**

Students select one religion and study systematically:

* Religious beliefs, values and teachings, their interconnections and how they vary historically and in the contemporary world.
* Sources of religious wisdom and authority.
* Practices which shape and express religious identity, and how these vary within a tradition.
* Significant social and historical developments in theology and religious thought.
* Key themes related to the relationship between religion and society.

**Course tasks:**

1. Research and produce fact files for the following philosophers including a summary of their theories: Socrates, Plato and Aquinas.
2. Watch the film, ‘The Matrix’ (15) and evaluate the meaning of the film and its religious content by answering the following questions:

* What is the matrix?
* What characters represent the Christian Trinity (God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit)-how and why?
* Who is Mr Smith?
* Would you choose to take the red or blue pill?
* Which character do you most relate to and why?

1. Explore the relationship between religion and morality and assess the strengths and weaknesses of some contributions.

* Watch <http://www.amazon.co.uk/Louis-Theroux-Strange-Dangerous-DVD/dp/B001ARYYQ8/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&s=dvd&qid=1257931226&sr=1-2>
* The episode ‘The most hated family in America’ offers a good foundation for critiquing the link between religion and morality.

1. Can morality be independent of religion?

* Watch ‘The Root of all Evil?’ and assess the argument offered by Dawkins. <http://www.amazon.co.uk/Richard-Dawkins-Collection-Charles-Enemies/dp/B0016OMFLQ/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=dvd&qid=1257932814&sr=1->
* Do you think that scientific explanation alone is enough to address the mysteries and miracles of our world?

1. Research and produce fact files for the following ethicists including a summary of their theories: Bentham, Fletcher and Kant.
2. An ethical dilemma- are you an altruist or not and can you defend your position? <https://socyberty.com/can-altruism-save-humans-becoming-extinct/>

* Make a mind map of possible responses include pros and cons for each of these with examples and determine which you would follow and explain why. Placing your response into a cultural context such as the current Coronavirus pandemic would make your positioning more credible.

**Examples of resources:**

* ‘Advanced Religious Studies’ (second edition) by Sarah K Tyler and Gordon Reid.
* The Bible.
* Aquinas’ Five Ways: <http://www.aquinasonline.com>
* ‘Designer or no Designer’ Clip: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/designer-or-no-designer/3808.html>
* <https://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/as-and-a-level/religious-studies-h173-h573-from-2016>