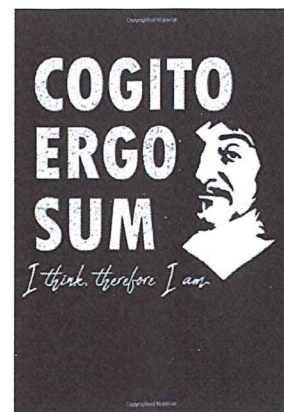
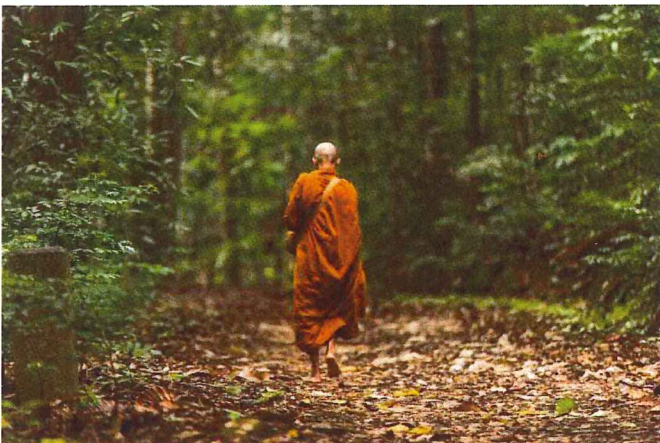
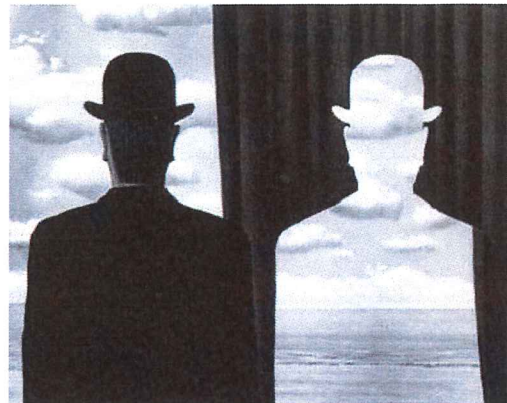


Belief, Philosophy and Ethics

OCR Religious Studies

Mr Azzopardi and Miss Khalila



2 The specification overview

2a. OCR's A Level in Religious Studies (H573)

Learners take components 01 and 02 and one from 03 to 07, to be awarded the OCR A Level in Religious Studies.

Content Overview	Assessment Overview	
<p>Philosophy of religion Learners will study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ancient philosophical influences • the nature of the soul, mind and body • arguments about the existence or non-existence of God • the nature and impact of religious experience • the challenge for religious belief of the problem of evil • ideas about the nature of God • issues in religious language. 	<p>Philosophy of religion (01) 120 marks 2 hour written paper</p>	<p>33.3% of total A Level</p>
<p>Religion and ethics Learners will study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • normative ethical theories • the application of ethical theory to two contemporary issues of importance • ethical language and thought • debates surrounding the significant idea of conscience • sexual ethics and the influence on ethical thought of developments in religious beliefs. 	<p>Religion and ethics (02) 120 marks 2 hour written paper</p>	<p>33.3% of total A Level</p>
<p>Developments in religious thought Learners will study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 <p>in the context of one religion chosen from Christianity (03), Islam (04), Judaism (05), Buddhism (06) or Hinduism (07).</p>	<p>Developments in religious thought (03–07) 120 marks 2 hour written paper</p>	<p>33.3% of total A Level</p>

2

Course Expectations

Organisation

You will need...

- A4 file, paper, stationary. Your folder will be checked routinely.
- Well organised notes — file for each teacher? Sub-divide into different areas of study? Essential for revision.
- Equipment and folder needed every lesson.
- Use study periods wisely.

Getting the most from lessons

- Attendance and punctuality are vital as this could affect exam entry. If you miss a lesson, it is your responsibility to catch up on missed work.
- Note taking is a key aspect of the course. Do not expect to be spoon-fed the answers — a big difference from GCSE. Good note taking requires active listening— really engaging in the lesson, asking questions etc.
- Ask for help if you are unsure of anything!

Reading

- This course requires lots of reading — the library will become your friend and prepares you for undergraduate study.
- You must read all the texts provided in class as these are core texts and you will not pass the course if you do not read them — you cannot 'blag' it.
- Try to read from other books or magazines as examiners will always give marks for evidence of up to date reading.

Improving subject knowledge

- Ethics is constantly in the media and your arguments will be much stronger if you can use recent examples (and get more marks in the exam!).
- Read a good quality newspaper (not The Sun) and watch the news for examples of ethical/moral issues. Try the internet news pages or the BBC Ethics website.
- Keep a scrapbook for your findings as this will help considerably with revision and essay writing. Cut out or write notes on key moral and ethical debates in the news.

Philosophy of Religion

Philosophy means 'love of wisdom'. It is about how to think and how to find the truth. Philosophy involves the study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality and existence.

In year 12 we study the Ancient Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle. We then look at arguments for and against the existence of God. This involves the study of many philosophers including Kant, Descartes, Dawkins and Aquinas. We then go on to discuss issues related to ideas about soul, mind and body, including:

- 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 begin by looking at the Ancient Greek influences on philosophy. To be prepared to start this you need to be able to distinguish between the two main approaches to knowledge:

Rationalism — Rationalist philosophers believe that all knowledge can be understood through a process of reasoning, without any external sources.

Empiricism — Empiricists believe that all knowledge comes from experience.

Recommended Reading

Edward Craig, *Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press)

Thomas Nagel, *What Does it All Mean?* (OUP).

Simon Blackburn, *Think* (OUP).

Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (OUP).

Journals

- [Think](http://www.royalinstitutephilosophy.org/think/index.php) (www.royalinstitutephilosophy.org/think/index.php)
- [The Philosopher 's Magazine](http://www.philosophersnet.com) (www.philosophersnet.com)
- [Philosophy Now](http://www.philosophynow.org) (www.philosophynow.org)
- [Dialogue](http://www.dialogue.org.uk) (www.dialogue.org.uk): for Philosophy of Religion and Ethics
- [Philosophy Compass](http://philosophy-compass.com) (<http://philosophy-compass.com>): more in-depth survey articles

Buddhism

Buddhism is an ancient religion but also one with teachings that seem particularly relevant to the modern world. Beginning 2,500 years ago in South Asia it has arrived in the West relatively recently. However, the Buddha's ideas about meditation, mindfulness and the nature of human beings are becoming very influential in Western countries in fields such as therapy and philosophy.

In year 12 we study the life and teachings of the historical Buddha, a man born as Siddhartha Gautama into a wealthy family in what is now Nepal. We examine the importance of the Buddha to his followers and look critically at his teachings about suffering and how it can be overcome. We also examine Buddhist teachings about life after death and the practice of meditation. The aim of the course is both to understand the beliefs held by different kinds of Buddhists and to critically evaluate these beliefs.

Compulsory Tasks:

1. **Read the Buddha's life story and write a summary. It should be a paragraph on each of the following:**
 - The Buddha's birth and his early life
 - The Four Sights
 - The Buddha's renunciation
 - Practising meditation with two teachers
 - Practising asceticism
 - The Buddha's enlightenment
 - The Buddha's death

Information on the Buddha's life can be found in the books below. The following resource may also be useful:

<http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/buddhism/lifebuddha/index.htm>

2. **Research the Buddha's most famous teaching: the four Noble Truths. Write a paragraph explaining each truth.**

Information on the four Noble Truths can be found in the books below. The following resource may also be useful:

<http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/buddhism/bs-s02.htm>

Recommended Reading

Reading beyond class handouts and textbooks is essential to success at A level.

So you should aim to read **AT LEAST** one of the following books:

1. *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction* by Damien Keown ISBN 0199663831
2. *Buddhism - An Introduction: Teach Yourself* by Clive Erricker ISBN 1444103490
3. *The Foundations of Buddhism* by Rupert Gethin ISBN 0192892231

Deadline: 1st lesson in September

Religious Ethics

Ethics is the part of philosophy that deals with good and evil. Ethics tries to answer questions like:

- What actions are good? What actions are evil?
- How can we tell the difference?
- Are good and evil the same for everyone?
- How do our actions affect others?

To be prepared for the study of ethics it is important to be able to distinguish between:

Deontological ethics — This is the branch of ethics concerned with actions. Here we should follow independent moral rules or duties. When we follow our duty, we are behaving morally. When we fail to follow our duty, we are behaving immorally.

Absolutist ethics — Some people think there are such universal rules that apply to everyone. This sort of thinking is called moral absolutism.

Teleological ethics — This is the branch of ethics concerned with consequences. Consequentialism teaches that people should do whatever produces the greatest amount of good consequences.

Relativist ethics — If you look at different cultures or different periods in history you'll find that they have different moral rules. So what is right or wrong depends on the situation.

Compulsory Tasks:

1. **Research the FOUR main categories of ethical theory and produce a summary of each.** You should include particular philosophers or ethical theories, and link these to examples of ethical dilemmas.
2. **Read and summarise AT LEAST ONE** news article on each on the following areas of Applied Ethics:
 - a. Euthanasia
 - b. Business EthicsYou should include the main ethical issue(s) raised in the article, and explain the arguments FOR and AGAINST the issue(s) mentioned.
3. **Read and annotate the Utilitarianism workbook provided. This is a summary of all of the main components of Utilitarianism and needs to be understood in preparation for the course.**

Deadline: 1st lesson in September

Utilitarianism

ACT UTILITARIANISM

Jeremy Bentham defended the 'principle of utility' or 'greatest happiness principle', 'that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question'. Or again, 'that principle which states the greatest happiness of all those whose interest is in question, as being the right and proper... end of human action'. (*Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Ch. 1 §2)

If we simplify this a little, we can say that act utilitarianism claims that an action is right if it leads to the greatest happiness of all those it affects, i.e. if it maximizes happiness. Otherwise, the action is wrong. The greatest happiness should be the goal of our actions, what we hope to bring about. Our actions are judged not 'in themselves', e.g. by what type of action they are (a lie, helping someone, etc.), but in terms of what consequences they have.

'Greatest happiness' is comparative (great, greater, greatest). If an action leads to the greatest happiness of those it affects, no other action taken at that time could have led to greater happiness. So an action is right only if, out of all the actions you could have done, this action leads to more happiness than any other. Just causing some happiness, or more happiness than unhappiness, isn't enough for an act to be morally right.

Act utilitarianism seems to have the advantage of providing a clear and simple way of making decisions – consider the consequences of the different actions you could perform and choose that action that brings about the greatest happiness. It makes complicated decisions easy – the only thing that matters is happiness (and surely everyone wants happiness).

Objections

But is the guidance offered helpful? How can we know or work out the consequences of an action, to discover whether it maximizes happiness or not? Bentham does not say that an action is right if it actually maximizes happiness. He says it is right according to 'the tendency which it appears to have' to maximize happiness. We don't need to be able to work out the consequences precisely. An action is right if we can reasonably expect that it will maximize happiness.

This still means we must be able to work things out roughly. John Stuart Mill, who defended a different version of utilitarianism, thought this was still too demanding. Happiness is 'much too complex and indefinite' a standard to apply directly to actions. But we don't need to try, he claimed, because over time, people have automatically, through trial and error, worked out which actions tend to produce happiness. This is what our inherited moral rules actually are: 'tell the truth', 'don't steal', and 'keep your promises' are embodiments of the wisdom of humanity that lying, theft, and false promising tend to lead to unhappiness. Mill called these moral rules 'secondary principles'. It is only in cases of conflict between secondary principles (e.g. if by telling

the truth you break your promise) that we need to apply the greatest happiness principle directly to an action.

A second criticism of act utilitarianism is that no type of action is ruled out as immoral. If torturing a child produces the greatest happiness, then it is right to torture a child. Suppose a group of child abusers only find and torture abandoned children. Only the child suffers pain (no one else knows about their activities). But they derive a great deal of happiness. So more happiness is produced by torturing the child than not, so it is morally right. This is clearly the wrong answer.

Act utilitarians can reply that it is very probable that someone will find out, and then many people will be unhappy. Because we should do what is likely to produce the greatest happiness, we shouldn't torture children. However, the theory still implies that if it was very unlikely anyone would find, then it would be right to torture children. But other people finding out isn't what makes torturing children wrong.

Integrity and demandingness

Act utilitarianism says that my happiness doesn't count any more than anyone else's when I'm considering what to do. Obviously, I am affected more often and more deeply by my actions than other people. But that's it. My actions is just a means of generating the greatest overall happiness.

So what if my conscience and moral integrity tell me not to do something that act utilitarianism says it is right to do? Act utilitarianism says I am supposed to calculate how unhappy it would be make me to perform the action, and see if that changes what I should do! If it doesn't, I should do the action anyway. This doesn't 'respect' the importance of people's integrity.

Second, act utilitarianism is too demanding. For example, every time I buy a CD, I could have given the money to charity; and surely that would create more happiness, since other people need food more than I need music. But because people will always need food, it will never be right for me to buy myself music. It will never be right to do something just for myself if I have more than the bare minimum.

RULE UTILITARIANISM

Rule utilitarianism claims that an action is right if, and only if, it complies with those rules which, if everybody followed them, would lead to the greatest happiness (compared to any other set of rules). (By contrast, Mill's secondary principles are rules of thumb, i.e. not strict rules that we must follow, but helpful guidance in our thoughts about what to do.)

Rule utilitarianism has some advantages over act utilitarianism. First, the rule forbidding torture of children will clearly cause more happiness if everyone followed it than the rule allowing torture of children. So it is wrong to torture children. Second, we don't have to work out the consequences of each act in turn to see if it is right. We need to work out which rules create the greatest happiness, but we only need to do this once, and we can do it together.

Third, the rule that we should usually allow people to act on integrity is a rule that will promote more happiness than any other. Finally, morality is not so demanding: I am only

required to act in a way that, if everyone acted like that, would promote the greatest happiness. In the case of charity, I only need to give as much to charity as would be a 'fair share' of the amount needed to really help other people. In all these ways, it looks like rule utilitarianism provides better guidance for making moral decisions.

However, act utilitarians object that rule utilitarianism amounts to 'rule-fetishism'. The point of the rules is to bring about the greatest happiness. If we only give as much to charity as we would need to if everyone gave to charity, then many people will not be helped, because not everyone will give what they should to charity. Surely, knowing this, I ought to give much more to charity; spending the money on myself would not be right. Or again, if I know that, e.g. lying in a particular situation will produce more happiness than telling the truth, it seems pointless to tell the truth, causing unhappiness. The whole point of the rule was to bring about happiness, so there should be an exception to the rule in this case. But then whenever a particular action causes more happiness by breaking the rule than by following it, we should do that action. And then we are back with act utilitarianism, weighing up the consequences of each action in turn.

Rule utilitarians respond, first, that only rule utilitarianism can provide real guidance for making moral decisions; and second, that deciding according act utilitarianism will break down our trust that people behave morally. So following a rule even when in the particular case it will cause less happiness than breaking the rule, is still justified, because if people kept breaking the rules, that would cause less happiness in the long run.

VARIATIONS ON 'HAPPINESS'

Hedonism

If we are to bring about happiness, we should consider what happiness is. Bentham and Mill were 'hedonists', claiming that happiness is pleasure and the absence of pain, and that this is all that matters. Bentham argued that we can measure pleasures and pains and add them up on a single scale by a process he called the 'felicific calculus'. If a pleasure is more intense, will last longer, is more certain to occur, will happen sooner rather than later, or will produce in turn many other pleasures and few pains, it counts for more. In thinking what to do, you also need to take into account how many people will be affected (the more you affect positively, and the fewer you affect negatively, the better). The total amount of happiness produced is the sum total of everyone's pleasures produced minus the sum total of everyone's pains.

Mill rejected Bentham's view that pleasures and pains are all equally important. Some types of pleasure are 'higher' than others, more valuable, more important to human happiness. But which ones? Mill thought there was an objective test: if almost everyone who knows what they are talking about compares two pleasures and agrees that the first is 'more desirable and valuable' than the second, then the first is a higher pleasure.

But how can we tell if a pleasure is more valuable (quality) than another, rather than just more pleasurable (quantity)? To tell if a pleasure is more valuable, people have to prefer it even if having that pleasure brings more pain with it. For example, the pleasure of being in love carries the pain of longing and the possible pain of breaking up. But people still prefer being in love to, say, eating delicious food. Happiness is not contentment.

Mill argues that, as long as our physical needs are met, people will prefer the pleasures of thought, feeling, and imagination to pleasures of the body and the senses, even though

our 'higher' capacities also mean we can experience terrible pain, boredom, dissatisfaction.

Pleasure and preferences

Preference utilitarianism claims we should maximize not pleasure, but the satisfaction of people's preferences. Two reasons favour this theory. First, it is easier to know whether someone's preference has been satisfied than how much pleasure someone experiences. So it provides better guidance. Second, it can be right to satisfy someone's preferences even when they don't know this has happened, and so don't derive any pleasure from it. For example, I can want you to look after my ant farm when I die. You should still look after my ants, rather than kill them, even though I cannot gain any pleasure for this.

Objections

But is happiness the right standard for morality at all? Utilitarianism weighs the unhappiness of one person against the happiness of another, whether this is in deciding which action to do or which rule to adopt. Philosophers object that it isn't concerned with people as individuals, but as 'receptacles' for happiness, which fails to show them proper respect. Furthermore, the distribution of happiness – who gets happy by how much – is irrelevant, which fails to respect justice.

Second, Kant argued that happiness (or satisfying people's preferences) is not always morally good. For example, the happiness child abusers get from hurting children is morally bad. The fact that the abusers are made happy by what they do doesn't make their action better at all, but worse. So there must be some other standard than happiness for what is morally good.

Third, is happiness the only thing that matters? Many philosophers argue that there are other values (freedom, justice...). Even if pursuing these values gives us happiness, it is not the happiness the value brings which is important, but the value itself.