

PHILOSOPHY

Exam board: AQA

Assessment methods: 100% exam

Length of exams 2 x 3 hour exams

Breakdown of units

Philosophy is often defined as the study of concepts (for example, Beauty, Time, Goodness, Proof, Mind, Gender, and Race). Philosophy attempts to untangle and define these complex concepts, and so enable us to resolve the disagreements produced by them. The Philosophy A-level focuses on four main concepts:

1. Knowledge
 - What is the definition of Knowledge? Is there a difference between knowledge and true belief?
 - Can we gain knowledge of the real world through the senses? We usually assume that there is a real world, and our senses put us in some kind of direct contact with it. But there are some questions that need to be asked here. What does it mean to call an object real? Do the things we perceive fulfil this criteria? How can we explain cases of illusion, such as when objects appear in ways that do not reflect how they really are?
 - Whilst the senses are often seen as the source of knowledge, many thinkers have thought there to be a different source of knowledge. Some truths may be innate, they argue, so that we are born knowing them. Or some truths may be discoverable through a kind of "intuition", which enables us to grasp truths unavailable to the senses.
2. Morality
 - What does it mean to call something right, wrong, good, or bad? Are these objective statements, describing real features of the world, or are these just expressions of our feelings or opinions? If they are just expressions of our feelings, does this mean we cannot morally condemn those who act in morally abhorrent ways?
 - How do we decide what is good or bad? Are any acts wrong in all situations? Should we be concerned only with the effects of our actions, or do other features such as our intentions matter?
 - What does the above tell us about specific ethical issues? Such as stealing, simulated killing (within computer games, plays, films etc.), eating animals, and telling lies.
3. God
 - Is the concept of God one that makes sense? Could God create a stone so heavy he cannot lift? If God is all powerful, can he commit evil actions?
 - Religious Language. What do claims like "God exists" mean? Are they, as we tend to assume, statements asserting the presence of some kind of entity (similar to scientific statements such as "black holes exist"). Or are they better understood as performing some other task, such as expressing feelings or making moral judgements?
 - Can the existence of god be proved or disproved by argument? Such as the design argument, cosmological argument, Ontological argument, or problem of evil.
4. Mind
 - What is the mind? What are mental states, such as thoughts, beliefs, intentions, and pains?
 - Are the mind/mental states non-physical? For example, perhaps the mind is some kind of non-physical "soul", connected to our body in some mystical way.
 - Are the mind/mental states physical? For example, perhaps the mind is just an old fashioned name for the brain. Would it be possible to create a machine that had a mind?

Philosophers Studied

In the course of study students will examine the work of ancient Philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas, philosophers from the modern period such as Kant, Descartes, and Hume, all the way up to contemporary Philosophers such as Frank Jackson, Anita Avramides, and Linda Zagzebski.



Overlap with other subjects

Philosophy trains the ability to analyse or argue for a certain position and so overlaps with other subjects based on these skills such as Government and Politics, Sociology, English Literature, Psychology, Film Studies and History. The course also relates, via its subject content, to the sciences. Much of the course exists on the crossover between Philosophy and science and philosophy of mind is, currently, an area in which neuroscientists, psychologists and philosophers all work. The Russell Group describe Philosophy A-level as providing “suitable preparation for entry to university in general”, and so it is a subject that can complement a range of different subject profiles and university applications.

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