

Pre-Post 16 tasks - Religion, Philosophy and Ethics

Welcome to Religion, Philosophy and Ethics at A Level! Here are some activities to get you started and get you thinking. **Please complete at least one of the following tasks to the best of your ability.** Enjoy!



Activity 1

Ethical scenario: I'm on school lunch duty and I see and hear a girl saying nasty things to another girl while they're eating their shepherd's pie.

Consider:

1. Why might it be deemed OK, and my duty, to tell her off for being unkind?
2. Why might it *not* be OK for me to tell her off for eating meat (imagine I am a vegetarian)?

Key questions:

- Which, if any, of our beliefs are 'just a matter of personal preference' and which, if any, refer to some kind of absolute fact? These notes may help you...
- Should we leave others to their 'personal preference' when it comes to religion, or are some religious beliefs right and others just wrong in an absolute sense? For example, it is ok for some religious people to condemn homosexuality because it is their 'personal preference'? Or is it just plain wrong for them to think this?
- At what point, if any, does one culture/country have the right to tell another 'you're doing it wrong'?
- To what extent, if at all, do people have an obligation to share their religious faith with others – or should we keep our beliefs to ourselves and try and respect the views of others even if we think they'll miss out on going to heaven?

Absolute ethics is based on the principle that some rules or ideas are true in all situations. For example, some people may say that being kind is always right, or killing is always wrong.

This is in contrast to **relative ethics**. This is based on the idea that right and wrong depend on the situation, context, personal preference etc and that there are no universal ideas of right and wrong. For example, some people may say that stealing is wrong in most circumstances, but there are occasions when it is justified (acceptable).

Task – write a detailed and balanced response to the statement below. Structure it like you would a GCSE Q5 – make sure it has arguments and examples in favour and against and then come to a justified conclusion.

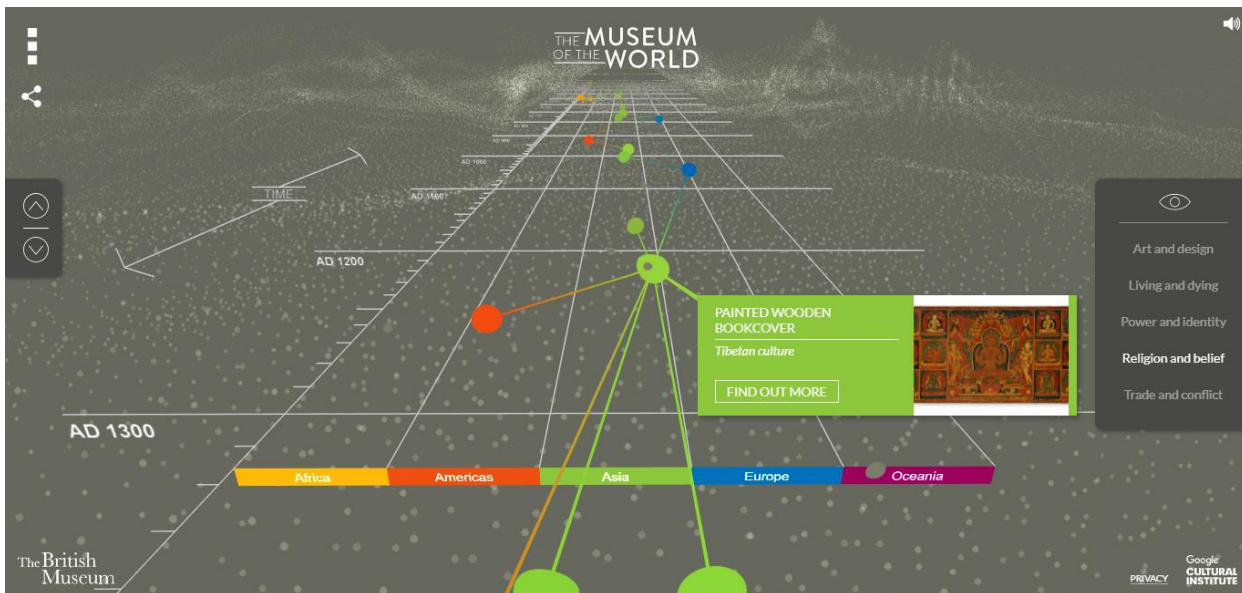
“There is no such thing as an absolute right or wrong. Matters of right and wrong are nothing but personal opinions and feelings.” Discuss.

Activity 2

'Visit' the **British Museum** online:

<https://britishmuseum.withgoogle.com>

This is an incredible website that takes you through time to explore a number of different themes and topics. Select the topic of **Religion and Belief**. Have a good look at some of the artefacts that it details. Then focus in on some of the Asian artefacts (you will study Buddhism for a third of your RPE A level so see if you can find some Buddhist examples).



Answer these questions:

1. How much can we tell about people's beliefs from the objects they leave behind?
2. What makes an object a 'religious' object, rather than just a special one?
3. Why do religious people have sacred objects – what function do they serve?
4. Become an expert about one of the objects that takes your interest – find out more about the culture it comes from, what the people believed and how the object was used, as well as which questions remain unanswered.

Activity 3

Reincarnation is a key principle that you will consider in your study of Buddhism.

Watch this documentary, 'Barra Boy'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nhGX1YCsvAM>

Think about:

- Do you think the story provides convincing evidence for reincarnation? Why, or why not?
- What do you think counts as 'convincing evidence' for life after death (e.g. scripture, near death experiences, nothing)? What makes evidence convincing or unconvincing?



Activity 4

What is 'evil'? Why do people commit 'evil' crimes against others? Where does 'evil' come from? In your RPE A Level you will study the problem of evil.

Find out about the famous Stanford Prison Experiment:

<https://www.simplypsychology.org/zimbardo.html>

Then watch this clip from the man behind the experiment, Philip Zimbardo:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5phRpcDyouA>



Task – reflect upon what you have learnt from these resources and think about what you learnt about the problem of evil at GCSE. Write your own personal response, whilst also reflecting on what you learnt from the experiment, to the following statement:

'Evil is born, not learnt.' Discuss

If you want some more...Extension Activities

Get to know some of the philosophers and principles you will meet during your A level course. There is a wealth of information on the broadcasts from 'In Our Time' from BBC Radio 4. Melvyn Bragg discusses a huge number of religious, philosophical and ethical topics. These are quite long and heavyweight so don't worry if this activity isn't for you or if you only pick up parts of what is talked about.

You'll find the full list of broadcasts here:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01f0vzr>

Listen to whatever takes your interest. However, you may wish to focus on a couple that are more relevant to your A Level. Here are some good examples:

- Zen
- St Thomas Aquinas
- Plato's Republic
- The Mind Body Problem

Suggested Reading

- Blackburn, S. **Think**, OUP 2001
- Craig, E. **Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction**, OUP 2002
- Nagel, T. **What Does It All Mean?**, OUP 1987 (reprinted 2004)
- Warburton, N. **Philosophy: The Basics (5th edition)**, Routledge 2012
- Gaarder, J. (1995) **Sophie's World**, London : Phoenix House
- Davies, B. (1993) **An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion**, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Vardy, P.(1999) **The Puzzle of Ethics**, SCM Press