

Pre-Post 16 tasks - Philosophy

Welcome to Philosophy 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

What is 'evil'? Why do people commit 'evil' crimes against others? Where does 'evil' come from? In your Philosophy 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

Activity 3

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 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:

- St Thomas Aquinas
- The Mind Body Problem
- Kant’s Categorical Imperative
- Utilitarianism
- Bishop Berkley
- Bertrand Russell
- David Hume
- The Ontological Argument

Task – write up some notes on TWO of the broadcasts you have listened to. Include in your notes your own personal take on the ideas discussed. Do you agree? Do you disagree? Why?

Suggested Extension 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