



**Shenley Brook End Sixth Form**

**Summer transition tasks for**

**PHILOSOPHY & ETHICS**

**Due date Monday 11 September 2023**

## **Religious Studies [Philosophy and Ethics] Transition Task- OCR H573**

### **Specification**

#### **Objectives:**

To be successful in Philosophy and Ethics, it is important to gain some prior knowledge. These tasks are designed to enable you to familiarise yourself with some of the essential key terms you will frequently come across and be expected to use during your studies. It will also give you a great foundation to build on in September.

#### **Task 1**

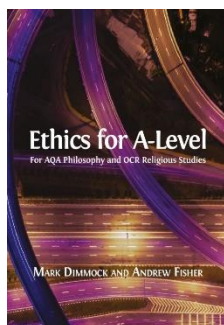
##### **Key Terms**

Understanding key terms is crucial to achieving high grades in this subject. These are a few of the important key words that you need to have some basic understanding of. Write a definition for each.

<b>Ethics</b>	
<b>Philosophy</b>	
<b>Religion</b>	
<b>Teleological</b>	
<b>Deontological</b>	
<b>Plato</b>	
<b>Aristotle</b>	
<b>Rationalism</b>	
<b>Empiricism</b>	
<b>Ontological</b>	
<b>A posteriori</b>	
<b>A priori</b>	

## **TASK 2**

### **Introductory reading**



The following extract is taken from 'Ethics for A-Level' by Mark Dimmock and Andrew Fisher pp.3-8. It is an open-source textbook, and a copy of the relevant sections will be given to you in September 20. For more information see the resource section.

Ethics is a part of Philosophy, and so as you begin to think about taking this subject read through the extract and then respond / consider the questions at the end. Hopefully, this will make you think about what this subject is about.

-----

### **Introduction**

#### **1. Philosophy, Ethics and Thinking**

Philosophy is hard. Part of the reason it can feel so annoying is because it seems like it should not be hard. After all, philosophy just involves thinking, and we all think — thinking is easy! We do it without...well, thinking. Yet philosophy involves not just thinking but thinking well. Of course, it is true that we all think. But thinking, like football, maths, baking, and singing is something we can get better at. Unfortunately, people rarely ask how. If you do not believe us, then just open your eyes. Society might be a whole lot better off if we thought well, more often.

Admittedly, doing A-Level Philosophy will not give you the ability to solve the problems of the world; we are not that naive! But if you engage with philosophy, then you will be developing yourself as a thinker who thinks well. Therefore A-Level Philosophy is useful not merely to would-be philosophers, but also to any would be thinkers, perhaps heading off to make decisions in law, medicine, structural engineering — just about anything that requires you to think effectively and clearly.

However, if Philosophy is hard, then Ethics is harder. This might seem unlikely at first glance. After all, Ethics deals with issues of right and wrong, and we have been discussing “what is right” and “what is wrong” since we were children. Philosophy of Mind, on the other hand, deals with topics like the nature of consciousness, while Metaphysics deals with the nature of existence itself. Indeed, compared to understanding a lecture in the Philosophy of Physics, arguing about the ethics of killing in video games might seem something of a walk in the park. This is misleading, not because other areas of philosophy are easy, but because the complexity of ethics is well camouflaged.

#### **2. Respecting Ethics**

When you study A-Level Ethics, and you evaluate what is right and wrong, it can be tempting and comforting to spend time simply defending your initial views; few people would come to a debate about vegetarianism, or abortion, without some pre-existing belief. If you are open-minded in your ethical approach then you need not reject everything you currently believe, but you should see these beliefs as starting points, or base camps, from which your enquiry commences.

For example, why do you think that eating animals is OK, or that abortion is wrong? If you think that giving to charity is good, what does “good” mean? For true success, ethics requires intellectual respect. If you might think that a particular position is obviously false, perhaps take this reaction as a

red flag, as it may suggest that you have missed some important step of an argument — ask yourself why someone, presumably just as intellectually proficient as yourself, might have once accepted that position.

If you are thinking well as an ethicist, then you are likely to have good reasons for your views and be prepared to rethink those views where you cannot find such good reasons. In virtue of this, you are providing justification for the beliefs you have. It is the philosopher's job, whatever beliefs you have, to ask why you hold those beliefs. What reasons might you have for those beliefs?

For example, imagine the reason that you believe it is OK to eat meat is that it tastes nice. As philosophers we can say that this is not a particularly good reason. Presumably, it might taste nice to eat your pet cat, or your neighbour, or your dead aunt; but in these cases, the “taste justification” seems totally unimportant! The details of this debate are not relevant here (for more on this topic see Chapter 14). The point is that there are good and bad reasons for our beliefs, and it is the philosopher's job to reveal and analyse them.<sup>1</sup>

### **3. The A-Level Student**

Philosophy is more than just fact-learning, or a “history of ideas”. It is different from chemistry, mathematics, languages, theology etc. It is unique. Sure, it is important to learn some facts, and learn what others believed, but a successful A-Level student needs to do more than simply regurgitate information in order to both maneuver past the exam hurdles and to become a better ethicist.

One aim of this book is to aid you in engaging with a living discipline. Philosophy, and in particular Ethics, is a live and evolving subject. When you study philosophy, you are entering a dialogue with those that have gone before you. Learning about what various philosophers think will enable you to become clearer about what you think and add to that evolving dialogue.

You will notice that in this book we have not included “hints and tips boxes”, or statements of biography concerning the scholars. Although these things have their place, we did not want the reader to think that they have learnt philosophy if they know what is in the boxes.

In reality, university Philosophy departments often work with first year students to lose some of their less academically successful habits. Why? Well, one of the authors has taught ethics at university for many years. Philosophy students often say something like this: “I thought we'd do hard stuff at University! I did Utilitarianism at A-Level, can I have something different to study, please?”

This statement reveals a whole host of things. Most important is the view that to “do” ethics is to remember information. That is why a student can say they have “done Utilitarianism”. They have learnt some key facts and arguments. But philosophy is not like this. In order to understand philosophy, you need to be authentic with yourself and to ask what you think, using this as a guide to critically analyse the ideas learned and lead yourself to your own justifiable conclusion. Philosophy is a living and dynamic subject that we cannot reduce to a few key facts, or a simplistic noting of what other people have said.

Some people distinguish between “ethics” and “morality”. We do not. For us, nothing hangs on the difference between them. In this book you will see us switching between the terms, so do not get hung up on this distinction.

#### **4. Doing Ethics Well: Legality versus Morality**

Moral questions are distinct from legal questions, although, of course, moral issues might have some implications for the law. That child labour is morally unacceptable might mean that we have a law against it. But it is unhelpful to answer whether something is morally right or wrong by looking to the laws of the land. It is quite easy to see why. Imagine a country which has a set of actions which are legally acceptable, but morally unacceptable or vice versa — the well-used example of Nazi Germany brings to mind this distinction. Therefore, in discussions about ethics do be wary of talking about legal issues. Much more often than not, such points will be irrelevant.

#### **5. Doing Ethics Well: Prudential Reasons versus Moral Reasons**

Something to keep separate are moral reasons and prudential reasons. Prudential reasons relate to our personal reasons for doing things.

Consider some examples. When defending slavery, people used to cite the fact that it supported the economy as a reason to keep it. It is true, of course, that this is a reason; it is a prudential reason, particularly for those who benefited from slavery such as traders or plantation owners. Yet, such a reason does not help us with the moral question of slavery. We would say “OK, but so what if it helps the economy! Is it right or wrong?”

#### **6. Doing Ethics Well: Prescriptive versus Descriptive Claims**

Another important distinction is between descriptive and prescriptive claims. This is sometimes referred to as the “is/ought” gap. We return to this in later chapters, especially Chapter 6. But it is such a common mistake made in general ethical chat that we felt the need to underline it.

Consider some examples. Imagine the headline: “Scientists discover a gene explaining why we want to punch people wearing red trousers”. The article includes lots of science showing the genes and the statistical proof. Yet, none of this will tell us whether acting violently towards people wearing red trousers is morally acceptable. The explanation of why people feel and act in certain ways leaves it open as to how people morally ought to act.

Consider a more serious example, relating to the ethics of eating meat. Supporters of meat-eating often point to our incisor teeth. This shows that it is natural for us to eat meat, a fact used as a reason for thinking that it is morally acceptable to do so. But this is a bad argument. Just because we have incisors does not tell us how we morally ought to behave. It might explain why we find it easy to eat meat, and it might even explain why we like eating meat. But this is not relevant to the moral question. Don’t you believe us? Imagine that dentists discover that our teeth are “designed” to eat other humans alive. What does this tell us about whether it is right or wrong to eat humans alive? Nothing.

#### **7. Doing Ethics Well: Thought-Experiments**

You will also be aware, especially in reading this book, of the philosophical device known as a “thought experiment”. These are hypothetical, sometimes fanciful, examples that are designed to aid our thinking about an issue. For example, imagine that you could travel back in time. You are pointing a gun at your grandfather when he was a child. Would it be possible for you to pull the trigger? Or,

imagine that there is a tram running down a track. You could stop it, thereby saving five people, by throwing a fat man under the tracks. Is this the morally right thing to do?

The details here are unimportant. What is important, is that it is inadequate to respond: “yes, but that could never happen!” Thought experiments are devices to help us to think about certain issues. Whether they are possible in real life does not stop us doing that thinking. Indeed, it is not just philosophy that uses thought experiments. When Einstein asked what would happen if he looked at his watch near a black hole, this was a thought experiment. In fact, most other subjects use thought experiments. It is just that philosophy uses them more frequently, and they are often a bit more bizarre.

## **8. Doing Ethics Well: Understanding Disagreement**

Finally, we want to draw your attention to a common bad argument as we want you to be aware of the mistake it leads to. Imagine that a group of friends are arguing about which country has won the most Olympic gold medals. Max says China, Alastair says the US, Dinh says the UK. There is general ignorance and disagreement; but does this mean that there is not an answer to the question of “which country has won the most Olympic gold medals?” No! We cannot move from the fact that people disagree to the conclusion that there is no answer. Now consider a parallel argument that we hear far too often.

Imagine that you and your friends are discussing whether euthanasia is morally acceptable. Some say yes, the others say no. Each of you cite how different cultures have different views on euthanasia. Does this fact — that there is disagreement — mean that there is no answer to the question of whether euthanasia is morally acceptable? Again, the answer is no. That answer did not follow in the Olympic case, and it does not follow in the moral one either. So just because different cultures have different moral views, this does not show, by itself, that there is no moral truth and no answer to the question.

If you are interested in the idea that there is a lack of moral truth in ethics, then Moral Error Theorists defend exactly this position in the chapter on Metaethics.

### **TASK 3**

Please answer the following **two A Level** style questions below, as best as you can. Your answers should be at least one side of A4 (approximately 300 words) each. They need to be on **two** separate pieces of paper. **Answers should be made up of at least two reasoned arguments for, two reasoned arguments against and an explained conclusion giving your view.** Please remember to put your name at the top of each essay. These assignments will allow your teachers to see at the beginning of the course your ability to answer questions in an essay format.

#### **Q1 Ethics 1 hour**

**“There are no moral rules that apply to all people of all time; morality is totally dependent on culture, time and place.”** Discuss.

#### **Q2 Philosophy 1 hour**

**“If God cannot be proven to exist by using empirical evidence, then it is not logical to believe in a god.”** Discuss.

**To discuss means to:**

- examine the strengths and weaknesses of arguments for and against the statement in the question.
- consider whether arguments in favour of and against the statement are successful.

Remember! Every point is a debate- use the format below for your essay:

#### **The Introduction of the essay**

Define your terms	Are there any words in the question which need explaining? If the question asks you to compare, how will you define success?
Implications	Why is this question important? What difference will it make if the question is true? This helps you to show the examiner your grasp of what the question is asking.
Scholars	Who are the key scholars involved in these debates? Do you know the names of their works or articles they have written? Use them.
Conclusions	You need to show what your conclusion is going to be right at the beginning. You must clearly state your line of argument you are going to be pursuing throughout your essay from the very start. <u>It is SUPER IMPORTANT.</u>

### The Body of the essay

Point	Give a scholarly reason to support your line of argument. This must refer to the question. Use the key language of the question to make sure you do this. Use evaluative language.
Evidence/Explain	Explain the point, using as much scholarly language, quotations and ideas as you can. Detail is key. Remember to keep linking ideas back to the question.
Response	Give an alternative view and/or criticism of this idea using scholarly argument. Every paragraph must have some form of debate in. If you write a paragraph without some form of debate in it, you are doing it wrong.
Evaluate	Give a judgement. In the debate you have just had, which is the strongest? Who is the winner? Explain why using scholarly argument.
Link	A mini conclusion: link back to the line of argument

### The conclusion of the essay

Refer	You must refer directly to the question, using the language of the question to make it obvious. Re-read your introduction and re-state your line of argument
Judge	You must make a clear judgment about whether the statement is true/argument is successful. Use evaluative language to make this clear. <i>"The most effective argument in favour of this point is ..."</i>

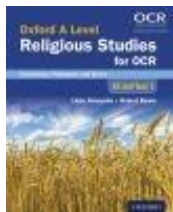
### Wider reading [Books and useful websites]

- Oxford A Level Religious Studies for OCR: AS and Year 1 (Libby Ahluwalia and Robert Bowie), ISBN: 9780198392859, Oxford University Press
- OCR Religious Studies A Level Year 1 and AS Student Book (Michael B. Wilkinson, Michael Wilcockson, Hugh Campbell), ISBN:9781471866692, Hodder Education.
- My Revision Notes OCR A Level Religious Studies: Philosophy of Religion ISBN: 9781510418042
- [Seven moral rules found all around the world | University of Oxford](#)
- [Logos | Online \(divinityphilosophy.net\)](#)
- <https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks/textbooks/ethics-for-a-level>
- <https://plato.stanford.edu/>



## **Books and Resources**

There are a range of resources available for this subject and many useful websites. There are two key recommended textbooks for year 12. You will need to purchase one of these. Many students prefer the Oxford textbook. There are copies in the library if you would like to see what they are like.

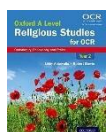


Oxford A Level Religious Studies for OCR: AS and Year 1 (Libby Ahluwalia and Robert Bowie), ISBN: 9780198392859, Oxford University Press

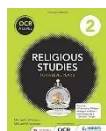


OCR Religious Studies A Level Year 1 and AS Student Book (Michael B. Wilkinson, Michael Wilcockson, Hugh N. Campbell), ISBN: 9781471866692, Hodder Education

For A Level (year 2) you would then need the second textbook

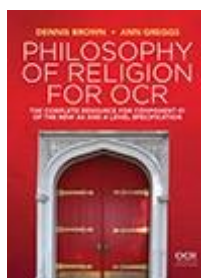


Oxford A Level Religious Studies for OCR: Year 2 Student Book: Christianity, Philosophy and Ethics  
ISBN: 978-0198375333

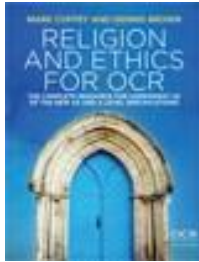


OCR Religious Studies A Level Year 2 Paperback, by Michael Wilkinson (Author), Michael Wilcockson (Author)  
ISBN: 978-1471866746

If you want to buy an extra textbook the following also cover parts of the course.

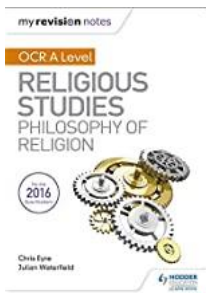


Philosophy of Religion for OCR (Dennis Brown & Ann Greggs), ISBN: 9781509517985, Polity Press  
NOTE: this only covers philosophy

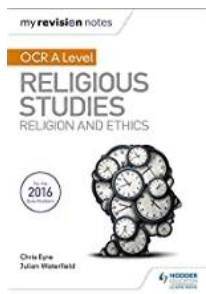


Religion and Ethics for OCR (Dennis Brown, Mark Coffey), ISBN: 9781509510160, Polity Press  
NOTE: this only covers ethics

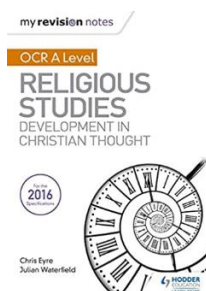
**Hodder education** also produces a shorter revision guide for each of the three components being studied. These are sometimes useful to get a quick overview of a topic before studying it in more depth.



My Revision Notes OCR A Level Religious Studies: Philosophy of Religion ISBN: 9781510418042



My Revision Notes OCR A Level Religious Studies: Religion and Ethics ISBN: 9781510418059



My Revision Notes OCR A Level Religious Studies: Development in Christian Thought ISBN: 9781510418066