



THE MEANING
OF LIFE
—
JOHN GRAY



An Introduction to A-level Religious Studies

What the course consists of:

Buddhism

THEME 1: LIFE OF THE BUDDHA
AND SCRIPTURE

THEME 2: KEY TEACHINGS : 8FP,
4NT, KARMA

THEME 3: BUDDHISM IN THE WORLD
TODAY

THEME 4: VIEW OF THE WORLD:
MEDITATION, DANA, JATAKA
TALES

Philosophy

THEME 1: ARGUMENTS FOR THE
EXISTENCE OF GOD: ONTOLOGICAL,
TELEOLOGICAL AND COSMOLOGICAL
ARGUMENTS

THEME 2: CHALLENGES TO
RELIGIOUS BELIEF: THE PROBLEM OF
EVIL AND PSYCHOLOGY AND
RELIGION

THEME 3: RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE

THEME 4: RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

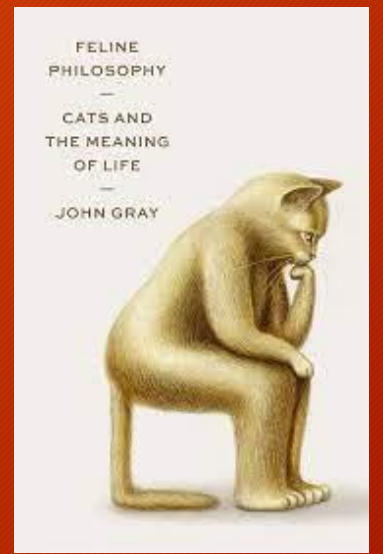
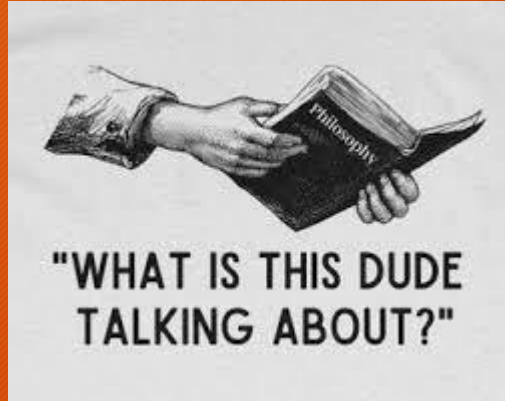
Ethics

THEME 1: DEONTOLOGICAL ETHICS:
VIRTUE THEORY, EGOISM, DIVINE
COMMAND THEORY

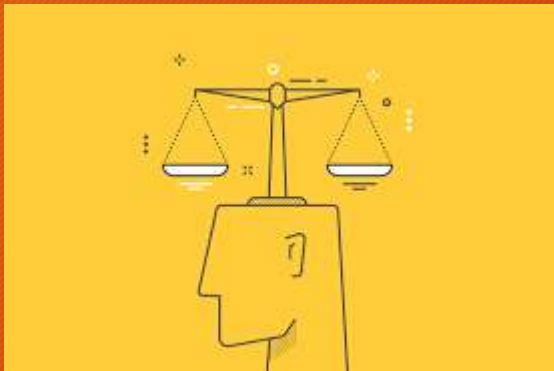
THEME 2: TELEOLOGICAL ETHICS:
NATURAL LAW

THEME 3: DETERMINISM: SITUATION
ETHICS AND UTILITARIANISM

THEME 4: FREE WILL: DETERMINISM,
ROLE OF FREE WILL



How it is different to GCSE?



Entry Requirements

You do **NOT** to have taken RS GCSE to do A-level Religious Studies.

We do require pupils to have a 6 in either English and/or Religious Studies.

This is because it is an essay based subject, and is quite writing heavy. However, if you are passionate about RS we will consider different grades.

What we will cover - Year 1 Buddhism:



Year 1 Buddhism

Topic 1 -

- Life of the Buddha/ The Four Sights
- The Awakening/Enlightenment of the Buddha
- Buddhist texts as sources of wisdom and authority - their use and treatment in daily life (Patimokkha and Parajikas)

Topic 2 -

- The Four Noble Truths
- The Eightfold Paths
- Dasa Sila - The Ten Precepts
- The Three Lakshanas (Anicca, Dukkha and Anatta)
- The nature of ultimate reality: Pratityasamutpada, karma and rebirth
- Arhat and bodhisattva - Theravada and Mahayana teachings

Topic 4 -

- Going for refuge
- Meditation - vipassana (insight/clear seeing), samatha (calmness), metta bhavana (loving kindness) and zazen (just sitting).
- The role and importance of Dana (giving) and Punya (merit)

Topic 1 (A2) -

- The Pali Canon: its role in Buddhism as a whole
- The main themes and concepts in two Mahayana texts: Heart Sutra and Lotus Sutra
- The contribution made by Buddhist teachers - The Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh



What we will cover - Year 2 Buddhism:



Year 2 Buddhism

Topic 3–

- Historical Development of Buddhism in Japan (Zen, Pure Land and Nichiren Buddhism)
- The relationship between religion and society: challenges from science
- The relationship between religion and society: challenges from secularisation

Topic 3 –

- The relationship between religion and society: Responses to the challenges of pluralism and diversity
- Historical development of Buddhism in Britain (Convert and Heritage Buddhists)
- The changing roles of men and women including feminist approaches to Buddhism

Topic 4 –

- Beliefs and practices of Tibetan Buddhist traditions with reference to mudra, mandala and mantra:
- Buddhism and change – the development and influence on religious belief and practice within Buddhism of: The Mindfulness Movement.
- Socially Engaged Buddhism - 'liberationist' traditions

What we will cover - Year 1 Philosophy:

Year 1 Philosophy

Topic 1: Arguments for the existence of God – inductive

- including the Cosmological and Teleological arguments.



Topic 1: Arguments for the existence of God – deductive

- including the ontological argument.
- The Strengths and weakness of the ontological argument

Topic 2: Challenges to religious belief - The problem of evil and suffering

We will explore the problem of evil arguments and focus on the following scholars:

- Epicurus
- JL Mackie
- Augustine
- Irenaeus



Theme 3: Religious Experience

- The nature of religious experience (including prayer, conversion, vision and mysticism)
- Mystical experience (James and Otto)
- Challenges to the objectivity and authenticity of religious experience:

Summer Term A2:

Theme 3 Religious Experience

- The influence of religious experience on religious practice and faith:
- The definition of miracles - with a focus on Aquinas and Holland
- A comparative study of two key scholars from within and outside the Christian tradition and their contrasting views on the possibility of miracles: Hume and Swinburne.



What we will cover - Year 2 Philosophy :



Year 2 Philosophy

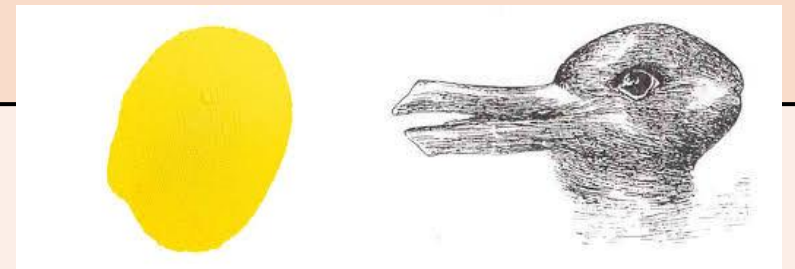
Complete Topic 3 Religious Experience

Topic 2- Challenges to religious belief - Religious belief as a product of the human mind

- Religious belief as a product of the human mind – Sigmund Freud
- Religious belief as a product of the human mind – Carl Jung
- Issues relating to rejection of religion: Atheism (including the New Atheists e.g Dawkins and Harris)

Topic 4: Religious language

- Inherent problems of religious language:
- Religious language as cognitive (traditional religious view), but meaningless (Logical Positivists' view) Hare and Ayer
- Religious Language as Symbolic
- Religious language as a language game



What we will cover - Year 1 Ethics:

Year 1

Theme 1: Ethical Thought

- Divine Command Theory (What is right is what God state)
- Virtue Theory (what is right links to good qualities)
- Ethical Egoism (what is right is what YOU want to do)

Theme 2: Aquinas' Natural Moral Law

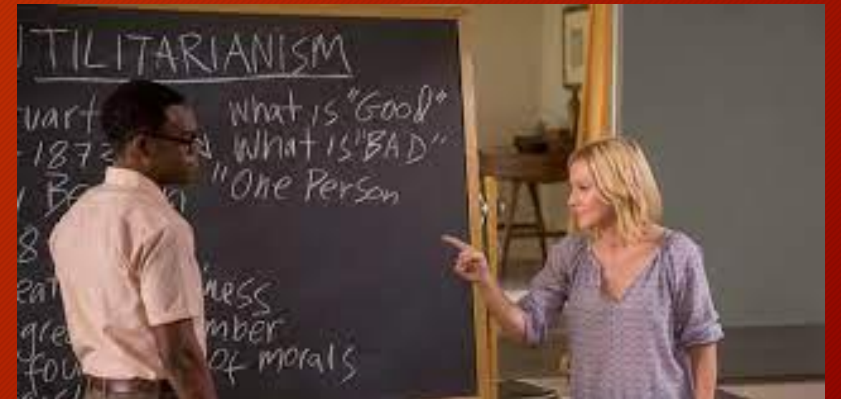
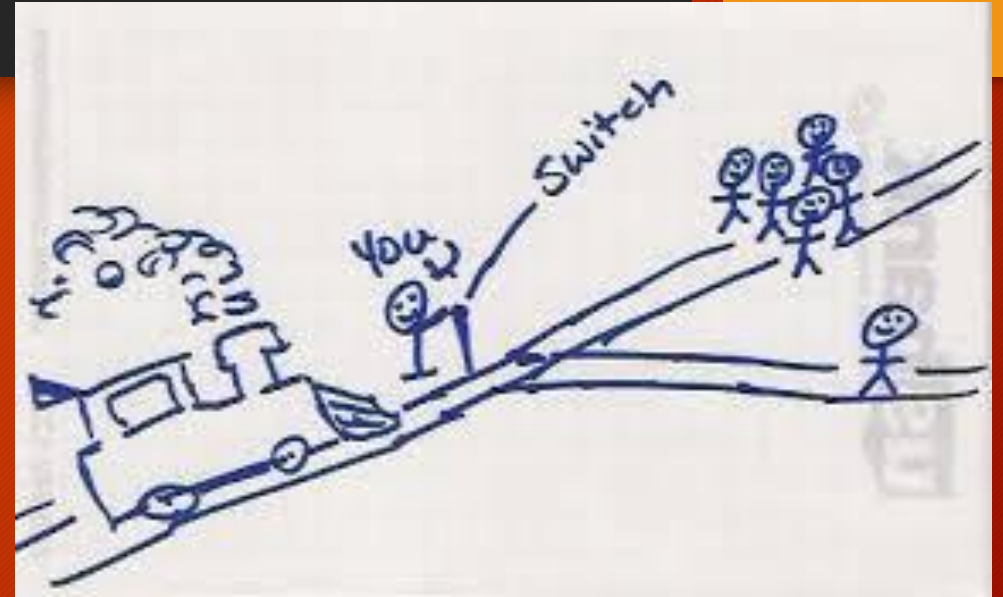
- Application of the theory to abortion and euthanasia

Theme 3: Situation Ethics

- Application of the theory to homosexuality and polyamory

Theme 4: Utilitarianism

- Application of utilitarianism to animal testing and nuclear war



What we will cover - Year 2 Ethics :

A Level Ethics

Theme 1 - Meta-ethical approaches

- Naturalism
- Intuitionism
- Emotivism



Theme 2— Deontological Ethics

- John Finnis' development of Natural Law and Bernard Hoose's overview of the Proportionalist debate
- Finnis' Natural Law and Proportionalism: application of the theory to the topics of immigration & capital punishment (death penalty)

Theme 4: Determinism and Free will

- Religious concepts of predestination, with reference to the teachings of St Augustine & Calvin
- Concepts of determinism (Locke and Hobbes)
- The implications of predestination / determinism

Theme 4: Determinism and Free will continued...

- Religious concepts of free will, with reference to the teachings of Pelagius & Arminius
- Concepts of libertarianism
- The implications of libertarianism and free will:




Assessment

3 exam papers - one for each unit

Each paper is 2 hour long

Each paper is worth 33.3333% of the overall mark

Answer 2 questions, consisting of a part A and B (4 essays in total)



Section A	
Please answer one question from this section.	
Either	
1.	(a) Examine the reasons for the development of Socially Engaged Buddhism. [20]
	(b) 'Buddhists should try to change themselves, not the world.' Determine the validity of this view. [30]
Or	
2.	(a) Explain the nature and purpose of meditation. [20]
	(b) Evaluate the view that meditation is best understood as the central practice of Buddhism. [30]
Section B	
Please answer one question from this section.	
3.	(a) Explain the main themes of the Heart Sutra. [20]
	(b) Assess the view that the themes of the Heart Sutra do not represent reality. [30]
4.	(a) Examine the concept of bodhisattva. [20]
	(b) 'Belief in bodhisattvas is unnecessary in Buddhism.' Assess the accuracy of this contention. [30]
5.	(a) Explain the diversity of Buddhism in Britain. [20]
	(b) 'The practice of Buddhism in Britain is a distortion of true Buddhism.' Judge the validity of this view. [30]

Desirable skills



Open mindedness

Willingness to
discuss

Empathy

Debate

Argument

Written skills

Intrigue

Willingness to learn

Like asking big
and little questions

Expectation

Enthusiasm,
intrigue
&
willingness
to learn.



Student comments

“Religious studies is a really interesting subject. Although there is a lot of content, it challenges you to think about things and debate.”

“It can seem overwhelming at first because it can be. But with some growing pains you’ll definitely enjoy it the debated created over the course and learning about a new religion”

*“It’s impossible not to like! **Buddhism** is like entering a new world in which you are embraced by colour and culture. **Philosophy** will make you question everything but also change your view on life and influence the way you think. It is pure character development. **Ethics** introduces you to some really questionable characters but it makes you feel more moral. **There is never a dull moment**”*

