

# Summer work Religious studies.

## Task 1

Read the three booklets attached on philosophy of religion, ethics and Christianity. Complete the activities in the booklets and the self checks at the end of each booklet.

## Task 2.

Go to the following website:

<https://www.philosophersmag.com/games>

Then play the following two games:

- Battleground God
- Should you kill the backpacker

The point of the games is to test your reasoning. Make a note of the outcome. What issues does each game raise about God and our ability to make consistent moral decisions?

(Feel free to try the other games too!)

## Task 3.

**Complete one question.**

Select ONE of the statements below and write a short essay (up to 500 words) explaining what the statement means, reasons why you think it may be correct and reasons why it may not be correct; you then need to come to a clear judgement.

- ***'Morality is doing what is right regardless of what you are told. Religion is doing what you are told regardless of what is right.'***
- ***'Name one ethical statement made, or one ethical action performed, by a believer that could not have been uttered or done by a nonbeliever.'* (Christopher Hitchens, 'An Atheist Responds', Washington Post, 14 July 2007)**
- ***'Teach a child what is wise, that is morality. Teach him what is wise and beautiful, that is religion!'* (Thomas Huxley, Aphorisms and Reflections, 1907)**

## Task 4 (extension)

The following novels are great as an introduction to some of the themes covered in religious studies.

You must read at least one, as we will ask you about it in September! Some of them are freely available online.

- Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never let me go* (cloning)
- Jodi Picoult, *My sister's keeper* (medical ethics)
- Aldous Huxley, *Brave new world* (utilitarianism)
- Fyodor Dostoyvesky, *Crime and punishment* (utilitarianism and deontology)
- Emile Zola, *Germinal* (nihilism)
- David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* (eternal return, reincarnation)
- George Orwell, *Animal farm* (political philosophy, animal rights)
- Yann Martel, *The life of Pi* (ethics; religious beliefs)
- Voltaire, *Candide* (the problem of evil)
- Kobo Abe, *The woman in the dunes* (human condition)
- Philip.K Dick, any of his books (science fiction)
- Margaret Atwood, *the Handmaid's tale* (women's rights; religion and equality)
- Joseph Heller, *Catch 22* (ethics of war)
- Jose Saramago, *the Cave* (reference to Plato)
- Jose Saramago *Blindness* (mass epidemic)
- Albert Camus *The Plague or the stranger* (existentialism, nihilism)
- Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (free will and determinism)

## Task 5 (extension)

Films with a philosophical theme to watch

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/apr/14/force-majeure-films-philosophy-memento-ida-its-a-wonderful-life>

<https://livelearnevolve.com/watch-therefore-10-best-philosophical-films/>

and if you have Netflix, watch the Good place!  
The explanation of key philosophical concepts is excellent!



## Topic 1

# Introduction to philosophy of religion

## Introduction

Philosophy of religion is a branch of philosophy concerned with questions regarding religion, including the nature and existence of God, the examination of religious experience, analysis of religious vocabulary and texts, and the relationship between religion and science. In Sections 2 and 3 of this NEC A level course you will explore some of the key philosophical issues and questions about religion and develop your understanding about the influence of religion on contemporary society and ideas. You will make a further study of philosophy of religion in the second half of the course if you decide to pursue the full A level. This topic is intended to provide a brief introduction to the field.

In the sections which follow, you will be engaging in arguments and debates that have shaped modern views of the world, such as the problem of evil and suffering, and the nature of religious experience. You'll look at religious and non-religious views of the world and consider how religious beliefs differ from contemporary views as expressions of beliefs about the world. Finally, you will study the development of philosophical ideas over time and the crucial influences on this process.

A key part of the course is the use of the writings of key scholars to explore different viewpoints and ideas. Study of these texts will enable you to gain a broader and deeper understanding of the key ideas and enable you to make links between the philosophy of religion and other areas of study within the course, for example Christianity and ethics.

The study and interpretation of religious texts and scholars' arguments is fundamental to the study of philosophy of religion, and to the A level. In the second half of the A level you will look at

key texts by scholars such as Bertrand Russell and F C Copleston and examine how their writings contributed to the key debates.

Before you embark on detailed study of the various arguments for the existence of God (Section 2), the nature and influence of religious experience, and the problem of evil and suffering (Section 3), you need to understand the nature of philosophical argument. Philosophical argument, and the key terms used to describe different types of argument, is therefore the focus of this first topic.

You will probably need 3 hours to complete this topic.



## Objectives

When you have completed this topic you should be able to:

- explain what is meant by an argument in philosophy
- outline the difference between deductive and inductive reasoning
- explain the difference between analytic and synthetic propositions
- identify the distinction between necessary truths and contingent propositions
- explain the difference between *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge.

## Argument and reasoning

A key component in the study of philosophy of religion is an understanding of the nature of argument and reasoning. All of the topics we will be looking at are grounded in the nature of argument and you will need to develop the ability to recognise types of argument, and to analyse those arguments, in order to evaluate the material in the topics effectively.

An argument is not the same thing as a quarrel. The goal of an argument is not to attack your opponent or to impress your audience. The goal of an argument is to offer good reasons in support of your conclusion, reasons that all parties to your dispute can accept. Thus an argument includes:

- a position or point of view
- an attempt to persuade others to accept that point of view
- reasons given to support the point of view.

As you work through the course and do the reading, you need to be able to distinguish between arguments, summaries, explanations and descriptions.

## Activity 1

(Allow 10 minutes)

Read the following passages. Decide, for each one, whether it is an argument, a summary, an explanation or a description? Note down the reasoning behind your decisions.

- 1 The article outlined the difference between individual yawns and infectious yawning. It referred to research by professor Platek which suggests that only humans and great apes yawn sympathetically. The article went on to say that people who yawn more easily in response to other people's yawns are also more likely to be good at inferring other people's states of mind. Finally, the article indicates some social benefits of yawning, suggesting that contagious yawning might have helped groups to synchronise their behaviour.
- 2 There were many reasons why Matthew was an hour late for his lesson. First of all, a pan caught fire, causing a minor disaster in his kitchen. It took 20 minutes to restore order. Then, he couldn't find his house keys. That wasted another ten minutes of his time. Then, just as he closed the door behind him, the postman arrived, saying there was a parcel to be signed for. His pen didn't work, which held him back even further. Finally, of course, he had to find his keys, which had once more slipped to the bottom of his bag, in order to re-open the door and place the parcel on the table.
- 3 Bilingualism and multilingualism confer many benefits. Speakers of more than one language have a better understanding of how languages are structured because they can compare across two different systems. People who speak only one language lack this essential point of reference. In many cases, a second language can help people have a better understanding and appreciation of their first language.
- 4 Plants need nitrogen in order to grow. Although there is nitrogen in the air, plants cannot absorb it by taking it in from the air. Instead, they are reliant on bacteria in the soil to absorb nitrogen in a process known as 'nitrogen fixation'. Thus, the bacteria turn the nitrogen into nitrates which are easier for plants to absorb through their roots.

You should have spotted that the first passage is a summary of the article; it just outlines what the article says. The second is an explanation of why Mathew was late with reasons. The fourth passage is a straightforward description of the process of nitrogen fixation. Only the third is an argument. It's an argument because it is trying to persuade you of something, in this case that bilingualism and multilingualism confer many benefits. Did you get these right?

Philosophy is the art of constructing and evaluating arguments. Arguments are meant to be convincing, so philosophers must be sensitive to what makes an argument convincing and students need to be able to evaluate arguments fully.

In order to evaluate arguments you need to:

- Think critically. What is the argument trying to say? Why does the argument succeed, or not?
- Consider the form of the argument. What's the point? How do we get to the point?
- Consider the structure. How do the parts of the argument fit together?

In general, arguments consist of:

- the thesis or position argued for – the conclusion (C)
- the reasons why the conclusion should be accepted – the premises (P).

There are different types of premise:

- general observations – hairdressers are prone to bad backs
- statements of fact – all men are mortal
- theoretical assumptions – events have causes
- definitions – a triangle is a three-sided figure
- hypotheses – if you exercise regularly you will be healthier.

Philosophical arguments may be written out in prose or in this form:

Premise 1 (P1): justification

Premise 2 (P2): justification

Conclusion (C): Therefore,.....

Whether an argument convinces us depends wholly on whether we believe its premises, and whether its conclusion seems to us to follow from those premises. So when we're evaluating an argument, there are two questions to ask:

- Are its premises true and worthy of our belief, or can we question them?
- Does its conclusion follow logically from the premises?

## Activity 2

(Allow 10 minutes)

Read the following arguments. Evaluate them by asking yourself these two questions:

- 1 Are the premises true or can they be questioned?
- 2 Does the conclusion follow logically from the premises?

Argument 1:

- P1 All trees are plants.
- P2 The redwood is a tree.
- C Therefore, the redwood is a plant.

Argument 2:

- P1 Getting wet in the rain gives you a cold.
- P2 The builders worked for several hours in pouring rain.
- C Therefore, they will get colds.

Argument 1 is straightforward: the premises are true and the conclusion follows logically from the premises, so we would consider this to be a sound and convincing argument.

Argument 2, however, is not as straightforward.

- We can question P1 – getting wet in the rain does not always give you a cold.
- We can also question the conclusion – just because the builders work in the rain doesn't mean they will get colds because they might be wearing waterproofs, or might be immune to colds or might be working under shelter.

Therefore, the second argument is not sound and is less convincing. As you proceed through the topics on philosophy of religion (Section 2), you should consider whether the arguments you encounter work and whether they are convincing.

## Inductive and deductive reasoning

The basis for the arguments for the existence of God is inductive and deductive reasoning. What is important is not just to answer the question of whether the existence of God can or cannot be proved, but also to consider the quality of argument and whether the argument works logically. Before we look at the arguments themselves let's look at what inductive and deductive arguments are.

In **deductive argument**, the premises offer logically conclusive support for the conclusion: if the premises are true, the conclusion must be true.

P1 All soldiers are brave.

P2 Martha is a soldier.

C Therefore, Martha is brave.

In this argument, the truth of the premises guarantees the truth of the conclusion. As you can see from this example, deduction involves arguing from the general to the particular, so if all  $x$  is  $y$ , then this  $x$  must be  $y$ .

Deductive arguments can be very strong, but essentially they only confirm what is contained in the premises. One of the most famous examples is:

P1 All men are mortal.

P2 Socrates is a man.

C Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

The premises here are true and therefore the conclusion – that Socrates is mortal – must also be true. But we would still need to ensure that the premises are true to guarantee that the conclusion is true.

**Inductive arguments** provide probable support for their conclusion: if the premises are true, the conclusion is probably true.

P1 Almost all students in this school support the Labour Party.

P2 Maria is a student here

C Therefore, Maria probably supports the Labour Party.

Induction goes beyond the information contained in the premises and therefore an inductive argument cannot guarantee the truth of the conclusion. It is an **argument from probability**: the conclusion

is a probability based on using what is known to speculate about what is not known.

Inductive arguments argue from particular instances to general conclusions, e.g. all observed  $x$  is  $y$ , therefore all  $x$  is  $y$ . Here's another example:

P1 The sun rose this morning.

P2 The sun has risen every morning since records began.

C The sun will rise tomorrow morning.

This seems very convincing and in this case the premises are true: we know that the sun rose this morning and has risen since records began. However, while the conclusion has an extremely high probability of being true, it is still only a probability and cannot be guaranteed.

## Types of proposition

We have looked at types of argument and have seen that they will be vital in evaluating the topics in philosophy of religion. The last thing to do before starting on the topics is to identify types of proposition: statements about the world. Being able to identify different types of proposition will be important for understanding inductive and deductive reasoning and for evaluating arguments such as the ontological argument. We need to define:

- analytic and synthetic propositions
- necessary and contingent truths
- *a priori* and *a posteriori* ideas.

### Analytic and synthetic propositions

'All bachelors are unmarried' is an example of an **analytic proposition**. The use of the word originates in the fact that you have only to analyse a statement of this kind in order to know whether or not it is true.

Analytic propositions are very important in philosophy since, once you know that a certain proposition is analytic, you know it to be true without any further investigation or without any observation of the world (which is required before you can know the truth of most propositions we believe). You do not have to investigate anything in the world apart from language to discover whether or not the proposition is true.

If you analyse the meaning of the word 'father' you know that 'fathers are male' is true. You know it from analysing the sentence itself, not from observation of the way the world is.

To summarise:

- An analytic statement or proposition is one whose negation is self-contradictory: if someone said 'black is not black' he would be contradicting himself.
- An analytic proposition is one whose truth can be determined solely by an analysis of the meaning of the words in the sentence expressing it.

Another way of expressing this is to say that no additional meaning or knowledge is contained in the **predicate** that is not already given in the subject. A predicate is a property, quality or attribute that is affirmed of a subject. In the example above, the predicate 'male' doesn't tell us anything new about the subject 'father', because the definition of 'father' includes male-ness.

Analytic statements take the general form 'all AB is A'. You know this is true from analysing the sentence itself, not from observing the world.

Analytic statements tell us about logic and about language use. They do not give meaningful information about the world. You are probably wondering what the point of them is! Hopefully this will become clearer when you come to look at ontological arguments for the existence of God in Section 2 Topics 4 and 5.

**Synthetic propositions** are propositions that are not analytic: the predicate is not contained in the subject. For example:

- All cats are selfish.
- The president is dishonest.

Synthetic propositions take the general form 'some AB are C'.

Unlike analytic statements, in the above examples the predicates (selfish, dishonest) are not contained already in the subjects (all cats, the president). Synthetic propositions cannot be verified simply from the meaning of the words – you need to investigate the world to check that it is true. In addition, negating either of the above would not result in a contradiction. It would not be a contradiction to say that 'The president is not dishonest' as it would to say 'The father is not male'.

Here's another example:

Analytic proposition: Vegetarians are people who don't eat meat.

Synthetic proposition: Some vegetarians don't like spinach.

Check your understanding in the next activity.

### Activity 3

(Allow 10 minutes)

Which of the following propositions are analytic? Explain why.

- 1 All swans are birds.
- 2 All swans are white.
- 3 Paris is the capital of France.
- 4 All triangles have three sides.
- 5 Frozen water is ice.
- 6 Bachelors are unmarried men.
- 7 Two halves make up a whole.

You should have spotted that all of these are analytic apart from 2 and 3. Did 3 catch you out? Certainly Paris is the capital of France at the moment, but it hasn't always been and it might not be at some point in the future. In the other propositions you can analyse the words to understand the meaning and the truth of the proposition: triangle means three-sided figure, etc.

### Necessary and contingent truths

Some propositions are necessarily true: **necessary truths** could not possibly be false. For example, 'one cannot be in two different places at the same time', or 'if one event precedes a second event and the second precedes the third, then the first precedes the third'. It could not be any other way. These propositions are widely considered to be necessary truths, and their negation would be necessarily false.

In contrast, there are **contingent** propositions. These are propositions which are true, but just happen to be true: there is no necessity about them. For example, the statement that 'there are 20 people in this room' is contingent on what the world happens to

be like. It could be some other way, i.e. there could be just two people in the room.

In summary, the terms necessary and contingent refer to truth:

- a necessary truth cannot be any other way
- a contingent truth is dependent on something else (for example the senses) and could change at any time.

## Activity 4

(Allow 10 minutes)

Which of the following propositions are necessary and which are contingent truths?

- 1 Some dogs are white.
- 2 The internal angles of a triangle add up to 180 degrees.
- 3 All bachelors are unmarried.
- 4 If it is a square, it cannot be a circle.
- 5 He is either coming or he is not.
- 6 Human beings have two legs.

Propositions 1 and 6 are contingent. Some dogs are black, red, brown; the fact that some dogs are white is dependent on the dog. Human beings might normally have two legs but some humans only have one leg or no legs and so the statement is contingent. The other statements are all necessary, they cannot be any other way: you can't come and go at the same time, a married man is not a bachelor, etc.

## *A priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge

*A priori* means 'what comes before'. *A priori* knowledge does not depend on experience for its justification. For example, we can know that  $2 + 3 = 5$  *a priori* since we only need to think about how to work out the sum. We don't need to look at the external world or examine our own experiences to recognise that it is true. What we do need, however, is reason. The truths of mathematics, geometry and logic are often considered to be knowable *a priori*.

You will see in Section 2 Topics 4 and 5 that the ontological argument for the existence of God is an *a priori* argument because it is based on the *idea* of God. The argument claims that once you have defined God, no doubt remains about his existence – he has to exist, by definition (just as, once you have defined a triangle, no doubts remain about it being three-sided).

*A posteriori* means ‘what comes after’. Another word for this is ‘empirical’.

*A posteriori* knowledge depends upon evidence that can only be gained through experience for its justification. We cannot work it out just by thinking about it.

You will see in Section 2 Topics 1 and 2 that the design argument for the existence of God is an *a posteriori*/empirical argument, because it relies on our sense-experience of the universe and of things in it, i.e. we perceive the order, beauty and complexity of the universe through our eyes, ears and other senses and argue that this evidence of design and order implies the existence of a designer, i.e. God. The cosmological argument (Topic 3) is also a *a posteriori*.

Necessary truths are necessary because they are knowable *a priori*. They are *a priori* in so far as they necessarily hold true for all cases, whether today, tomorrow or in a million years. What makes a statement *a priori* – and hence necessary – is how we come to know it, not the structure of the statement itself, as with analytic statements. An *a priori* statement doesn’t need any verification by further experience.

Any statement that we do have to test to see whether it holds for future cases is a contingent statement, knowable only *a posteriori*.

**Activity 5**

(Allow 10 minutes)

Which of the following propositions are *a priori* and which are *a posteriori*?

- 1  $2 + 3 = 5$
- 2 A square has four sides.
- 3 The sky is blue.
- 4 I exist.
- 5 There are more than three students in this class.

Statements 1, 2 and 4 are all *a priori* – I can know them without experiencing them; they are necessary and analytic. Statements 3 and 5 are *a posteriori* – they rely on experience; they are contingent on the way the world is and synthetic.

**Study hint**

Make sure you are thoroughly familiar with the various terms covered in this topic so that you can apply them when you come to look at the various arguments for the existence of God in Section 2. You might want to generate a table of definitions, with examples for each term.

**Self check**

(Allow 10 minutes)

Read the following statements and decide whether they are true or false.

- 1 In a deductive argument, the truth of the premises guarantees the truth of the conclusion.
- 2 'All mammals suckle their young' is an analytic proposition.
- 3 The predicate in 'All blondes have fair hair' is 'blondes'.
- 4 Deductive arguments are arguments from probability.
- 5 Analytic statements tell us nothing new about the world.
- 6 *A posteriori* ideas rely on sense-experience.

- 7 Synthetic propositions take the form 'all AB is A'.
- 8 'London is the biggest city in the UK' is a necessary truth.
- 9 'A square has four sides of equal length' is an *a posteriori* statement.
- 10 'If I come third in the race I can't come second' is a necessary truth.

You will find feedback to self checks at the end of the section.

## Summary

Philosophy of religion involves the study and analysis of key arguments about the nature and existence of God. These arguments, as we shall see, are either inductive or deductive and they rely on the use of premises that are synthetic or analytic, necessary or contingent and evidence that is *a posteriori* or *a priori*. Developing the ability to analyse argument effectively will enable you to fully understand and evaluate controversial issues about beliefs and values and will give you the confidence to express your ideas and put forward your own beliefs and ideas supported by reasoned argument and evidence.

## Key terms

***a posteriori***: known after sense-experience; for example, that 'some roses are red' can only be known by seeing them; 'fluffy rabbits are lovely' can only be known to be true if (1) you have seen rabbits, and (2) you have experienced something fluffy. The modern term for *a posteriori* is 'empirical'.

***a priori***: known before or without sense-experience (i.e. what you know as a result of using your five senses of touch, taste, hearing, smell and sight); for example: 'a bachelor is an unmarried man', 'a triangle has three sides'.

**analytic proposition**: a proposition that is true or false by definition, that is, by virtue of the meaning of the terms and grammatical rules used. For example 'triangles have three sides' is analytically true because a triangle is defined as a three-sided polygon. Conversely, 'The soldier recovered from his fatal wounds' is analytically false because 'recovered from' contradicts 'fatal', which means 'resulting in death'. See **synthetic proposition**.

**argument from experience**: asserts that it is only possible to experience that which exists; the phenomenon of religious

experience demonstrates the existence of God according to this argument.

**argument from probability:** the design argument asks you to decide which is more probable – that the appearance of design in the universe is purely by chance, or that it is the work of a guiding intelligence. The truth of the design argument is therefore a question of likelihood or probability.

**contingent proposition:** proposition for which there are possible circumstances in which it could be false. Propositions that can be denied without self-contradiction are contingent, and so any proposition that is not logically necessary is contingent, e.g. 'dogs have four legs' is a contingent proposition, because we can deny that dogs have four legs without contradicting ourselves (the dog might only have three legs due to an accident). *See necessary truth.*

**deductive argument:** the process of inferring a conclusion from premises using valid forms of argument. If an argument is deductively valid, then the conclusion must follow necessarily from the premises. Deduction involves arguing from the general to the particular so if all  $x$  is  $y$ , then this  $x$  must be  $y$ . *See inductive argument.*

**inductive argument:** process of reasoning from particular instances to general conclusions, e.g. all observed  $x$  is  $y$ , therefore all  $x$  is  $y$ . *See deductive argument.*

**necessary truth:** a proposition is a necessary truth if, and only if, its denial involves contradiction. Necessary truths are propositions that cannot be false under any circumstances (they are true in all possible worlds). *See contingent proposition.*

**predicate:** property, quality or attribute that is affirmed of a subject, i.e. anything that could complete the phrase 'x is...'.

**synthetic proposition:** a proposition the truth of which depends on factors other than the meanings of the terms used; it has to be tested through observation of the world. A synthetic proposition consists of two logically unrelated parts, e.g. '[all dogs] are [clever]'. Unlike **analytic propositions**, synthetic propositions are neither self-evidently true nor self-evidently false.

## Topic 2

# Introduction to ethics

## Introduction

What would you do if a person close to you, terminally ill and in unbearable pain, asked you to help her die? Regardless of what the law says, would you agree? What would be the reasons behind your decision? Would you say a life defined only by pain is not worth living, or would you, on the contrary, think that even if the person is in pain, her life is still valuable and her experiences meaningful?

In such difficult situations, people usually appeal to moral principles; they would argue that assisted suicide is right or that it is wrong, or maybe it should be acceptable in certain cases. Such dilemmas and the questions that surround them are the basis of a specific field of philosophy called ethics. The aim of ethics, or moral philosophy, is to explain what we mean by morality and moral terms such as 'good', 'right', 'wrong' and so on, as well as what moral standards we should adopt. This is an essential aspect of philosophy in so far as most of the decisions we make and the actions we decide to perform are informed by moral principles.

The religion and ethics element of the course is covered in Sections 3 and 4, and you will return to it in the second half of the course if you decide to pursue the full A level, so what follows is simply an introduction. In this introductory topic, we will look at the main concepts that moral philosophy refers to and the different philosophical approaches to the issue of morality.



You will probably need 3 hours to complete this topic.

## Objectives

When you have completed this topic you should be able to:

- identify the core aspects of moral philosophy
- explain the difference between moral, immoral and amoral actions

- outline the three main fields of ethics
- explain the aims of ethical theories, meta-ethics and applied ethics.

## What is ethics?

Morality understood in an everyday sense broadly means having some kind of system of values – deciding what is right or wrong for yourself. Ethics, however, takes a much more systematic and critical approach to the question. The focus of ethics is indeed the notion of right and wrong, but what it attempts to explain is why people make certain moral decisions and how we create moral systems which tell us how to act. Some ethical theories also aim to tell us what moral standards we should choose and how we could achieve the good life. While non-philosophers see morality as a set of rules to obey and principles to follow, moral philosophers want to know how those rules can be justified and what is the logic behind moral judgement.

Thus, while morality refers to the rules and codes that we live our lives by and tells us how we should live and act and develop as humans, ethics goes beyond that and looks for reasons why we should adopt a certain system of values. Ethical thinking is about thinking critically about what, as a person, you should do, what others should do and what sort of person you should be.

Examples of ethical questions are:

- How ought we to live?
- What makes our actions right or wrong?
- What does it mean to call actions right or wrong?
- Do non-human animals have rights?
- What is the link between religion and morality?

## What is a moral issue?

One of the first tasks of moral philosophy is to be clear on what makes an action moral and to differentiate between moral and non-moral judgments. Clearly, telling a friend that she should buy the red coat I have just seen in a shop is not a moral judgement, whereas telling her that she shouldn't buy a red coat made by child labourers in India is. But how can we explain the difference between the two?

Think about this in the first activity.

## Activity 1

(Allow 5 minutes)

Which of the following are moral issues?

- We shouldn't litter the street.
- You shouldn't tell white lies.
- We should watch TV.
- We shouldn't experiment on animals
- I should get 3 A levels.

Most people would argue that telling white lies and experimenting on animals are moral issues whereas getting good grades or watching TV aren't. However, notice that the same key term 'should', a term which has some moral dimension, is used in each case. 'Should' has a prudential use, which means that it is based on careful consideration, something that has been thought about; it also has a moral use, in so far as it makes implicit reference to some kind of guideline of behaviour or principle. A non-moral action doesn't involve the consideration of principles.

The main difference, then, between moral and non-moral issues is that moral issues are based on values rather than facts.

- A fact is a descriptive statement about the world, but could also be what the law says, what religions say or what takes place in nature - for example, 'it is illegal to have abortions in Ireland', 'people are banned from smoking in public places in England'. These are facts.
- A value, however, is never intended to be descriptive: it is a judgement about the world and implies the acceptance or rejection of norms of behaviour, and the understanding of terms such as right or wrong. Examples include 'it is unacceptable for women to have abortions', 'you shouldn't smoke in front of your children'.

Philosophers investigate the relationship between facts and values, which means how we view the world and the moral principles we adopt.

This has led philosophers to make a distinction between moral, immoral and amoral actions.

- A moral action is an action which is considered morally right or good.
- An immoral action is an action that is considered morally wrong.
- An amoral action is one performed by someone who is not morally aware, i.e. doesn't have any concept or understanding of right and wrong.
- A morally neutral action is one that is independent of moral judgement, for example the prudential use of the verb 'should' when we say you should eat more fruit.

## Activity 2

(Allow 5 minutes)

Are the following actions moral, immoral or amoral?

- 1 A lion killing a zebra.
- 2 A toddler hitting a baby.
- 3 A 19-year-old man stealing from a shop.
- 4 A child accidentally firing a gun and injuring a relative.
- 5 A 40-year-old woman hitting her child.

Don't read any further until you have noted down your answers.

You should have noted that examples 1, 2 and 4 are amoral, because animals and small children do not have a concept of right and wrong. You might have thought that even a young child should realise that it is wrong to fire guns at people, but the point is that a young child does not have sufficient moral awareness for us to describe this action as immoral. (The age of criminal responsibility in England and Wales is 10.) Examples 3 and 5 clearly are immoral, unless the people in question were known to have some kind of cognitive impairment that affected decision-making.

Philosophers recognise certain requirements as essential to be able to have moral choice and make moral decisions. A moral agent is a being who is capable of moral decisions; with this capacity comes responsibility for the moral or immoral behaviour chosen. The main criteria for moral agency would be the following:

- We need to be free to make choices – moral philosophers presume free will.
- We need to be rational – able to look at the pros and cons of decisions and weigh up consequences.
- We need to be self-aware and conscious – we understand that we are the ones performing the action.
- The act must be intentional.
- The act has an effect – beneficial or harmful – on others, in so far as it can benefit them or harm them.

### Activity 3

(Allow 5 minutes)

Think carefully about the last point. What problem does this throw up?

The core problem in ethics is however who we define 'others'. Are the beings in our moral sphere moral agents like us, or could they be beings incapable of moral choice, such as animals, people in a coma or newborn babies? The treatment of animals is a good example. If we accept that animals are not moral agents, are we free to treat them as we wish?

Philosophers are aware of the problem and make a distinction between moral agents and moral patients. While a moral agent is one who is capable of moral choice, a moral patient is not capable of making a moral decision but still partakes in the moral realm. Thus, most of us would not give a second thought to killing a wasp buzzing by a window, but we wouldn't hurt a newborn baby. A baby is part of the moral world, in so far as we have moral responsibilities towards it. This distinction will be particularly important when you look at practical ethics and the issues of abortion and euthanasia.

## The three main approaches to ethics

There are three main types of ethical theory:

- meta-ethical theories.
- ethical theories, also called normative theories

- applied ethics.

Meta-ethics, also called ethical language, is the branch of ethics that deals with the meaning of ethical terms. Instead of asking what is moral, what makes an action moral, or how to behave in a moral way, meta-ethics thinks about the meaning of terms such as 'good', 'evil', 'just', 'right', etc.

There are two main approaches to meta-ethics:

- Moral realism argues that moral truths or facts exist. When we say 'good', for example, we are referring to an objective property that exists in the world.
- Moral anti-realism argues that moral truths do not exist and that moral judgements are just based on individual likes and dislikes.

Ethical theories or normative theories don't look at the meaning of ethical terms like 'good'; rather, they try to define what good actions can be and apply them to real life. Ethical theories set up moral standards and tell us how we should behave – or not. They are called 'normative' theories because they examine the norms by which people make moral choices. This involves questions about our duty (what we 'ought' to do) and questions about the values that are expressed through moral choices (what constitutes a 'good life'). Philosophers have argued about whether moral codes should be based on intention and motive, positive consequences, or virtues – or, in the case of situation ethics, whether morality should be based on what we consider the most loving.

Applied or practical ethics is the area which has the most relevance to our everyday life. One of the main aims of applied ethics is to solve moral dilemmas in a systematic and philosophical way. For example, the areas it may consider include:

- Abortion – Is it ever morally justifiable? At what stage of foetal development should it be illegal? Are fetuses persons and therefore in possession of rights?
- Euthanasia – Can assisted suicide be moral?
- Animal rights – Are animals part of the moral world? Do they have rights?

In this A level course, you will investigate four main areas of applied ethics.

In the first part of the course (AS), you will consider the following:

- Environmental ethics – Do we have a moral duty and responsibility towards the environment and the animal kingdom? Do animals have rights?

- Equality – What does the concept of equality mean in relation to gender, race and disability?
- Just war – Can a war ever be just and morally justifiable? Can there be good reasons to start a war? Can there be moral ways to conduct a war and a moral way to act once it is over?
- Sexual ethics – What sexual behaviours can be considered moral or immoral in our liberal society? Do religious approaches still matter or are they outdated?

In the second half of the A level course, you will consider the following two aspects of medical ethics:

- What is the status of the embryo? You'll think about medical research, pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD), stem cells and cord blood, in-vitro fertilisation (IVF), destruction of embryos and abortion.
- Can assisted dying be considered moral? You'll consider euthanasia, palliative care, current legal positions and concepts of rights and responsibilities, personhood and human nature, options and choices.

You will focus on both secular and religious approaches and evaluate their relative strengths and weaknesses.

## Making moral decisions

Throughout the religion and ethics element of this course, you will need to reflect on how you make moral decisions and whether you are consistent when you are faced with moral dilemmas. The following activity tests whether your decisions are consistent and logical and should encourage you to think about the criteria you use to make moral decisions. Is it intentions, consequences or something else which forms the basis of your moral code?

### Activity 4

(Allow 20 minutes)

Have a think about these famous philosophical 'thought experiments'.

Imagine yourself to be a surgeon, a truly great surgeon. Among other things you do, you transplant organs, and you are such a great surgeon that the organs you transplant always take. At the moment you have five patients who need organs. Two need one lung each, two need a kidney each, and the fifth needs a heart. If they do not get those organs today, they will all die; if you find organs for them today, you can transplant the organs and they will all live. But where to find the lungs, the kidneys, and the heart? The time is almost up when a report

is brought to you that a young backpacker who has just come into your clinic for his yearly check-up has exactly the right blood-type, and is in excellent health. Lo, you have a possible donor. All you need do is cut him up and distribute his parts among the five who need them.

### Do you kill the backpacker?

Suppose you are the driver of a trolley. The trolley rounds a bend, and there come into view ahead five track workmen, who have been repairing the track. The track goes through a bit of a valley at that point, and the sides are steep, so you must stop the trolley if you are to avoid running the five men down. You step on the brakes, but they don't work. Now you suddenly see a spur of track leading off to the right. You can turn the trolley onto it, and thus save the five men on the straight track ahead. Unfortunately, there is one track workman on that spur of track. He can no more get off the track in time than the five can, so you will kill him if you turn onto the spur.

### Do you turn off on the spur or keep going?

Suppose you are on a footbridge above the line. You can see that the trolley approaching the bridge is out of control and will hit the five workmen stuck on the track just beyond the bridge. The only way to stop the trolley is to drop a heavy weight onto the track in front of it. The only heavy weight available is the fat man standing on the bridge next to you. You can push him in front of the trolley; he will certainly die but the trolley will stop and the five workmen will be saved. Or do you allow the trolley to continue on its path?

### Do you save the fat man?

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What you probably found out is that some of your moral decisions seem inconsistent. While it appears morally acceptable to press the switch so that the trolley kills one person in order to save five, it seems immoral to push the fat man onto the track to stop the trolley. Somehow, although the consequences are the same (killing one man to save five), pushing the man seems more of an action than pressing a switch, which in turn means a greater moral responsibility. The question we can ask, however, is whether it is rational to think that way. Similarly, despite the fact that the aim of a doctor is to save lives, it feels wrong to kill an innocent person to donate his organs, even though that means five people will now live.

A number of works of fiction deal with similar issues and suggestions for reading are given at the end of this topic.

## Self check

(Allow 15minutes)

Explain the difference between the three areas of ethics: normative ethics, meta-ethics, applied ethics.

You will find feedback to self checks at the end of the section.

## Summary

Ethics, or moral philosophy, is the field of philosophy that deals with issues of right and wrong. It takes a systematic approach to the problem of morality by investigating what we mean by morality and why it is so essential to human flourishing. There are three main approaches to ethics. The first – ethical theory, also called normative ethics – tries to establish objective and universal moral standards for us to follow. The second approach to ethics is that of meta-ethics, a more abstract form of philosophy that investigates the linguistic meaning of moral terms. Meta-ethics has debated whether moral truths exist, which means whether the term ‘good’ reflects something that actually exists in the world. Finally, applied ethics attempts to solve moral dilemmas, such as the validity of euthanasia or genetic engineering and whether animals have rights.

## Going further

The following novels address some key ethical problems:

Isabel Allende, *City of the Beasts*, Flamingo, 2003 (environmental ethics)

Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, Virago, 2013 (environmental ethics, medical ethics)

Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Vintage Future, 2016 (equality, genetic engineering)

Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*, Vintage Classics, 2007 (utilitarianism)

Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, Faber & Faber, 2010 (medical ethics)

Jodi Picoult, *My Sister's Keeper*, Hodder, 2013 (medical ethics)

Jodi Picoult, *Lone Wolf*, Hodder, 2013 (assisted suicide)

See also Edmonds, D (2010) 'Matters of life and death', *Prospect Magazine*, 7 Oct 2010, accessed 10 June 2016

[www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/features/ethics-trolley-problem](http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/features/ethics-trolley-problem)



## Topic 3

# Introduction to Christianity

## Introduction

Paper 4 of the Edexcel AS and A level course focuses on the study of religion. This element of the course asks you to investigate and explore the following in relation to a particular religion:

- religious beliefs, values and teachings
- sources of wisdom and authority
- practices that shape and express religious identity
- social and historical developments
- the works of scholars and the place of religion in society.

For this NEC course, you will study Option 4B: Christianity, which is the focus of Section 5 in the first half of the course. You will return to the study of Christianity in the second half of the course if you decide to pursue the full A level. This topic is designed to provide you with a brief introduction.

Section 5 will provide a foundation for understanding the key tenets and values of the Christian religion. In studying Christianity, you will look at how Christian believers attribute authority to key people in the religious community and to sacred texts. You will look at the ways Christians express their beliefs and how such beliefs and practices have changed over time. There will also be an opportunity to look at the contribution of key scholars and the contribution of Christianity to contemporary society.



You will probably need 2 hours to complete this topic.

## Activity 1

(Allow 15 minutes)

Take some time to reflect on what you know about Christianity. Perhaps you, yourself, are a Christian; perhaps you were brought up as a Christian but no longer believe; or perhaps you subscribe to another faith. Whatever your situation, think about what you do know about the Christian religion. How many followers do you think it has? What are its main texts? What are its core beliefs or different branches?

In the twenty-first century, approximately one-third of the human race identifies itself as Christian. In 2011 Christianity was the most popular religion in the world, with over two billion adherents; 42 million Britons saw themselves as nominally Christian, with six million of these actively practising.

There are several branches of Christianity. Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox are the main branches, but within these there are many variations and practices: Opus Dei, Anglicans, Pentecostals, the Coptic Orthodox Church, Methodists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, etc.

While these groups may disagree on key rituals and practices, they share a belief in the basic truths of the Christian religion. The essential tenet of Christianity is that Jesus was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God and that God sent his son to earth to save humanity from the consequences of its sins.

One of the most important concepts in Christianity is that of Jesus giving his life on the cross (the crucifixion) and rising from the dead on the third day (the resurrection). Christians believe that there is only one God, but that there are three elements – the Holy Trinity – to this one God:

- God the Father
- God the Son
- God the Holy Spirit.

## A brief history of Christianity

This history of Christianity begins with and is focused on the life, death and resurrection of one person, Jesus Christ, the son of God. Born a Jew in the Roman province of Judaea, now part of modern Palestine, little is known of his early life, but at around the age of 30, Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist and had a vision in which he received the blessing of God. After this event, he began a ministry of teaching, healing, and miracle-working. After just a few years, opposition mounted against Jesus, particularly because he claimed publicly that he spoke with the authority of God. This claim angered the Jewish religious authorities and they handed Jesus over to the Roman authorities as a revolutionary. He was tried, condemned and put to death by means of crucifixion.

Most of Jesus' followers scattered, dismayed at such an unexpected outcome. But three days later, women who went to anoint his body reported that the tomb was empty and an angel told them that Jesus had risen from the dead. The disciples were initially sceptical, but later came to believe. They reported that Jesus appeared to them on several occasions and then ascended into heaven before their eyes.

### Study hint

Dates used to be expressed as either BC (Before Christ) or AD (*anno domini*) and these terms are still in use. Nowadays, however, you are more likely to see dates expressed as BCE (Before Common Era) or CE (Common Era) in order to display sensitivity towards non-Christians.

## First-century Christianity

The remainder of the first-century CE saw the number of Jesus' followers, who were soon called 'Christians', grow rapidly. Instrumental in the spread of Christianity was a man named Paul, a zealous Jew who had persecuted Christians, then experienced a vision of the risen Jesus. Taking advantage of the extensive system of Roman roads and a period of peace, Paul went on numerous missionary journeys throughout the Roman Empire. He started churches, then wrote letters back to them to offer further counsel and encouragement. Many of these letters would become part of the Christian scriptures, the New Testament.

In the second and third centuries, Christians struggled with persecution from outside the church and doctrinal debates within the church. Christian leaders, the so-called 'church fathers', wrote

defences against the false claims made against Christians (apologetics) as well as arguments against false teachings spreading within the church (polemics). Doctrines were explored, developed, and solidified; the canon of the New Testament was formed, and the notion of 'apostolic succession' established a system of authority to guard against wrong interpretations of Christian teachings.

## Constantine and the Eastern Church

A major turning point in Christian history came in the early fourth century when the Roman emperor Constantine converted to Christianity. The Christian religion became legal, persecution ceased, and thousands of pagans now found it convenient to convert to the emperor's faith. Now allied with the Roman Empire, Christianity gradually rose in power until it became the 'Christendom' that would encompass the entire western world in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

Emperor Constantine hoped that Christianity would be the uniting force of his empire, but the development of a dispute over Arianism, which held that Christ was more than a man but less than God himself, began to cause fractures in the church. In 325 CE, Constantine called the Council of Nicea so that the bishops could work out their differences. They condemned Arius and Arianism and declared the Son (Christ) to be of 'one substance' with the Father. The Nicene creed, named after this council, is still widely used in the Christian liturgy. After the council, St Athanasius of Alexandria continued to battle the Arians, but the orthodox view eventually won out for good. The church then turned to issues about Christ's divine and human natures, which were essentially resolved at the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE).

In the meantime, the considerable religious, cultural and political differences between the Eastern and Western churches were becoming increasingly apparent. Religiously, the two parts of Christendom had different views on topics such as the use of icons and the nature of the Holy Spirit. Culturally, the Greek East has always tended to be more philosophical and abstract in its thinking, while the Latin West tended toward a more pragmatic and legal-minded approach. These various factors finally came to a head in 1054 when Pope Leo IX excommunicated the Patriarch of Constantinople, the leader of the Eastern Church. The Patriarch condemned the Pope in return, and the Christian church has been officially divided into West (Roman) and Eastern (Greek) since then. The Eastern Church (Orthodox) in turn developed into different

churches in Eastern Europe: Greek Orthodox, Serbian Orthodox and Russian Orthodox.

## The Reformation: the development of Protestantism

In the Western Church, the Roman Catholic faith was the main branch of western Christianity until, in 1517, a German monk named Martin Luther posted 97 complaints against the practice of selling indulgences on the church door in Württemberg (a town in modern-day Germany). An indulgence was the full or partial remission of punishment for sin. This was supposed to happen through the performing of good works or missionary duties but priests increasingly 'sold' indulgences for monetary gain.

Luther had experienced a personal conversion to the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Justification by faith means that you can only attain salvation – a place in heaven – through true faith and not simply through good works (which was the standard teaching at the time). Luther was regarded as a danger to the Roman Catholic Church and was excommunicated (thrown out) from the Church. He barely escaped with his life on more than one occasion, but lived out his life spreading his ideas on church reform and died a natural death. His ideas had already spread throughout Germany, and similar reforming movements sprung up in England and Switzerland. Soon much of Europe was embroiled in war, with Protestant nationalists fighting Catholic imperialists for religious and political freedom. Support came from sincere religious reformers, while others manipulated the movement to gain control of valuable church property (for example Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries in England). The term Protestant was not initially applied to the reformers, but later was used to describe all groups protesting Roman Catholic orthodoxy.

As hope of reforming the Roman church faded, the 'protestants' were forced to separate from Roman Catholicism, resulting in Lutheran churches in Germany, Scandinavia and some Eastern European countries, the Reformed churches in Switzerland and the Netherlands, Presbyterian churches in Scotland, and the Anglican church in England, and other diverse elements, all of which have evolved into the Protestant denominations of today.

In the seventeenth century, Christians of many ideologies, but particularly the more zealous of the Protestant faiths, embarked on the hazardous journey across the Atlantic to the promise of religious freedom and economic prosperity in the New World. Quakers went to Pennsylvania, Catholics to Maryland, and Dutch

Reformed to New York. Later came Swedish Lutherans and French Huguenots, English Baptists and Scottish Presbyterians. With the exception of some Puritan communities, there was no attempt to impose religious uniformity in America.

## Modern Christianity

In the twentieth century, as western imperialism broke up and disappeared, there was a new revival of growth in Christianity in Latin America and Africa and parts of Asia. Geographically, Christianity had always been centered in Europe, but during the twentieth century the focus of Christianity has moved south. The Christian faith has also changed in other ways with new movements changing the shape of the modern church. Movements such as Christian Liberalism, Fundamentalism, Evangelism, Pentecostalism and Charismatic revival have had a huge impact on the differing interpretations of Christianity over issues such as women priests, marriage within the priesthood, gay marriage and homosexuality. In the later part of the twentieth century and the early part of this century there has been a crisis in traditional church authority because of increased affluence, choice, education, mobility and access to knowledge. This has led to the growth of movements catering for a more personal experience and allowing for greater lay participation, which some traditional forms of Christianity are finding it hard to accept.

### Activity 2

(Allow 30 minutes)

Do your own research into the historical development of Christianity. This is a huge subject, so focus on an area that interests you, for example the Reformation or the Crusades (*The History of the Crusades* by Steven Runciman is considered to be a classic investigation). There is a huge amount of information online. You could start with the religion pages on the BBC website. The Christianity page has, amongst many other things, links to some of the ethical issues you considered in Topic 2.

If you don't have internet access you might want to read one of the introductions to Christianity listed at the end of this topic. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* has some useful information too.

As you work through the early sections of the course, keep an eye out for religious debates in the newspapers and on TV. The debates over women priests and the celibacy requirement for Catholic priests are never far from the front pages. You could also follow church debates

with an ethical dimension, for example calls for abortion to be legalised in Northern Ireland. What is the Church of England saying about poverty and disease in parts of the so-called Third World?

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## Self check

(Allow 10 minutes)

Test your recall of this brief introduction to Christianity by answering the questions below.

- 1 What are the three elements of the Holy Trinity?
- 2 What is the key belief of the Christian faith?
- 3 Which Christian convert was instrumental in the spread of Christianity in the first century CE?
- 4 Who was the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity?
- 5 What is another name for the Eastern Church?
- 6 Martin Luther was a key figure in which religious movement?
- 7 What is justification by faith?
- 8 How many Britons describe themselves as practising Christians?

You will find feedback to self checks at the end of the section.

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## Summary

As we study Christianity we will be looking at some of its history because the context within which its key tenets developed is important. But we will really be focusing on ideas about the nature of God as personal and as Creator, ideas about the Trinity, the nature of the church and its key principles. You will also look at the Bible, the nature of the role of Jesus and the practices which express the Christian identity.

Whatever faith you subscribe to, or if you don't subscribe to a faith or belief, it is important to come to the study of any religion with an open mind and an interest in engaging with the key debates and arguments.

Your study of Christianity should prove to be an enjoyable journey through the key issues, ideas and practices of one of the world's most important religions. The study of Christianity should give you the skills and understanding needed to explore other religions and to grasp what it means to be a religious believer today in our increasingly diverse and secular society.

### **Study tip**

Although you will not study the Bible as a text during your work on Section 5, you will find it useful to have a copy with you as you study this section as we will refer to it throughout the topics.

## **Going further**

For a brief introduction to Christianity, try:

Ward, K (2007) *Christianity (A Beginner's Guide)*, Oxford: Oneworld Publications

Woodhead, L (2014) *Christianity: A Very Short Introduction* (2nd edition), Oxford: Oxford University Press

(Note that there are introductions to all the major religions in this excellent OUP series.)

You might also be interested in:

*A History of Christian Thought* by Justo González (Nashville: Abingdon Press) is in three volumes which together cover the history of Christianity from its beginnings to the twentieth century

McMullen, R (1991) *Paganism and Christianity, 100–425 CE: A Sourcebook*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press