

Philosophy

Philosophy is an academically demanding subject but one that will open new avenues and challenges to those that study it. It is a stand-alone A Level and does not require any previous knowledge or understanding, just an inquisitive mind and one that likes exploring the big questions in life. Philosophy is a subject that will interest anyone, regardless of their academic background. This is because in and of itself, Philosophy is a study of knowledge and wisdom and what it is to be human.

The A Level is split between two 3-hour papers. The first paper looks at Epistemology and Moral Philosophy, the second and metaphysics of God and metaphysics of Mind.

Epistemology is a study of the theory of knowledge. We study what knowledge is and where it might come from. When we say 'I know X' what does that mean? Does knowledge have to be justified or can it be lucky? If I said what is my number plate and you guessed the right answer, does that constitute knowledge? Questions such as these are ones we attempt to answer.

We then look at whether knowledge comes purely from the senses (and whether they can be trusted) or whether knowledge can come through intuition and deduction (which would seem infallible). Epistemology also covers scepticism about the real world and attempts to answer whether or not a tree that falls in the wood with no one around makes a sound!

Moral Philosophy is a study of ethics. Ethical theory is an important area of study in so many different walks of life so knowing how to make these decisions is of crucial importance. We look at normative ethics (what rules should we follow in making decisions) and meta-ethics (what does the word 'good' or the word 'bad' actually mean).

After studying a variety of different theories, ranging from Utilitarianism to Kantian Ethics boys apply these to real life situations and also theoretical ones, ranging from the obvious to the more nuanced such as simulated killing in computer games.

Metaphysics of God is a study of the Philosophy of Religion. We start by examining the classic concept of God and its implications, asking questions such as 'Can an all-powerful being make a weight too heavy for him/her to lift?'. Secondly, we look at arguments given by Philosophers for and against the existence of God, ranging from possible design in the universe to the deductive, logical based arguments given by Descartes. Finally, we delve into religious language and the issues surrounding it such as how it is possible to talk meaningfully about a deity.

Metaphysics of Mind is a study of the mind/body problem and the potential solutions to it. It is an examination of what it is to be conscious and all its implications. We examine questions such as 'how can we have free will and consciousness in a world constrained by the laws of physics?' or 'how do I know anyone else has a mind when I can never experience anything but my own?'. This is looked at through the prism of dualism (the mind is a separate 'thing') and physicalism (mind and body are one).

The course includes readings and works by many Philosophers ranging from Descartes to Bertrand Russell to Wittgenstein and helps boys learn many new skills such as presenting an argument logically and being able to critically analyse difficult text. It is a thoroughly enjoyable subject and should you wish to know more do not hesitate to contact me or anyone else in the department.

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