



A level Religious Studies (Philosophy and Ethics)

Who is this course for?

It's for anyone who wants to know more about the big questions in life, such as – Is there a God? What's the difference between right and wrong? Is there life after death? Is the universe just an accident? Is killing human beings sometimes right? Does science disprove God? Can miracles happen?

NB. It doesn't matter whether or not you have a religious faith. All you need is to be interested in discussing and writing about the sorts of questions listed above.

What are the entry criteria?

Students will need an average of grade C at GCSE (average score of 5.0) in at least 5 subjects including English Language.

The Religious Studies department at Wyke Sixth Form college.

Noel Stewart runs the department and is the sole (or should that be 'soul') teacher. He has an MA in philosophy, and another MA in Theology & Religious Studies, and has written a book on Ethics. He was once an assistant minister, but is now an atheist.

His having had a foot in both religious and nonreligious camps should help bring a balanced approach to the subject.

Exam Board

AQA

Course Details

There are four units of study, units 1 and 2 at AS, and units 3 and 4 at A2. All are taken as exams at the end of the first and second years. There is no coursework at all. The two AS exams last 1 hour 15 minutes each, and the two A2 exams last 1 hour and 30 minutes each.

The content of each unit is briefly as follows:

Unit 1 (AS) - First Topic

The moral theory of Utilitarianism, including two of its main versions,

Viz. Act Utilitarianism (Jeremy Bentham's theory).

And Rule Utilitarianism (John Stuart Mill's theory).

These are contrasted with a deontological approach to ethics – we look at Immanuel Kant's moral theory as an example of this.

We also look at whether utilitarianism is compatible with religious ethics, and with its application to the question of animal rights.

Unit 1 (AS) - Second Topic

We study two practical moral issues – **abortion**, and **euthanasia**, using the concepts and theories learned in unit 1, to better understand and appreciate the arguments for and against.

Unit 2 (AS) - First Topic

Miracles: What does the word 'miracle' even mean? For example, what people call the miracle of modern technology is a far cry from walking on water or telling a storm to stop. These break laws of nature whereas the first one does not.

What evidence and arguments are there for miracles in the natural law-breaking sense?

Unit 2 (AS) – Second Topic

The Argument from Design: We examine this famous and influential argument for the existence of God, looking at the pros and cons. The argument appeals to the orderliness of the world, and its spectacular complexity, as evidence for the existence of a cosmic Designer who planned it and put it all together. Surely all of this couldn't have happened by chance.

Unit 3 (A2) – First Topic

Body, Soul, and Personal Identity: Do we have a soul? If not, is death the end of me? What makes me the same person from one day to the next? If I need my body in order to be me, how can I even be the same person after death as I was before, since I will have lost my body?

Unit 3 (A2) – Second Topic

The Problem of Evil: This problem is a major problem which helps to prevent many people from believing in God. It's a question nearly everyone has asked at one time or another: "How can God, who is supposed to be loving and good, create a world like this with so much suffering?"

We look at the arguments for and against.

Unit 4 (A2) – Only one Topic

Life, Death, and Beyond: This involves an examination of the differences between religious and nonreligious beliefs about, and attitudes towards, the nature and value of life in the here and now, and to the eventual death of the individual, and what that might mean.

How the course is delivered

There are four, 70 minute lessons per week, taught by Noel Stewart. Students will typically do a variety of things in lessons, such as doing presentations, watch and discuss a movie, write an essay, do a quiz, read take notes on handouts, debate topics, and so on.

Departmental Enrichment

Students may be offered the chance to attend a one-day student conference on religious studies themes. These are usually held in London.

Student Success

This is a brand new course at Wyke, so we are looking forward to many stories of successful students in this our first year as the Religious Studies department.

What does this course lead to?

As a respected A level qualification, it will form part of a student's application to university. There is no specific career uniquely linked with religious studies, but it is an invaluable preparation for university-level courses in the humanities, such as history, philosophy, theology, and any course with an ethics element, eg. medicine.

But ultimately, and fundamentally, it should lead to a student being a better-informed, better educated, and hopefully better, human being.

What can I do now that would help prepare me for this?

There are some useful introductory books such as 'Teach Yourself Ethics', which you might try reading.

If you're really keen then try Richard Dawkins's pot-boiler, 'The God Delusion'. It's a good read but very one-sided.

If you're desperate, you could even try my book! It's called, 'ETHICS: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy' and it's published by Polity Press.

Keep an eye out for news stories involving moral issues, (which is practically every news story ever), but particularly those to do with abortion and euthanasia.