



The Thomas Hardy School

## Summer Preparation Task

Religious Studies Philosophy A Level  
2 of 3

### Purpose of task:

To explore the origins of philosophical thinking and how it attempted to define the nature of reality.

### Recommended resources:

1. 'An Introduction to Ancient Greek Philosophy'
2. The Problem of Evil – Peter Vardy

This can be found in the Summer Tasks page on the school website under 'Theology and Ethics Philosophy task' and at the end of this document

### Additional Activities : Research Activity x 2

1. The Problem of Evil – Article at the end of the document

*'How can you believe in an all-good, all-powerful God in the face of this suffering? Nothing is worth the suffering of these innocents and if the price for love is that human beings can do this to each other, then it would have been better for God to have created no world at all rather than this one'. Ivan rejects God even though he believes that God exists. There is no easy philosophic answer to Ivan's challenge to God, which is probably the most devastating ever written.*

This article asks you to consider the problem of evil in the world with the belief in an omnipotent God who has given humans free will. The article will place these problems in the context of some of the most awful examples of human evil towards one another and see if a belief in an omnipotent God can be maintained in the face of such evil

Summarise it – explain the key points in each paragraph. What is the main argument of the article ? Do you agree /disagree refer specifically back to points raised.

### 2. Religious Experience: case studies

Create a table of case studies for this topic – explain what happened and to who.

Teresa of Avila -

The Wind in the Willows <http://www.online-literature.com/grahame/windwillows/7/>

Isaiah – Isaiah 6 1-13 – use Bible Gateway <https://www.biblegateway.com/>

Saul's conversion (became Paul) Acts 9: 1-22

Toronto blessing

Pentecost

**Stretch and challenge:** explain the different types of religious experience and explain which category each example above falls into and why.

<https://philosophydungeon.weebly.com/types-of-religious-experience.html>

**Deadline for Task:** First lesson in week commencing 13<sup>th</sup> September 2021



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## Summer Preparation Task

Religious Studies Philosophy A Level  
2 of 3

### Essential Activities : Pre-knowledge x 2

#### 1. The Ancient Greeks

After reading the article 'An Introduction to Ancient Greek Philosophy', answer the following questions:

1. Give a definition of the term 'philosophy' with reference to its two parts.
2. Explain what it was that the ancient Greeks sought to know.
3. Explain the Greek's aim to understand the framework in relation to the details of existence. Refer to the building trade metaphor in your explanation.
4. What impact did philosophy as 'knowledge of Reality or Being' have on how a person lived?
5. Why did the ancient Greeks distinguish humanity from other sentient beings?
6. Bernard Lonergan argues that the distinction is due to our capacity for self-transcendence. What does this mean?
7. Explain the 'anti-philosopher' stance held by (a) the Sophists and (b) the Skeptics.
8. To what does the term 'pre-Socratic' refer?

#### 2. Ontological Argument

Read:

<http://www.philosophyofreligion.info/theistic-proofs/the-ontological-argument/>

Use the tabs down the side to read about Anselm's argument, Gaunilo, Existence is not a real predicate

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/ont-arg/>

Watch:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jsNdL\\_ANjAA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jsNdL_ANjAA)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SlkVU0AcSMw>

Using the resources above and any additional resources you can find online.

Anselm and Gaunilo were contemporaries (they lived both at the same time). I would like you to imagine that they were pen pals (Anselm and Gaunilo) who were writing letters to each other. In your letter as Anselm- please outline the argument for the existence. In the letter from Gaunilo explain what issues you have with Anselm's argument.

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Whole.

## 2. Possibility of Philosophy

Ancient Greek philosophy generally distinguished human beings from other sentient beings by asserting that that the former had the capacity to philosophize; often they explained this by postulating that human beings possessed reason (logos), or some such expression. What they seem to have meant by this is explained by Bernard Lonergan, who is a modern philosopher standing within the Aristotelian tradition (Aristotle was, of course, an ancient Greek philosopher). According to Lonergan, what the Greek philosophers meant when they said that human beings possessed reason (or some similar expression) was that what distinguished a human being from another sentient being was the capacity for self-transcendence.

What does this mean? Well, transcendence denotes the state of having gone beyond. Thus, self-transcendence is the state of having gone beyond oneself. One does this whenever one goes beyond the world of pure, practical self-interest and seeks to know something for its own sake. Human beings have, according to Lonergan, the pure, unrestricted desire to know; this is a distinctively human. This pure, unrestricted desire to know drives us beyond ourselves in an effort to understand reality for its own sake. When all of our physical needs have been met, we do not curl up and go to sleep, as a dog does; instead we begin to ask questions. This is our uniqueness: the capacity and drive to ask questions about everything. This is why Lonergan writes, "Man is an animal for whom mere animality is indecent" (*Insight*, 187). According to Lonergan, the unrestricted desire to know will eventually lead one to ask the question about Being, so that all human beings are (potentially at least) philosophers.

The possibility of self-transcendence also means that human beings are capable of examining courses of action and choosing the one which is logically demanded by reality, often called the good. Thus, the human being is intrinsically an ethical being.

## 3. Possibility that Philosophy is 'Impossibility'

There was a subversive undercurrent in Greek intellectual culture, standing in opposition to the basic assumption shared by all philosophers in spite of their diversity. These *anti*-philosophers viewed the goal of philosophy as unattainable. Either there is no Reality to know behind the world of common sense or, if there is such a Reality, it is inaccessible to human beings. The Sophists fall into the first class of anti-philosopher, while the Skeptics fall into the second class.

Given all the different versions of Reality or Being that were produced by Greek philosophy (and those produced by philosophers from different cultures and eras), it seems that the Sophists and the Skeptics may be correct in their criticisms of philosophy. If philosophy were possible, one would expect after so many centuries of philosophical activity that there would be consensus; there is none, however, so far.....

## The Pre-Socratics



The roots of Western philosophy (as opposed to Eastern, i.e., Indian and Chinese) are to be found in the pre-Socratic philosophers, beginning in the sixth century BCE. These philosophers lived, as the term implies, before Socrates, so that they obviously did not consider themselves as pre-Socratics; this is a term that was imposed upon them by later generations. The fact that they are called "pre-Socratics" implies that ancient Greek philosophy should be organized around Socrates and Plato. This implies that all pre-Socratic philosophers were preliminary to or preparatory of Socrates and Plato. That this is true is, however, a presupposition that should not necessarily be

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accepted as fact. Most of the so-called pre-Socratics came from the eastern or western parts of the Greek world; Athens would only later enter the philosophical fray.

### **Additional information:**

Please contact Mr Matthews ([kmatthews@thomas-hardye.net](mailto:kmatthews@thomas-hardye.net)) or Mrs Selway [cselway@thomas-hardye.net](mailto:cselway@thomas-hardye.net) for further information

### **Recommended reading list:**

- Plato, Republic Book V.476f, Book VII.507b-513e
- Aristotle, Physics II.3 and Metaphysics V.2
- Annas, J. (1998) An Introduction to Plato's Republic, Oxford University Press, Chapters 9 and 10
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2004)

### **Required Stationery and Equipment for A Level Theology and Ethics**

- 3 x lever arch 'archive folders' (colour coded – blue for Philosophy, red for Ethics and orange for Buddhism) with dividers named with the units covered [you will need at least 6 dividers per component] (This is to stay at home safely so if the ring binder 'working folder' is lost, say on the bus, it is not catastrophic!)
- 3 x ring binder 'working folders' (blue, red and orange) with a sufficient amount of lined paper inside it for note taking (This is the folder students carry with them to and from school and has the notes from the unit currently being studied)
- At least two working ball point or biro pens
- Coloured highlighters
- General personal stationery as preferred – suggested items to include pencils, ruler etc.

### **Essential Resources**

'Oxford A Level Religious Studies for OCR: Year 1' textbook by Ahluwalia and Bowie. ISBN: 978-0-19-839285-9

### **Things to Consider Throughout the Year**

Read 'Sophie's World' by Jostein Gaardner as an overview of Philosophy, watch the news regularly to keep up-to-date with current ethical affairs. There will be several trips and visitors from the Buddhist tradition.

The exam board we study for Religious Studies is OCR and our chosen religion is Buddhism. [Please see link below]

<http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/as-a-level-gce-religious-studies-h173-h573-from-2016/>

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# The Free Will Defence

Peter Vardy

Writing an article for *Dialogue* is not easy. It will be read by teachers with degrees in Theology and Philosophy, those about to take A-levels who may have had two years studying Philosophy of Religion, and by first-year sixthformers who have done little work so far in the subject. How much does one assume one's reader knows? For those who have written on evil the problem is made worse as some readers may have read their books and there is nothing more boring than repeating the same arguments in an article as appeared in the book.

**The problem of evil** can be simply stated: If God is all-powerful and all-good, how can evil exist? The problem is as simply resolved - if one is prepared to give up God's omnipotence or God's goodness, then one can argue that either God was unable to prevent evil or did not want to do so. Neither of these answers, however, accords with traditional Christian belief (and the problem is much the same for Jews and Muslims as well). The answer given by the Free Will Defence appears simple: God wishes human beings to respond to him and to each other in love and they can only do this if they are genuinely free. If humans are given freedom, then God is unable to prevent them doing evil. The evil actions of human beings can then be explained and God remains omnipotent. God could eliminate evil but only at the price of doing away with human freedom, and this freedom, and the love that it makes possible, is worth the price of the evil that exists. However, this is where the problems start.

## (a) The Problem of Freedom

The first problem is what is meant by 'freedom'. There are two opposing views:

(1) Freedom means that a human being can do what she wants to do, even though this is determined by background factors (this is termed a **compatibilist** view of freedom or **liberty of spontaneity**). **Anthony Flew** argues for this position. Take an example - Catherine may be free to choose to fall in love with and to marry Paul. This may be her free choice, but this does not mean that her choice is not determined. In fact her decision to choose Paul was not a random decision: she did not walk along the street and grab the first man who happened to come along. She chose Paul because of her and his education, background and many other factors. It could be argued, therefore, that she was free to choose Paul in that Paul was the man she wanted but she wanted Paul and chose him because of her nature and this nature is determined. If this view of freedom is taken, then God could have given human beings a nature such that we would always *want* to choose what was good. In this case we would be free to do what we wanted, but what we wanted would be determined and we would never do evil. The Free Will Defence therefore collapses.

(2) Freedom means that a human being is not wholly controlled or determined by any internal or external factors such as genetic make-up, schooling, culture, etc. (this is termed a **non-compatibilist** view of freedom or **liberty of indifference**).

**Alvin Plantinga** rejects the first alternative, saying that, perhaps, human beings suffer from 'trans-world depravity'. This means that in every world in which human beings exist, they must perform at least one

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wrong action. Being depraved is thus part of human nature and God could not have made humans who were not depraved - since being human means to be depraved, at least to some extent. However, the problem with this is why should one assume that human nature *has* to be depraved? Also, if we are depraved by nature, then doing evil may no longer be our fault.

The supporter of the Free Will Defence has to assert that human freedom is to be understood in terms of (2) above - in other words, human freedom is incompatible with determinism. If this is the case, then God could not have given us a nature which ensured we would always do good and still make us free - the two are incompatible. This raises the question of why God 'could not' have done this.

### **(b) The Problem of Omnipotence**

God is traditionally held to be almighty or omnipotent. There are various definitions of omnipotence but two, in particular, are relevant:

- God can do anything, absolutely.
- God can do anything that does not involve a contradiction.

The first of these was held by **Rene Descartes** and if this view is adopted then God

can even do logically impossible tasks. God can make a cow be a spider whilst still remaining a cow; swear by a being greater than God and commit suicide. More important for the Free Will Defence, God could create people with liberty of indifference and bring it about that they always do what is right. In other words, if God can do the logically impossible, God can give us freedom from control and still control us. If this were the case, then the Free Will Defence fails as God could have given humans the freedom necessary for love and yet still have ensured that we never did wrong.

For the Free Will Defence to succeed, therefore, the second view of omnipotence must be adopted. If it is held that it is a contradiction to say that human beings are both free and determined, then if God cannot do contradictory things, God cannot make humans both free and also determined.

**The Free Will Defence depends, therefore, on maintaining that (i) human freedom should be understood in terms of liberty of indifference and (ii) that God cannot do logically contradictory tasks.**

### **(c) The Problem of Natural Evil**

The Free Will Defence mainly deals with the problem of moral evil - however, it is much less effective in dealing with so-called natural evil such as volcanoes, tidal waves, cancer, smallpox, etc. Nature is, essentially, 'red in tooth and claw' and is wasteful on a huge scale. One species preys on another and huge numbers of offspring are killed or devoured by other species. The human body might well have been better designed to minimise pain and, it is argued (for instance by David Hume) that if one looks at the natural world there is little evidence of an all-powerful and wholly good creator. To be sure, there is also great beauty in the world, but the evidence for the existence of God from design is not strong.

It is important to recognise, however, that the problem of evil is not concerned with establishing the existence of God - it is rather concerned to answer the atheist's challenge that the God of traditional belief is incompatible with the existence of evil. This challenge can be rejected if one can show for what good reason God would allow natural evil. Various attempts have been made to do this, but the important point is that these generally do not fall under the Free Will Defence heading.

**Alvin Plantinga** has suggested that, as an hypothesis, it is possible that natural evil could be the result of free choices made by the Devil and his angels. This thesis has two problems - firstly, the evidence for the existence of the devil is not strong nor is the evidence for some original, paradise-like state which was subsequently corrupted. More important, why should God allow the Devil freedom to disrupt creation on such a huge scale?

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The Free Will Defence is one of the best replies to those who reject God on the grounds of the existence of evil. God may have had to allow evil and this, it can be argued, shows the incredibly high value attached to freedom and the human ability to be able to love and to be able to sacrifice her or himself for others. However, this opens the way for the next challenge.

#### **(d) The Suffering of Innocent Children**

Ivan Karamazov, in *The Brothers Karamazov* by Dostoyevsky (himself a Christian), sets out one of the most effective rejections of God ever written. I will not go through his argument here since it is set out in some detail in *The Puzzle of Evil* (Harper Collins). However, his position is, effectively, that no matter what end God has in view, the suffering of innocent children is simply not worth it.

Imagine standing by the side of the lime pits in Belsen or Treblinka where Jews were buried after being gassed. In 1943, to save gas, the SS threw live children up to the age of 5 into the lime pits and dead bodies of adults were thrown down on top of them. They died slowly and those who tried to crawl out were simply kicked back. As an alternative, imagine watching as thirteen and fourteen year-old girls were gang raped by soldiers in the former Yugoslavia whilst their officers looked on and laughed. Imagine looking on at one of these scenes whilst Ivan Karamazov stands at your side. He would, effectively, have said to you, 'How can you believe in an all-good, all-powerful God in the face of this suffering? *Nothing* is worth the suffering of these innocents and if the price for love is that human beings can do this to each other, then it would have been better for God to have created no world at all rather than this one'. Ivan rejects God even though he believes that God exists. There is no easy philosophic answer to Ivan's challenge to God, which is probably the most devastating ever written.

Possibly Job can provide a way forward as the book of Job is also the story of a man pre-occupied with suffering - first his own but later the suffering of all human beings. Ivan and Job are very similar: both are angry with God, both want to 'put God in the dock' and both want to act as God's prosecutor. The difference between Ivan and Job is that whereas Ivan wants to be prosecutor and judge, Job is, in the end,

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willing to trust God. In the final chapters of the book of Job, God answers Job but gives no explanation. However, Job is satisfied - he is willing to trust God even though he cannot understand him. It is significant that God says that Job is right to be appalled and concerned about the problem of suffering: God does not condemn Job for questioning God. Confronted by the suffering of innocent human beings, two reactions are possible - that of Ivan and that of Job. At some point philosophy has to be modest and to fall silent and this, to me, is the point where philosophers should be willing to say no more. In the face of extreme horror, silence may be the best reaction and we may be forced to make a decision as human beings between the response of Job and that of Ivan.

The challenge of Ivan on the grounds of innocent suffering undercuts the Free Will Defence, as whilst the Free Will Defence maintains that freedom and the possibility of love justify evil, Ivan rejects this. He thus rejects the central plank of the Free Will Defence as he maintains that *nothing* can justify the suffering of innocent children. Ivan's position is well known and generally most people studying at A-level will be aware of it. However, there is a second challenge put forward by Ivan which is often not discussed.

### **(e) The Grand Inquisitor**

Ivan Karamazov tells a story that has considerable contemporary relevance. The scene is Seville in Spain at the height of the Inquisition. The previous day, heretics had been burnt to death for not accepting the beliefs of the Church. Into the crowded square, Jesus comes back a second time. He raises a young girl from the dead and people rush to touch him. Out on the steps of the Cathedral comes the aged and venerable Cardinal and looks down on the scene. He recognises what is happening and sends his guards down to arrest Jesus. The crowds part and Jesus is brought before the Inquisitor.

The Inquisitor asks Jesus why he has returned. Jesus, the Cardinal says, handed over the world to the care of his Church - but since Jesus died the Church has not served God but Satan. The Church does this out of love, because Satan loves human beings much more than Jesus ever did. Jesus, claims the Inquisitor, offered people freedom and called them to follow him - he offered a high and lonely path which was incredibly difficult and demanding. Instead of the ancient law which was clear and comparatively simple to follow, Jesus called his followers to use their freedom, to give up everything in order to be his disciples. This message appealed to the strong and, the Inquisitor said, he himself could have been one of this select band who lived on locusts and wild honey and gave up earthly joys for the sake of obedience to God. He started out on this path - but rejected it as he 'refused to serve madness'. Instead he became a leader of the Church which deceives people, out of love.

The Inquisitor's point is that very few will really be able to sacrifice themselves for God, very few will be able truly to love their neighbour and to put family and friends in second place. Most people are weak and simply want to be happy. Most people wish to live in the comfort zone where they can be secure, reassured by their friends, and have few demands made of them. Provided they are nice to each other, do not do anything terribly wrong, live a conventional life and go to Church from time to time (as well as contributing financially), then the Church reassures them and makes them content. Most people rush to give up their freedom as it is too demanding to take responsibility for their own lives - instead they want security and they want the Church to tell them what to do. Certainty is very appealing. People do not want to be individuals, they just want to be 'one of the crowd'. Instead of measuring themselves against God's

demands, they measure themselves against each other and are reduced to a common, low-level uniformity. This, the Inquisitor recognises, is a denial of Jesus' message and, indeed, it is Satan's message - albeit one endorsed by the Church. The aim is to help people to conform and not to face up to the reality of Jesus' call.

Jesus never replies to the Inquisitor. When the Inquisitor finishes speaking he dismisses Jesus and says 'Go, and never return'. Jesus leans forward and kisses the Inquisitor. The Inquisitor shudders - and then Jesus leaves. It is not clear what Dostoyevsky meant by this ending of the story, but his basic message is clear. Human beings are so weak that they cannot cope with the gift of freedom. Notice that the Inquisitor never says that human beings are not free - instead he says that they do not want to be and are too weak to make use of their freedom.

Crucial to the Free Will Defence is that people are free and can use this freedom to respond to God. However, in order to do this they must first become individuals and the Free Will Defence assumes this is possible. It is worth reading or, if there is a performance near you, seeing Ibsen's play *The Dolls House*, which deals with the theme of becoming an individual and the realisation of a woman that she is trapped in a marriage which denies her individuality. Most people do not want to be individuals - to have their lives transformed so that all the things that matter so much to so many people (power, security, money, reputation, etc.) are seen as being of little account. Most people do not want to face up to unconditional, non-preferential love for others. Instead they want the security of the comfort zone, they want to be happy, they want to conform.

Most people, it may be argued, are not really free at all. They will leave school, perhaps go to college or university, have one, two or more 'relationships', live with someone or get married, buy a second hand Ford Fiesta, take out a mortgage, have one or two babies, buy a series of better cars, watch the children grow up, go through the normal mid-life crises, struggle to pay for their children's schooling and university, retire, cultivate the garden, play golf and eventually die. Most people think they are free when they make this sort of choice, but in fact the choice is normally to conform. Most young people are desperate to be 'in' with the crowd - to look the same as their peers, to behave the same and to have the same aims. Few are individuals.

The Free Will Defence is based on the assumption that human beings are capable of much, much more than this and that everyone is in principle capable of becoming an individual in his or her own right, living, if they believe there is a God, in relationship with this God and trying to show radical love, compassion and gentleness in all that they do or say. Such a position may well be ridiculed by friends, parents and family who may ask the person to 'be reasonable' and to 'conform'. The Free Will Defence assumes that all human beings genuinely have the freedom to make a decision for themselves about the sort of life they will live - and if this is not valid then the Free Will Defence fails.

## (f) Conclusion

Does the Free Will Defence succeed? It is not effective against natural evil and other arguments are needed to cope with the problems that arise in this area. However, it may well succeed in explaining why a wholly good, all-powerful God should allow *moral* evil provided four assumptions are made:

- Human freedom is defined in terms of liberty of indifference,
- God is omnipotent in the sense that God can do everything that does not involve a contradiction,
- The suffering of innocent children is a price worth paying for human freedom and the love that this makes possible, and
- Human beings do have the ability, whether or not they choose to exercise it, to become individuals capable of rejecting convention and living lives of radical love for God and for their fellow men and women.

At the end of the day, however, the problem of evil is not simply a problem for philosophers - it is a challenge to us as individual human beings. The question we need to ask ourselves is whether, in the face of great human misery and suffering, we are prepared to stand up and be counted and to try to roll back the tide of despair and hopelessness and, in their place, leave compassion, gentleness and a genuine commitment to the good of others. Freedom makes this a possibility. If we try to take this path, we may well be unpopular, often lonely and isolated and sometimes afraid that we are deluded - but we may become individual human beings and perhaps that is the greatest achievement of all.