



# PHILOSOPHY, ETHICS AND RELIGION

## Bridging Work

The following activities have been designed to help you begin developing the academic skills necessary to excel in Philosophy, Ethics, and Religion, and also to allow your teachers to evaluate your skills. The activities are divided into the three components of the A-level course, and a suggested time for each activity is provided.

All work to be completed by hand, unless your usual way of working (as per Exam Access Arrangements) is to use a laptop. (**A note on using AI:** We understand that it's possible to use AI to help with these tasks. However, doing so would defeat their primary purpose, which is to help you grow as a thinker. The goals of studying A-level Philosophy, Ethics, and Religion are to sharpen your own intellect and argumentative abilities, leading to an excellent grade. True progress toward these goals can only come from your own work and effort)

## PHILOSOPHY

### TASK 1 - Questions on a Philosophical Excerpt (90 minutes)

A significant aspect of the work you will do in Philosophy, Ethics and Religion involves reading and analysing (sometimes archaic) arguments and text excerpts. You will need to be able to understand and efficiently summarise the main purpose of the texts and arguments, then evaluate their quality. Below is a famous passage taken from William Paley's book, *Natural Theology*. Carefully read the text, then answer the following question; other than where you are explicitly told otherwise, you should limit your answers to a short paragraph of no more than five or six sentences.

"In crossing a heath, suppose I pitched my foot against a stone, and were asked how the stone came to be there; I might possibly answer that, for anything I knew to the contrary, it had lain there forever. Nor would it perhaps be very easy to show the absurdity of the answer. But suppose I had found a watch upon the ground, and it should be inquired how the watch happened to be in that place; I should hardly think of the answer, which I had before given, that for anything I knew, the watch might have always been there ... the watch must have had a maker: that there must have existed, at some time, and at some place or other, an artificer or artificers, who formed it for the purpose which we find it actually to answer; who comprehended its construction, and designed its use .... Every indication of contrivance, every manifestation of design, which existed in the watch, exists in the works of nature, of being greater or more, and that in a degree which exceeds all computation yet in a multitude of cases, are not less evidently mechanical, not less evidently contrivances than are the most perfect productions of human ingenuity." (Paley, 1809)

- a.) Annotate the passage, identifying any Tier 2 (academic words found across multiple disciplines [subjects]) and Tier 3 (Subject specific words) vocabulary
- b.) Summarise the text into no more than four sentences
- c.) Explain, in no more than two sentences, the main purpose of William Paley's story about crossing a heath
- d.) Describe the significance of the heath in Paley's story. How, if at all, does it contribute to the overall argument?
- e.) Analyse the analogy between the watch and the world in Paley's argument. What does Paley suggest about the existence of a designer?
- f.) Identify the key elements of the watch that Paley highlights in his story. How do these elements support his argument?
- g.) Evaluate Paley's use of the watch as an example of design. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this analogy in supporting his argument? (Do not limit yourself to five or six sentences when listing strengths and weaknesses)
- h.) Discuss Paley's reasoning behind the conclusion that the existence of a watch implies the existence of a designer. Do you find his reasoning convincing? Why or why not?
- i.) Examine the role of complexity and order in Paley's argument. How does he use these concepts to support his claim about a designer?
- j.) Critically analyse Paley's story in terms of its logical structure and coherence. Are there any logical fallacies or gaps in his reasoning?
- k.) Using contemporary language, create your own analogy which functions as a teleological argument.
- l.) Compare and contrast Paley's argument with the teleological argument for the existence of God. How are they similar, and how do they differ?

## TASK 2 – Philosophical Reflection – Continuation of Self (90 minutes)

This task is designed to introduce you to abstract thinking without requiring any prior knowledge of philosophy:

- **Reflect:** Think about what your life was like when you were five years old. Consider as many aspects as possible, for example: your appearance, your personality, your relationships with others, what motivated you, and what your goals were.
- **Argue and Conclude:** Now, consider the following statement: **I am the same person now as I was when I was five years old.**

Present arguments for and against this statement. You must end with a definitive conclusion, taking a clear stance one way or the other rather than "sitting on the fence."

## Ethics

### TASK 1 – Meta-Ethical Thinking Exercise (90 minutes)

This task is designed to encourage you to think about the nature of ethics. It builds on ideas some of you may have encountered during induction sessions.

- **Reflect:** Imagine you are at a dinner at your partner's parents' house for the first time. List three foods you would most dislike eating, from one you could force down out of politeness to a third you would have to refuse. (Please base this on personal preference, not allergies or religious beliefs).  
  
Now, think about morality. List three specific human actions you believe are immoral, from one you find merely distasteful to a third you consider to be the most evil act imaginable.
- **Consider:** Is there a meaningful difference between saying '[Food 3] is bad' and '[Behaviour 3] is bad'?  
  
When we claim behaviours are evil, are we stating a fact about the world, or are we just expressing our strong personal dislike for it? If there is a difference, what is it?
- **Argue and Conclude:** Now, consider the following statement: **Stating 'the cold-blooded murder of children is evil' is no different than claiming, 'I dislike the idea of the cold-blooded murder of children'**  
  
Present arguments for and against this statement. You must end with a definitive conclusion, taking a clear stance one way or the other rather than "sitting on the fence."

### TASK 2 – Ethical Argument Analysis Exercise (45 minutes)

This task is designed to encourage you to think about the relationship between motivation and morality. It builds on ideas some of you may have encountered during the induction sessions.

- **Reflect:** Imagine you have two children, Luke and Leia. One day, fed up with the state of their bedrooms, you and your partner agree on a new rule: If the children clean their rooms by the end of the day, they will each get £10. If the rooms are still untidy, they will be grounded.  
  
Unbeknownst to you, Luke overhears this conversation and, wanting the reward, goes to tidy his room. Leia does not overhear the conversation; however, she cleans her room out of gratitude for the lovely home you provide and because she knows you would appreciate it.  
  
By the end of the day, both rooms have been tidied to the exact same high standard.  
  
**In no more than three sentences, explain whether you think the children have been equally good, or if one has been morally better than the other. Justify your answer.**
- **Consider the following argument:**
  - **Premise 1:** Most religious people believe they will be rewarded for moral behaviour and/or punished for immoral behaviour after death.
  - **Premise 2:** This belief in a posthumous reward or punishment is (at least in part) a motivation for their moral behaviour.
  - **Premise 3:** When non-religious people behave morally, they are not motivated by a belief in posthumous reward or punishment.
  - **Premise 4:** It is morally better to act for the right reasons (i.e., for morality's own sake) than for the sake of a reward or to avoid punishment.
  - **Conclusion:** Therefore, when acting morally, the actions of non-religious people are morally better than the actions of religious people.
- **Evaluate:** Do you find this argument convincing? Explain your reasoning, perhaps by challenging one or more of the premises.

### TASK 3 – Ethical Thinking Exercise (45 minutes)

This task is designed to help you explore the complex nature of moral responsibility and culpability.

- **Reflect:** Imagine you are a judge presiding over an exceptionally complex case. A child, Jamie, who has been kept socially isolated (home-schooled/stopped from accessing media etc.) has been taught from birth that blonde-haired people are evil. Everyone Jamie interacts with has reaffirmed this message, telling him that, given the opportunity, blonde people will hurt and kill him and everyone he has ever loved. They tell him that blonde-haired people love nothing more than torturing and killing people who aren't blonde; they can't help it, blonde people are just inherently evil. He is taught that killing blonde-haired people is good and right because, in doing so, he will be saving the lives of individuals blonde people would victimise. These lessons are constantly reiterated as Jamie ages however, fortunately, he lives in a very small, homogenous community where he never encounters a blonde person.

Other than his beliefs concerning blonde people, Jamie is perfectly rational, intelligent and articulate. He has no mental illnesses of any kind. He simply believes what he's been told about blonde people by every adult he knows and trusts.

Upon his eighteenth birthday, Jamie decides to leave his small and isolated community. During his first visit to a city, he encounters a blonde person for the first time. He instantly attacks and kills the blonde person and is subsequently arrested. Jamie admits what he's done, explaining why he's done it; he doesn't (at least at first) understand why he's being arrested, rather than applauded, for his behaviour.

- **Answer:**
  1. Is Jamie a good or a bad person? Explain your answer.
  2. Is Jamie's behaviour good or bad? Explain your answer.
  3. Is Jamie responsible for his behaviour? Explain your answer.
  4. Should Jamie be punished for his behaviour? Explain your answer.
  5. As the judge, what sentence (if any) should Jamie receive? Explain your answer.

## Islam

Before starting – read the 1.1 Background notes to Jahiliyya (found at the end of the Bridging work). This will set the scene for your bridging work.

### TASK 1 – Contextual Reading and Summary (1 hour)

Read the article: [Arabia Before Islam](#)

After reading, make notes on the following:

1. **Social conditions:** Tribal structure, treatment of women, law and order.
2. **Religious beliefs:** Polytheism, idolatry, practices at the Kaaba.
3. **Moral and ethical behaviour:** Practices such as gambling, drinking, warfare, and slavery.
4. **Economic and political Life:** Mecca as a trade hub, absence of political unity.

### TASK 2 – Critical Thinking Questions (1 hour)

1. Answer the following questions in short paragraphs (4–6 sentences each):
2. What were the main social and moral problems in pre-Islamic Arabian society?
3. In what ways did religion in pre-Islamic Arabia lack moral guidance?
4. How did tribalism contribute to instability and injustice?
5. Could any of the features of pre-Islamic Arabian society be seen as positive? Explain.
6. Why might some people argue that the society was in ‘need of revelation’?

### TASK 3 – Creative Reflection – A Day in Pre-Islamic Arabia (1 hour)

This task will help you gain insight into why revelation might have felt necessary/unnecessary to people at the time.

Write a first-person narrative (500–700 words) from the perspective of someone living in pre-Islamic Arabia. You can choose your character (e.g., a merchant, a Bedouin tribesperson, a slave, a woman, or a religious leader).

Your account should reflect your understanding of the social, religious, and moral environment described in the article.

**Your narrative should include:**

- A description of daily life (e.g., trade, tribal conflicts, religious practices).
- Moral dilemmas or challenges faced in that society (e.g., violence, injustice, inequality).
- Personal thoughts or feelings about the state of society and any sense of spiritual or moral confusion.
- A hint of longing or curiosity for something greater (e.g. a different moral order or a more just society).

### TASK 4 – Preparing to Evaluate (1 hour)

Use quotes from the article and your own research to support or challenge the idea that pre-Islamic Arabian people were in need of revelation.

**Instructions:**

1. Find **3 quotes** that support the claim that revelation was needed.
2. Find **3 quotes** that could be used to argue that some aspects of society were functional or structured, and revelation might not have been ‘needed’.

For each quote:

- Write the quote
- Briefly explain how it supports or challenges the idea that pre-Islamic Arabian people were in need of revelation.

## BACKGROUND TO JAHILIYYA

**T**he time of Muhammad is generally known as pre-Islamic Arabia. For Muslims, however, it is also called jahiliyya, which means “ignorance”. It was an age in which there were beliefs and practices that were the total opposite of what submission to Allah required. The religion, morality, social structure, politics and the general chaotic state of the population underpinned this description.

Religion was polytheistic, animistic and driven by human greed. Idols were sold that they believed would cause their enemies to fear them and served to deliver protection to individual tribes. Religion was practical and through sacrifice and ritual it served the needs of the ignorant public; it was by no means a deep-rooted theological pursuit.

Society was rife with immorality. The tip of this was the feudal system in which life was cheap and there was nothing immoral about killing. Trading for profit and raiding other tribes was the norm; indeed, robbery was not considered immoral unless you stole the goods of kinsmen.

The strong ruled and the weak were oppressed and exploited. Poverty was ignored and charity a rarity. Population control was often by female infanticide and the life of a woman had little value. In general, women, like slaves, were not treated particularly well and had no specific rights, human or legal.

In political terms there was no overall system of government. Rules were there but not written or firmly established; they were also variable and inconsistent.

Many books, written from a monotheistic or Muslim perspective of jahiliyya, record mostly just negative accounts. However, this does not mean that the entirety of pre-Islamic life in Arabia was evil or debased. There were some good qualities of tribal society, such as honour, bravery, hospitality and generosity. There were also areas of society, as evidence by the example of Khadijah, where women were not routinely oppressed.