

Philosophy

Advanced General Certificate of Education (A level)

Philosophy is about asking, and attempting to answer, fundamental questions such as: what is knowledge; do we see the world as it is, or is our perception of the world misleading; does God exist and what is the problem of evil; what is the nature of mind and can we explain the mental purely in terms of the physical; what is moral goodness, and what is the nature of moral language.

The study of philosophy combines reading from the works of great philosophers, identifying the issues and arguments involved, and arriving at reasoned conclusions. Students will gain knowledge of important philosophical issues, and will learn how to interpret and assess arguments and counter-arguments. Students will learn the key skills of how to write clearly and accurately, how to express persuasive arguments, and how to develop their own thinking.

Students should have an enquiring mind, enjoy reading, exchanging ideas in discussion and have a genuine interest in Current Affairs and the Law. The ability to argue a case, in speech and writing, is essential.

Course Content:

Year 12

Epistemology which covers main themes such as:

What is knowledge? - distinguishing between different kinds of knowledge and defining the concept.

Perception as a source of knowledge - exploring our knowledge of the external world

Reason as a source of knowledge - considering whether we can know about the world through reason alone

The limits of knowledge - questioning whether humans can have any knowledge at all

Moral philosophy which examines ethical theories and their application to areas like:

Simulated killing (within computer games, plays, films, etc.)

The treatment of animals

Deception and the telling of lies

Stealing

Year 13

The Metaphysics of God which looks at arguments both for and against God's existence. It covers the following themes:

The concept and nature of 'God' - does the idea of an all-powerful, all-loving and all-knowing God make sense?

Arguments relating to the existence of God - does the existence and nature of the world prove God's existence?

Does suffering show that He could not exist?

Religious language - does religious language make sense or is it just nonsense?

The Metaphysics of Mind which explores some of the most important issues in philosophical psychology, including:

What do we mean by 'mind'? What are the defining features of the mind?

Substance dualism - is the mind a non-physical soul?

Property dualism - are mental states non-physical properties, which emerge from the brain?

Physicalist theories - is the mind behaviour or the brain? Do minds even exist?

Paper 1: Epistemology and moral philosophy

Written exam: 3 hours

100 marks 50% of A-level

Paper 2: The metaphysics of God and the metaphysics of mind

Written exam: 3 hours

100 marks 50% of A-level

Career Opportunities:

Philosophy is a good choice for ambitious students seeking careers with international organisations, the Civil Service, law firms and accountancy/consulting firms, and leading businesses especially in information technology and environmental sectors. The key skills of understanding ideas and arguments, clear and critical thinking and writing, and making rational decisions, are highly valued at senior management levels.