

A-Level Religious Studies: Philosophy, Ethics & Theology

What is it?

Philosophy, or 'love of wisdom' is the study of fundamental questions and problems of logic, existence, truth and reality. It is characterised by critical analysis, debate and rational thought. Ethics is a branch of Philosophy (moral philosophy) which poses questions of right and wrong. Theology is the study of the nature of God and religious truth. Religious Studies students explore some of the most perplexing questions of all, focusing on philosophical and religious questions: the existence of God, the soul, life after death, good and evil and the validity of religious experience. In Ethics the course covers secular and religious ethical theories alongside modern concerns (the right to life, sexual ethics and business ethics).

How might it relate to other A-level courses?

The topics encompass a variety of aspects of science (cosmology), medical ethics, and psychology (focusing on the motivation for moral behaviour e.g. issues of free will and determinism) and have direct links to other humanities (e.g. Economics, History) and social sciences (e.g. Politics, Sociology and Psychology).

How useful is this A-level?

The Russell Group of top universities has said the RS A-level provides "*suitable preparation for University generally*". Both Oxford and Cambridge include Religious Studies in the top level list of "*generally suitable arts A-levels*".

Applicants with Religious Studies A-level were more likely to gain admission to study History at Oxford in 2012 than those with A-levels in many 'facilitating' subjects (these include Maths, English Literature, Biology and Languages) and 20% of students admitted to Oxford to study Mathematics in 2011 had an RS A-level (more than those with Economics, Physics and Business Studies A-levels).*

In recent years our students have gone on to study History at Oxford, English at Cambridge, Medicine, Languages, Psychology, Law, Geography, Philosophy, Criminology, Nursing, Teaching and International Politics (most of which were at Russell Group institutions).

Why should I study it?

Socrates said: "*An unexamined life is not worth living*". We will examine the origins, purpose and many other aspects of life. Religious Studies offers you an intellectually challenging A-level with opportunity for discussion and debate. You will learn how to deconstruct the arguments of others and how to construct your own. These valuable skills of logical argument and critical evaluation can be transferred to other areas of study.

What is involved?

In the Philosophy unit you will study arguments for and against the existence of God and debates surrounding the soul, mind and body, among other topics. You will explore philosophical ideas developed by major thinkers including Plato, Wittgenstein and Dawkins. In the Ethics unit you will study ethical theories and issues. You will learn about concepts such as free will and conscience, as well as the works of scholars like Kant and Freud, applying them to sex, euthanasia and other matters. In the Developments in Religious Thought (Theology) unit you will explore the ways in which Christianity has developed and responded to challenges and contemporary social issues. This will include the study of

Secularism, Pluralism, Liberation and Feminist Theology. Each module is examined via a two hour examination in the summer term of Year 13. **Course requirements:**

- You do **not** have to have studied GCSE Religious Studies

- We recommend that candidates have at least a GCSE grade 6 in English.

Is this an easy A-level?

No – you are grappling with some of the most difficult philosophical concepts from some of the greatest thinkers. We challenge anyone to read Immanuel Kant and then say it's easy. Research from the Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring at Durham University on the comparative difficulty of different subjects at A-level showed that RS was “in the middle difficulty range, similar to Geography and more demanding than English”.*

What can we offer you at SGGS when studying this course?

- Expert, experienced teachers – all are specialists, with many years of experience delivering A-level RS. Mrs Steele has also been an examiner for the exam board.
- Excellent success rate – 91% A*-B pass rate last year
- A variety of relevant and engaging resources, which are constantly updated
- Opportunities to attend conferences/study days/ a trip to Athens or Rome

Careers?

Religious Studies could help you in any career where it's important to be able to think critically and to understand what people believe and how it affects their lives. For example **medicine, social work, law, the armed services, the police, journalism and teaching**. Any career that requires interpersonal skills, an awareness of others and a finely tuned mind is open to someone with this kind of qualification.

For further information please speak to Mrs Steele: steele.k@sggs.org.uk *Source: NATRE

