

Getting Ready for Religion, Ethics & Philosophy

Name		Course	Religion, Ethics & Philosophy A1		
Date set	July 24	Deadline	9 th September 24		
Task Instructions	<p>Complete the research and writing tasks outlined in the attached document that explore the challenges concepts of evil and suffering pose to religious and philosophical world views. (Overall it is expected that the tasks will take around 4 hours to complete).</p>				

We are delighted you have chosen to study A Level Religion, Ethics & Philosophy at Worthing College.

Instructions: This pack will help you make the best possible start to studying this subject.

The tasks in this pack:

- should take you **about 4 hours to complete** in total.
- should be handed into your teacher when teaching starts – *from Monday 9th September 2024* – with your name on it for assessment.
- are available on the internet – follow the links in the document.

If you need help: The tasks are designed to get a bit more difficult as you work through them as they are preparing you for studying at a higher level and to become an effective independent learner. You should try to get as far as you can working on your own but if you do need help, please email us at gettingreadyfor@worthing.ac.uk, telling us which task you are working on and what help you need. Help is available throughout the summer holidays.

Teacher Feedback

<p>Skills for this task. Your teacher has indicated which are strengths and which are areas for improvement using different coloured highlighters.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synthesise key Christian and secular defences and attacks on the concept of God in the face of evil and suffering • Formulate your own arguments on the philosophical repercussions of the existence of evil • Evidence research into key secular and religious thinkers who have explored notions of evil in their art or philosophy 	<p>Your teacher has highlighted the actions you need to take to make the relevant improvements. These actions will be due for checking in your next ISP.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise key philosophy and ethics terminology • Recap the central philosophical arguments that claim the existence of evil and suffering disprove the existence of God
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Further comments:	

GRFP – Evil and Suffering

1) Evil and Suffering and Concepts of God

The term “God” is used with a wide variety of different meanings. These tend to fall, however, into two main groups. On the one hand, there are metaphysical interpretations of the term: God is a prime mover, or a first cause, or a necessary being that has its necessity of itself, or the ground of being, or a being whose essence is identical with its existence. Or God is not one being among other beings—even a supremely great being—but, instead, being itself. Or God is an ultimate reality to which no concepts truly apply.

On the other hand, there are interpretations that connect the term “God” in a clear and relatively straightforward way with religious attitudes, such as those of worship, and with very important human desires, such as the desires that good will triumph, that justice be done, and that the world not be one where death marks the end of the individual’s existence.

What properties must something have if it is to be an appropriate object of worship, and if it is to provide reason for thinking that there is a reasonable chance that the fundamental human desires just mentioned will be fulfilled? A natural answer is that God must be a person who, at the very least, is very powerful, very knowledgeable, and morally very good. But if such a being exists, then it seems initially puzzling why **various evils exist**. Even a moderately good human being, given the power to do so, would eliminate those evils. Why, then, do such undesirable states of affairs exist, if there is a being who is very powerful, very knowledgeable, and very good?

What one has here, however, is not just a puzzle, since the question can, of course, be recast as an **argument for the non-existence of God**. If we focus on a conception of God as all-powerful, all-knowing, and perfectly good, one way of formulating such an argument is as follows:

1. If God exists, then God is omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect.

2. If God is **omnipotent**, then God has the power to eliminate all evil.
3. If God is **omniscient**, then God knows when evil exists.
4. If God is morally perfect, then God has the desire to eliminate all evil.
5. Evil exists.
6. If evil exists and God exists, then either God doesn't have the power to eliminate all evil, or doesn't know when evil exists, or doesn't have the desire to eliminate all evil.
7. Therefore, God doesn't exist.

The point here is simply that when one conceives of God as unlimited with respect to power, knowledge, and moral goodness, the existence of evil quickly gives rise to potentially serious arguments against the existence of God.

But what if God, rather than being characterized in terms of knowledge, power, and goodness, is defined in some more **metaphysical** way—for example, as the ground of being, or as being itself? The answer will depend on whether, having defined God in such purely metaphysical terms, one can go on to argue that such an entity will also possess at least very great power, knowledge, and moral goodness. If so, evil is once again a problem.

TASKS for reading section 1)

- 1) Read the extracts above that outline the challenge evil and suffering poses to the notion of God
- 2) Write up (after researching if necessary) a definition of the terms in bold and underlined in the extract
- 3) Expand the points made in arguments 1-7 to full sentences used in a mini speech that opens a philosophy debate – your side is arguing: *In the face of evil, God cannot exist.*

2) Evil and human suffering – Philosophical problem or human tragedy?

Many studies of the philosophy of religion include the “problem of evil,” which can be treated either as an intellectual problem, one which raises logical and epistemic issues, or as an existential problem of human tragedy.

Philosophers and theologians take on the challenge of trying to show that one can consistently affirm God’s existence and the fact of evil in the world. Other philosophers argue the contrary thesis. Questions of logical consistency are hashed back and forth; attempts are made to make concepts fit together, while others expose unexamined assumptions and point to implications that follow from propositions affirmed.

But the intellectual problem arises from the “existential problem”, one concerning human experience of suffering and evil, and human attempts to make sense of such suffering and evil. However, unless we have been there, we cannot fully comprehend first-hand experience of suffering and confrontation with evil. Fortunately, great literature, film, art and drama can offer a concrete, real-life expression, and enable us some measure of the experience of human tragedy. Great literature, both religious and secular, effectively portrays humans in confrontation with suffering and moral evil, attempting to find meaning and some redeeming value in tragedy. In some cases, the message of literature and art implies a rejection of the intellectual “solutions” as mostly ineffective. This is often said to the case in the novels of Dostoyevsky.

TASKS for reading section 2)

- 1) Read the extracts above that outlines artistic and philosophical conceptions of the ‘problem’ of evil
- 2) Write up (after researching if necessary) a definition of the terms in bold and underlined in the extract
- 3) Research the novelist Dostoyevsky’s views on evil and suffering and then write 2 paragraphs summarising his opinions, providing a description of how one of his novels explores this theme
- 4) Write a short summary of whether you feel that the problem of evil and suffering is a philosophical problem or human tragedy or both.

3) A range of theological, philosophical and existential problems with regards to evil

The question is not why do humans commit and suffer evil, but why so much? Why is there so much gratuitous evil and unnecessary suffering? (Gratuitous Evil (suffering) – Suffering which is devoid of reason or justification.) The question is not why isn't the world one of perfection and pure happiness, but why is the world one in which so much is permeated with intense suffering, evil, and injustice? This question is one which applies even to a secular person, someone who has a non-theistic, naturalistic view of reality. In the face of such overwhelming evil, what meaning and value can we find in human existence? What moral order remains?

Theological problems in relation to evil

The question becomes more pressing for the theist who believes in an all-powerful deity who represents the highest moral good. Some Christians have the image of the God the heavenly shepherd, who cares for his flock. Jews have the idea of a covenant between God and his chosen people. Muslims believe that everything that happens is Allah's will. In each case, we have the general idea of a deity who controls or oversees all that happens to his creatures. Add to this the idea that the deity is perfectly good and desires that his creatures enjoy their measure of happiness and well-being. David Hume relies on analogies to argue that on basis of his works we could never infer the existence of an all-powerful, perfect Being.

Existential problems in relation to evil: Given human experience of evil, how do we make rational sense of evil? What are the implications for our beliefs, our faith, and our attitude (toward God, with regard to our moral values)? What meaning or value or moral order can we find in human existence? The question for everyone, including nonbelievers in deity, is why does the world show so little moral progress in presenting so much evil and suffering. This question arises in the context of great progress in the sciences, technologies, engineering, medicine, communication, etc.

Biblical view on evil and suffering set out in Job: The lesson taught is: Might makes right. Job is overwhelmed by the might of the almighty, therefore the question of justice becomes irrelevant. The lesson of Job is not an intellectual one, but an existential one. Job, the paragon of virtue, has become a man of flesh and blood overcome by suffering. Standard answers (from theology and philosophy) to the problem of evil and suffering are discarded as insufficient, even irrelevant. The questions raised by Job are not intellectual ones. He cries out because, through suffering, he has lost the capacity to trust in life itself. The final point (a religious one) is that meaning in life is not to be found in words (philosophy), but in confrontation with the Almighty himself.

View on evil from Plato: Socrates raises a philosophical dilemma for theists. Either moral good is what God does (i.e., definition of "good" as anything which God does) or God does what is good (meaning, the action of deity is good by some objective standard). If the former is true and good is by definition whatever God does, then there is no problem of evil. But you have bizarre consequences that genocide, murder, and the suffering of innocent children could be morally good. If the latter is true (God's acts can be evaluated by some standard of good), then we have a problem of evil when the actions of God (and what He allows to happen) are evil by our objective standard and cannot be explained as the acts of benevolent, just Being. .

First common argument used regarding suffering: In life 'you win some and lose some'. Yes, sometimes good people win (the trapped minors are rescued and all passengers on the crashed

airliner are safe). However, evil results when everyday experience is one of profound suffering and loss, as is the case for many people on the earth. Evil is manifest in the gross injustice and disparity of wealth and standards of life around the world “Any talk of a correspondence between moral justice and human destiny is just plain foolishness.”

Second common argument used regarding suffering: Any great suffering that we focus on (e.g. genocide, Jewish holocaust, slavery of Africans, conquest and destruction of native Americans, oppression, hunger, death from preventable disease in ‘developing nations’; death and suffering from wars) is but a sampling of the suffering of people throughout history. (Statement by a Jewish man referring to Biblical history of Hebrews. Statement made in context of attempt to make sense of God’s role at time of Nazi genocide perpetrated on Jews, among others.) “God was not good. He was only on our side.” “God destroys both the guilty and the innocent. Even worse, He allows the evil doer to prosper, and destroys the righteous.”

TASKS for reading extracts 3)

- 1) Read the above summaries of key philosophical and religious arguments and concepts in relation to evil.
- 2) For each paragraph come up with a short catchy title for the arguments set out
- 3) For each paragraph/argument summarise and paraphrase into your own words (you could try the length of a tweet – 280 characters/produce a tweet if useful)
- 4) For each paragraph (with the exception of the ‘Job’ paragraph) research a thinker/writer who has presented these ideas and note the texts where these ideas are explored (these could be works of literature, philosophy or religious texts)

Work Experience week

All year 1 students are required to participate in a week-long work placement during their first year of study. You will be expected to locate one week's worth of work placement and submit your work experience form before October half term.

Placement Dates:

L2/L3 students on double /triple qualifications:

1 week course-specific placement, expected placement dates will be confirmed by the course leaders at the beginning of September.

Students with 2 or more single subjects:

1 week placement during the Easter holidays or w/c 23 June 2025

You can find the work experience form [HERE](#)
More information and guidance can be found [HERE](#)

