

philosophy

A Level

Head of department: Steve Murphy

Email: smurphy@esher.ac.uk

Exam board: AQA



What is this subject about?

You will be introduced to the methods and aims of Philosophy through the study of traditional philosophical problems such as "What is knowledge?" "Is morality merely a matter of opinion or can it be objective and factual?" "What is the nature of reality?" "Can thoughts be explained in purely physical terms?". To study Philosophy you must enjoy reading and writing as well as being prepared to contribute to class discussions. Philosophy is intellectually challenging and very stimulating. It is guaranteed to get you thinking about things in an entirely new way.

What will I study over the two years?

You will be introduced to philosophical reasoning and argument and how to assess whether an argument is successful or not. You will explore how reason and experience contribute to our knowledge of the world and what our perceptions can tell us about the nature of reality and whether we can be said to be born with any knowledge. Further, you will study Moral Philosophy which involves asking what makes an action right or wrong, what constitutes a good or bad person and whether lying, stealing or enjoying simulated killing in video games are immoral.

In the second year you will deepen your expertise in and understanding of Philosophy by studying philosophical questions about the nature of God and whether His existence is compatible with evil in the world and how human freedom can be reconciled with an all-powerful creator. You will also study the Philosophy of Mind which investigates the nature of consciousness and whether our minds can be reduced to aspects of our physical bodies or whether they are the kind of things that cannot be subject to scientific explanation.

How is the course assessed?

The course is assessed by two written examinations. The two exams are both three hours long and are a mixture of short comprehension and longer evaluative essays.

What skills will I need and develop in this course?

You will learn the skill of identifying, spotting and explaining flaws in philosophical theories and arguments, and you will also be enabled to construct and develop your own arguments in support of, or against, a variety of philosophical positions. You need good written skills and will develop these further in the context of producing essays on philosophical questions.

What can the course lead to in terms of higher education and future careers?

Philosophy has always been seen as providing a rigorous intellectual training and is regarded as an invaluable preparation for careers in the law, the higher reaches of the Civil Service and the Diplomatic Service, jobs requiring policy formation, and work in education. Universities particularly value Philosophy for the analytical skills and the cognitive perspective on other disciplines it provides.

What are the formal entry requirements for this course?

Aside from the general entry criteria that the College requires, you will also need to achieve a minimum of:

- Grade 4 in GCSE English Language

Philosophy A Level is distinct from the material covered in GCSE Religious Studies and performance in English Literature, History and Maths GCSEs are better indicators of success in Philosophy A Level than performance in Religious Studies.

What extra support/enrichment activities are on offer?

Opportunities are offered for the discussion of ideas both in class and outside of College through visits to events like the annual "Battle of Ideas" festival at the Barbican. In previous years successful trips to New York to visit the United Nations, Ground Zero and Ellis Island Immigration Museum have taken place and Philosophy students have participated in the annual Classical Civilisation trip to Greece to visit the key sites of the ancient Greeks. Students will also be taken to philosophical conferences to enhance their studies, and guest speakers from university Philosophy departments will be invited in. There are also opportunities for extra help in tutorial and lunchtime sessions, and catch-up sessions will be provided for writing tasks that need completion.

Subject combination advice:

Philosophy combines extremely well with most other disciplines because these have philosophical issues embedded within them. It goes very well with Humanities subjects such as History, English Literature and English Language, Classical Civilisation, and Politics, but also very well with Maths and Sciences, such as Physics, Chemistry and Biology, and Social Sciences, such as Psychology.

What is the difference between Philosophy and Psychology?

Psychology has often been described as the science of human and animal behaviour, and as a science it uses empirical methods of investigation, essentially observation and experiment. Philosophy is very different and is carried out through the use of reasoning and conceptual analysis, hence its resemblance to mathematics in this respect. Philosophy is also a much broader discipline than Psychology, encompassing philosophy of science, the theory of knowledge, the philosophy of religion, the philosophy of art, ethics, logic, and political philosophy, to mention only a few of the areas in which it is involved.