

AQA A-Level Religious Studies (PY)

Bridging Work



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Core Text(s)

This is the textbook for the specification – If you are able, please order a copy.

- 1) AQA A-level Religious Studies Year 1: Including AS (Paperback) by John Frye. ISBN:9781471873959 Publisher: Hodder Education
- 2) AQA A-Level Religious Studies Year 2 by John Frye, Mel Thompson and Deborah Herring. ISBN: 9781471874000. Publisher: Hodder Education.

Bridging Work (to be submitted in your first lesson in September)

Activity 1

With ALevel PY, we have quite a lot of people that we have to remember. These people are scholars who have created key theories which we look at across the course. It is a good idea to create a timeline and fact file of all the key people below to get a good head's up of them before we look at the more across the PY course. This can include; key books, key dates, key ideas, key theories and, your opinion on some of their theories if you can

1. Plato
2. Socrates
3. Aristotle
4. Rene Descartes
5. John Hick
6. Peter Singer
7. Thomas Aquinas
8. Joseph Fletcher
9. Jeremy Bentham
10. John Steward Mill
11. David Hume
12. Immanuel Kant
13. Ludwig Wittgenstein
14. Daphne Hampson
15. Richard Dawkins
16. Pseudo-Dionysius
17. Maimonides
18. Paul Tillich
19. Richard Swinburne

20. G. E. Moore
21. Libby Lane
22. Rosemary Radford Ruther

Activity 2

Sister of Mercy (Abortion and Ethics)

Newspaper report:

Catholics in America are divided over the formal excommunication of a nun who authorised an abortion to save a mother's life. It is the latest case to highlight the bitter divisions within the American Church. Most controversies within the Catholic Church do not get their own Wikipedia entry, at least not so soon. But the 14 May decision of Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted of Phoenix, Arizona, to state that Sister (Sr) Margaret Mary McBride had formally cooperated in the procurement of an abortion and, by that act, had excommunicated herself from the Catholic Church, is no ordinary controversy.

Sr Margaret was vice president of mission integration at the St Joseph's Hospital and Medical Centre in Phoenix when, late last year, another of three, pregnant with another child, was deemed unable to continue her pregnancy because of pulmonary hypertension. The condition is a rare disorder that weakens the heart and lungs. For pregnant women suffering from severe pulmonary hypertension, the mortality rate is high. The Ethics Board at the hospital was convened. The doctors asserted that only an abortion could save the mother's life and that failure to perform the procedure would result in the death of both the mother and the unborn child. The Ethics Board, on which Sr Margaret sat, agreed to permit the abortion. A statement from the hospital's administrators said: "If there had been a way to save the pregnancy and still prevent the death of the mother, we would have done it. We are convinced there was not."

*Upon learning of the abortion at the Catholic hospital, Bishop Olmsted ordered Sr Margaret to be reassigned and pronounced the formal excommunication, writing in his statement: "An unborn child is not a disease. While medical professionals should certainly try to save a pregnant mother's life, the means by which they do it can never be by directly killing her unborn child. The end does not justify the means." The bishop quoted from Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, and from the fifth edition of "Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health-care Services" issued at the end of last year by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, in support of his decision. All are agreed that Sr Margaret is an outstanding Christian soul. A doctor at the Phoenix hospital described her as "a kind, soft-spoken, humble, caring, spiritual woman whose spot in Heaven was reserved years ago". Others make similar claims for Bishop Olmsted. "He is not a crazy bomb-thrower," I was told by a priest who knew Olmsted when he worked at the Vatican. "He is the sweetest man, a man who loves God."*

In most dioceses, priests are given faculties to absolve a person who has been involved in the procurement of an abortion and to reinstate them into full communion. But when a formal pronouncement has been made, only the bishop can restore a person to full communion. Fr Ladislav Orsy SJ, of Georgetown University, said such decrees of excommunication are "exceedingly rare". Canonists have expressed a wide range of opinions about Bishop Olmsted's decree. What is not murky is the response from the pews, where the Phoenix case has quickly become another battleground in the culture wars. Conservative Christians have largely applauded the bishop's decision. The American Life League invited Catholics to sign a letter of support to Bishop Olmsted: "The individuals signing this letter pledge their support for Bishop Olmsted's faithful defence of church teaching to accomplish his primary task—the salvation of souls in his diocese—which includes the souls of Sr Margaret McBride, the pre-born child whose death Sr Margaret authorised, the child's parents, and any other individual involved." On EWTN—the Eternal Word Television Network founded in the US in 1981 as a cable channel to present Catholic-themed programming—Fr Robert Sirico, head of the Acton Institute, applauded Bishop Olmsted's decision and the host, Raymond Arroyo, linked Sr Margaret's role in permitting the abortion to the advocacy for health-care reform by other Religious women, whom he accused of "dissent" and "disloyalty". From the Left come two arguments. The first is that the Catholic Church is wrong to allow "religious dogma" to interfere with a patient's decisions, as put on National Public Radio by University of Virginia Ethics Professor Lois Shepherd: "We live in a country

where these decisions are made by the patients themselves –not by religious dogma. Can hospitals run by the Catholic Church continue to survive if they allow their strict adherence to doctrine to interfere with the basic standards of life-and-death care?”

The argument is a weak one, not least because it ignores the fact that Catholics believe there were two patients involved, and no one procured the consent of the unborn child to the procedure. More importantly, Catholic hospitals grew out of the gospel mandate to care for the afflicted, and those same Gospels are the basis of the Church’s opposition to abortion. The second argument is slightly different and, ironically, mirrors some of the complaints from the Right. In an op-ed piece in The New York Times, it was put thus by Nicholas Kristof: “We finally have a case where the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy is responding forcefully and speedily to allegations of wrongdoing. But the target isn’t a paedophile priest. Rather, it’s a nun who helped save a woman’s life. Doctors describe her as saintly.” The article ran around the Catholic blogosphere at the speed of light. Where some conservatives see the Phoenix case as another instance of dissent by Religious women, who are appropriately being investigated by the Vatican, some liberals see the case as another example of the hierarchy’s heavy-handed treatment of Religious women who have given their lives to the Church. More thoughtful commentary has emerged on both sides as well. In the conservative journal First Things, Michael Liccione questioned the role of Sr Margaret’s subjective intent. He noted that the Church permits abortions that are not intended, for example when a woman has an ectopic pregnancy, requiring the removal of her fallopian tube. This will result in the death of the unborn child, but that is not the intended object of the surgery. Liccione argues that this “law of double effect” may have animated Sr Margaret’s decision, in which case, her moral culpability is diminished. The more persuasive criticism of Bishop Olmsted’s decision is located here. In such dreadful circumstances, even if the actors make the “wrong” decision, heavy-handed punishment is ill-advised. Liccione writes that “the bishop’s ability to make such a confident judgement in this case seems very unclear –to me and to many others. Moreover, the public outrage over the Phoenix case illustrates the dangers of making politically significant announcements on the basis of moral reasoning that not many people can follow and that even theologically well-educated Catholics disagree about.” This is also where one encounters the most persuasive arguments in favour of the bishop’s decision. The child is dead, and it is precisely in such difficult decisions that strict adherence to the Church’s moral teachings keeps good people from performing evil acts.

The Catholic bishops may regret that this situation has become another sideshow in the culture wars, but they are in part responsible for the Church’s involvement in those culture wars. The bishops have given support to groups such as the American Life League and EWTN, both of which have turned on the bishops when the bishops have not followed their conservative positions. There is a yet deeper concern, and one that has not been much commented upon in the Phoenix situation. Yes, the controversy can be seen as a part of the culture wars. But it is also an example of a deeper pathology in American religious experience –the way religion is reduced to ethics in American culture. “It is a great temptation for the Church to reduce its mission to that of an ethical authority in order to gain access to the public forum,” Mgr Lorenzo Albacete wrote in the Catholic quarterly Communion more than 15 years ago, and the warning remains true. Pope John Paul’s and Pope Benedict’s call for a “New Evangelisation” will be stillborn if the Church can’t find ways to proclaim the Gospel effectively, and a main impediment to that proclamation is this reduction of religion to ethics. Today, in America, the Catholic Left reduces the Church’s mission to a social-justice ethic, and the Catholic Right reduces the Church’s mission to its ethics on sexual morality. Bishop Olmsted’s decision has encouraged partisans of both Left and Right to embrace a defensive posture in which it is difficult to even hear the transcendent call of the Crucified who Lives. When a moralism of the Left or Right trumps mercy, the Gospel is not proclaimed. The most frightening thing about Bishop Olmsted’s decision is, finally, not its justice or lack thereof. It is that, in his multi-paragraph statement announcing the excommunication, he did not even mention God. That is, if you will pardon the expression, damning.

Test your Understanding:

1. What did Sister Margaret Mary McBride do?
2. What did Bishop Thomas J Olmsted do?
3. What, according to the doctors, would have happened if the abortion had not been performed?
4. What is the Catholic teaching on how ectopic pregnancy should be treated?
5. What is the Principle of Double Effect?

6. Why did Michael Liccione write that the Principle of Double Effect may have animated Sister Margaret McBride's decision?
7. If the decision was animated by the Principle of Double Effect, what difference should that have made to Sister Margaret's treatment?
8. What did Bishop Olmsted write, suggesting that he did not accept that this was a case of double effect?
9. What did Fr Ladislav Orsy SJ, of Georgetown University say about the excommunication?
10. What was University of Virginia Ethics Professor Lois Shepherd's objection?
11. Why does the author dismiss Shepherd's argument?
12. What was Nicholas Kristof's argument in the New York Times?
13. What does the author consider to be the most persuasive argument in favour of the Bishop's decision?
14. What did Mgr Lorenzo Albacete write in the Catholic quarterly Communion more than 15 years ago?
15. What does the author consider to be damning about the Bishop's decision.
16. Summarise and explain the Roman Catholic teaching on abortion in your own words.
17. Do you think that the publicity that excommunication was likely to generate, with the damage that it might do to the Church's reputation on the treatment of women, should have been a factor in the Bishop's decision making process?
18. Consider the arguments in favour of the Bishop's action and against it. If you were the Bishop what would you have done and why?
19. Is there any place for Roman Catholic hospitals in the modern world?
20. Do you agree with the author, that the Church is placed in danger by the very steps taken to try to make it seem relevant in the modern world, by making it all about ethics? Explain your answer.

Activity 3

Have a listen to some (you do not have to listen to them all!) of these BBC Sounds Radio 4 Philosophy and Ethics podcasts and make some introductory notes if you can. These are REALLY GOOD podcasts but, without having some background knowledge of the course / taught lessons they may be a bit difficult. Stick with them and see how you get on. I suggest listening to the following

- Aristotle's Biology – looks at where does life come from and, what is life?
- Plato's republic - considering earlier and current forms of government and how philosophy and ethics are really important for politics, government and society.
- Utilitarianism – One of the key ethical theories that we study.
- Truth – What exactly is truth and, what does it mean to say that something is 'true'. Is something always true?
- Free Will – To what extent are we really free to make our own decisions?
- Good and Evil – How do we judge good and evil in modern society?
- Feminism - What have been the most lasting changes for women in the last century and what is there still left to achieve?
- Evil – Was evil invented by the Church?
- David Hume - A key figure in the Scottish Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, Hume was an empiricist who believed that humans can only have knowledge of things they have themselves experienced. Hume is a **KEY THINKER** that we look at across most topics in the course.

- St Thomas Aquinas - St Thomas Aquinas' ideas remain at the heart of the official doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church today and inform philosophical debates on human rights, natural law and what constitutes a 'just war'. Another **KEY THINKER** that we look at across most topics in the course

Activity 4

Read the Dialogues magazine and make notes. It can be found on the original post on SMHW.

- What did you learn?
- What did you find interesting?

Activity 5

Faith, hype and a lack of clarity – The ability of human reason.

Article

For the past two weeks, the Oxford professor Richard Dawkins has attacked religious faith on television as irrational, non-thinking and a suspension of critical faculty. Here, a leading theologian takes him to task. Science and religion are in absolute conflict, according to Richard Dawkins, Professor of the Public Understanding of Science at Oxford University. Furthermore, in The Root of All Evil, a two-part TV series this month, he has made the extraordinary claim that religion might be the root of all evil. It seems that he thinks scientists are all reasonable, sceptical, honest people who insist on having evidence for all their beliefs. Religious believers, however, are irrational, and their faith discourages independent thought, is divisive, and dangerous. Faith, Dawkins said, is a process of non-thinking, or of believing because you have been told, without any evidence at all. Presumably scientists who have religious beliefs are rational during the week, and suddenly become insane on Sundays. It takes only a little knowledge of history to undermine this black-and-white view of the world. It would be ludicrous to accuse Plato or Aristotle of non-thinking. But Augustine, Anselm and Aquinas, to name just three Christian theologians, continued the Greek philosophical traditions, reflecting in detail on how these Greek views could be reasonably thought to be completed by Christian monotheism. Today, if you take a course in theology at Oxford, Dawkins' own university, you will be challenged to think for yourself, to engage with the best philosophical minds of the past, and to decide for or against specific religious beliefs on the basis of the best reasons you can find. Most believers do not get involved in such abstract intellectual arguments about God. Christians quite rightly sustain their faith by personal response to the love of God which they see in Christ, in the sacraments of the Church, and in their personal experience. But they do need to know that faith has a rational foundation, and that in fact most of the great classical philosophers, Christian or not, have thought that there are very good reasons for believing in God. In fact modern philosophy and science have both arisen from a resolute attempt, initiated by theologians, to think hard about the nature of the universe, and to decide whether it is founded on a spiritual reality or is at base purely material. Isaac Newton, Michael Faraday, and the co-discoverer of the principle of natural selection, A.R. Wallace, were all explicitly motivated to pursue science by their religious beliefs. Of course you do not need religious beliefs to be a great scientist, but to say that having religious beliefs is incompatible with being a scientist is just historically false. Dawkins may think that the spiritual hypothesis has been demolished by materialism. There are indeed some philosophers who think so. But, as anyone who teaches philosophy knows, there are also reasons for believing in God. Even scientists who are not avowed theists, such as Sir Martin Rees, the Astronomer Royal, usually accept that there are good reasons for believing in a designing intelligence, even if they think there are stronger reasons for declining that inference. There are reasons for belief in God, however, that can be intelligently believed and discussed, and to deny that is wilful prejudice

and intellectual dishonesty. When I watched the two programmes presented by Dawkins on Channel 4 this week and last, I could find only two reasons given by him for not believing in God. One was his misunderstanding that natural selection is an alternative to intelligent design. It is not. Natural selection can be intelligently designed. Almost all the theologians I know accept both natural selection and the intelligent design of the universe by its creator. This discussion has become confused because intelligent design has been used by some (such as the biochemist Michael Behe) for the thesis that there are identifiable biological phenomena that require all scientists to posit an intelligent designer. Almost all Catholic theologians and scientists reject this thesis. But naturally they believe that the process of evolution is itself intelligently designed, as a way of generating a great diversity of emergent life-forms, culminating so far on Earth in intelligent human life.

The other reason is that a creator would be as improbable or complex as the complexity he was supposed to explain, so would not really be an explanation. This is more interesting, for it introduces a discussion about what an explanation is. A theist claims that scientific explanation, in terms of general laws and initial states, is not the only sort of explanation. There is also personal explanation, in terms of purposes and values. This is the sort of explanation used by historians, novelists, anthropologists, critics of the arts and ethicists. It is a perfectly familiar form of explanation. The question 'Could there be a personal explanation for the universe?' is one on which there is rational discussion, and on which different views are held. It does no service to clear thinking to say that if anyone thinks there is such an explanation for instance, that the universe exists because God chooses it, they are irrational, non-thinking, and have suspended their critical faculties. This is abuse, not argument. What, then, about the claim that religion is the root of all evil? The twentieth century saw more people killed in warfare than any other century. Two world wars, the Falklands conflict, Vietnam and Korea, the massacre of dissidents in Russia the list is long and tragic, but religion does not figure as a significant factor. Ironically, science does, since it is scientists who have designed weapons of mass destruction that can destroy the world, and built the arsenals that have made modern warfare possible. Has science, then, produced more evil than religion? Lazy thinking would undoubtedly say yes. But what we really need to do is distinguish, and point out that it is the use of science by those with a blind will for power that is evil, while science can be used for good in medicine and agriculture. So it is with religion. Religion can be used by those with a blind will for power (though the religious need scientists to make their bombs). But religion is also the source of immense good hospitals, hospices, relief organisations, universities and schools, great cathedrals, music, art and literature and philosophy. Would the world be better without such things? What Dawkins' programmes lacked was any sense of complexity or discrimination. It was all uncomfortably like 1984, with its vastly over-simplified binary oppositions, 'science good, religion bad?' He did present some very creepy religious believers, but when he deigned to include a sensible one, Richard Harries, the Anglican Bishop of Oxford, he dismissed him as not really religious; betraying both reason and faith, he commented. The bishop betrayed reason just because he was religious, and betrayed faith because he did not seek to apply Old Testament injunctions without qualification to modern society. And that, despite massive evidence to the contrary, is what Dawkins thinks faith is: taking a Holy Book literally, and applying all its principles unthinkingly to modern life. He did indeed find some people who apparently try to do that, though even they must do some thinking occasionally, since the Bible does not mention nuclear weapons or cloning, for instance. Anyone with a little knowledge of moral theology will know that biblical literalism is alien to those who seek to make moral decisions for the Church. The papal encyclical Veritatis Splendor, for example, is a rigorous and finely argued document on morality which makes clear that Christian moral decisions are made on grounds of reflection on natural human inclinations, in the light of belief in a creator God and the revelation of God's love in Jesus Christ. When reference is made to the Bible, it is taken as a record of developing moral insights that culminated in the person of Jesus, who gave as his main principle of interpretation, Love God and your neighbour as yourself. That principle needs to be carefully worked out, but it certainly excludes applying ancient biblical texts literally without reference to the Church's long tradition of moral reflection. Dawkins argues that morality can exist without religion, and the main Christian tradition would agree. God has planted some knowledge of natural moral law in the hearts of all. But Dawkins adds that Christian morality is cruel, brutish and poisonous because it seeks to make us moral by fear of Hell, and makes morality a matter of sucking up to a cruel and tyrannical God. We should seek good for its own sake, and affirm life in a way that religion never can. Perhaps what Dawkins is doing is warning us of the pathologies of religion. Such pathologies exist, and they are to be eschewed. But virtually all the Christians

I know do seek the good for its own sake, since God is precisely the Supreme Good. They affirm life and hold it precious because God creates and values life. They see in God a limitless, precarious and vulnerable love, in which they seek to participate. Whatever this is, it is not sucking up to a cruel sky-god. So why can Professor Dawkins only see the bad in religion? Why is he incapable of making an objective, scientific, study of it, in all its diversity? Why is he unable to make distinctions between the many different forms of religious belief? I do not know the answer to these questions, but I do know this apostle of reason, when confronted with the word faith, suddenly becomes irrational, careless of truth, incapable of scholarly analysis. I really think it must be some sort of virus, and I wish my colleague a speedy recovery.

Test your Understanding:

1. Whose work is Keith Ward reacting against?
2. What 'extraordinary claim' did Dawkins make in his two-part documentary?
3. What, according to Ward, does Dawkins suggest about religious believers?
4. How, according to Ward, does Dawkins define faith?
5. Which 3 examples of great scientists motivated by religious faith does Ward give?
6. Which famous contemporary scientist, though not a theist, accepts that there are reasons for belief in a designing intelligence?
7. To deny what is "wilful prejudice and intellectual dishonesty."
8. Which scientist has suggested 'that there are identifiable biological phenomena that require all scientists to posit an intelligent designer'?
9. What is Dawkins' first reason for not believing in God and his first misunderstanding according to Ward?
10. What do almost all Catholic theologians and scientists believe?
11. What is Dawkins' second and more interesting reason for not believing in God?
12. What is 'abuse, not argument'?
13. Why does Ward dismiss the argument that Religion produces evil, like the argument that science produces evil, as 'lazy thinking'?
14. What did Dawkins' programmes lack, according to Ward?
15. What does Dawkins think that faith is, according to Ward?

Develop your understanding:

- Watch the Dawkins' documentary "Religion: The root of all evil". It is available on You Tube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8nAos1M-Ts> write a 500 word review of the documentary, as if for the television guide of a broadsheet newspaper.
- "It is simply irrational for a scientist to also be a Christian!" Do you agree? You must consider different points of view and give reasons and examples to support your answer.
- To what extent is Ward's accusation, that Dawkins is attacking a 'straw man' rather than making valid criticism of religious faith, valid? Refer to examples from the series and elsewhere.

Activity 6:

Netflix documentaries to watch:

- The Good Place
- The Story of God by Morgan Freeman – Season 1-3 (season 3 is particularly good!)
- Black Fish

- Explained (the 2 series which have the images of boats on the front NOT the series called the mind explained)
- I am a killer

Activity 7

Watch the videos below, choosing one to focus on for your task. Write a list of discussion points/questions it raises. Choose (at least) one of your questions and draft at least three possible answers that might be given.

https://www.ted.com/talks/kwame_anthony_appiah_is_religion_good_or_bad_this_is_a_trick_question/transcript#t-22290 Ted Talk by Kwame Anthony Appiah -- Is Religion Good or Bad? (This is a trick question)

https://www.ted.com/talks/damon_horowitz/transcript Ted Talk by Damon Horowitz – We Need a Moral Operating System

https://www.ted.com/talks/tom_honey_on_god_and_the_tsunami/transcript Ted Talk by Tom Honey – Why Would God Create A Tsunami?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8MzPmkNsgU> Debate: Atheist vs Christian (Christopher Hitchens vs William Lane Craig)