

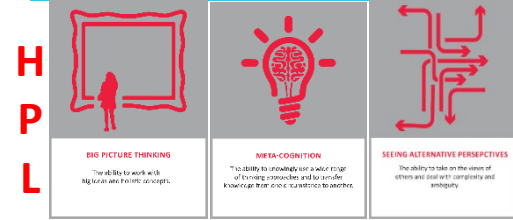


Religious Studies

AQA Course Guide

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Course Aims & Expectations

1. What is Religious Studies?

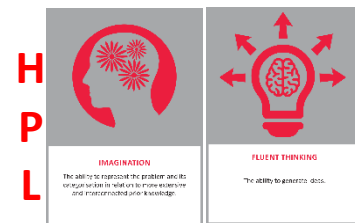
The Religious Studies course ensures students have a thorough understanding of diverse philosophical and ethical viewpoints.

Religious Studies is a thought-provoking subject and our contemporary themes will help students to inspire engaging classroom discussion.

The ancient Greek philosopher, Socrates, once said that **“the unexamined life is not worth living”**.

Philosophy is, by definition, the love of wisdom. It is the study of the most profound questions that you can imagine:

- **What it means to be human?**
- **Are we just animals who have evolved to more sophisticated beings?**
- **Is there a God?**
- **What is knowledge?**



It provides students with the tools they need to critically examine their own lives as well as the world in which they live. It develops a student’s logical capacity and the ability to argue a case coherently.

Furthermore, it is one of the oldest and most respected academic disciplines and has been steadily increasing in popularity over the last decade.

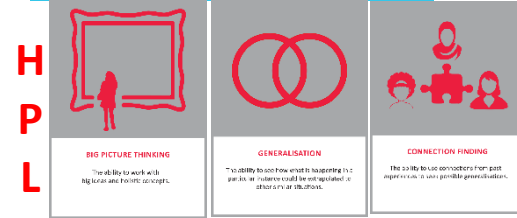
2. What are the aims of the Religious Studies A-Level Course?

Students studying Religious Studies A-Level will have the opportunity to engage with big questions about philosophy, ethics and religion in a secular context. Students will be encouraged to:

- **Develop their interest in a rigorous study of religion and belief and relate it to the wider world;**
- **Develop knowledge and understanding appropriate to a specialist study of religion;**
- **develop an understanding and appreciation of religious thought and its contribution to individuals, communities and societies;**
- **Adopt an enquiring, critical and reflective approach to the study of religion;**
- **Reflect on and develop their own values, opinions and attitudes in the light of their study;**

Furthermore, through this study they will develop important skills such as to be **intellectually confident** and use **precision** in their thinking and writing, the ability to engage with complex texts and the ability to analyse and evaluate arguments as well as constructing and defending their own through **critically and logical thinking**.

Students gain critical and evaluative skills sought by higher education and employers – particularly in law, education, social work, politics, medicine, administration and the media.



3. What careers can Religious Studies lead to?

Religious Studies is a highly valuable A-Level choice. Through the study of philosophy, ethics and religion, students develop many transferable **High Performance Learning** skills that are very applicable to a number of higher education degrees and careers. As an essay-based subject, students develop excellent written communication, **critical and logical**/analytic reasoning, and the ability to interpret, condense and clarify information.

Obviously, studying Philosophy & Ethics A-Level is a good foundation for students wishing to study the following at university:

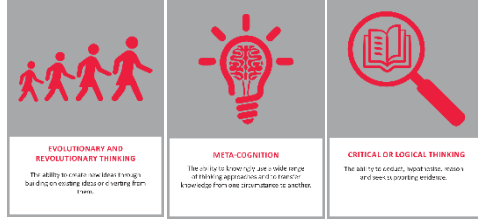
- **BA(Hons) Philosophy**
- **BA(Hons) Theology**
- **BA(Hons) Comparative Religious Study**
- **BA(Hons) Philosophy, Politics & Economics (PPE)**

But there are also many other degrees where an A-Level in Philosophy & Ethics might be useful, including:

- **BA(Hons) Law**
- **BA(Hons) English Literature**
- **BA(Hons) Journalism**
- **BA(Hons) History**
- **BMBS Medicine**
- **BA(Hons) Sociology**
- **BA(Hons) Psychology**
- **BA(Hons) Criminology**

Furthermore, there are many different careers that students who study Philosophy & Ethics A-level go onto, including in the following professions:

- **Law**
- **Finance**
- **Journalism**
- **Civil Service**
- **Education**
- **Business & IT**
- **Human Resources**
- **Marketing, Advertising & Public Relations**
- **Media**



EVOLUTIONARY AND REVOLUTIONARY THINKING
The ability to create new ideas through bold and creative ideas or a setting from them.

META-COGNITION
The ability to know one's own mind and to be able to think about one's own thinking. It is the process of reflecting on one's own knowledge from one's own experiences to another.

CRITICAL OR LOGICAL THINKING
The skill to compare, interpret, assess, make and use logical evidence.

Course Information

4. What do you Study in Religious Studies?

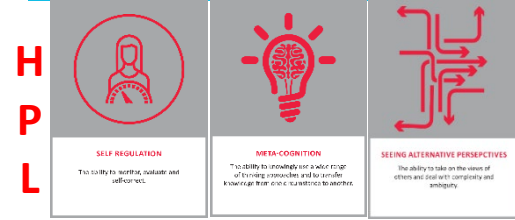
The Religious Studies A-Level is composed of two assessed components as follows:

Component 1	Component 2
<p>Section A: Philosophy of Religion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arguments for the Existence of God Evil & Suffering Religious Experience Religious Language Miracles Self and Life After Death <p>Section B: Religion & Ethics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethical Theories Issues of Human Life & Death Issues of Animal Life & Death Meta-Ethics Free-Will & Moral Responsibility Conscience Bentham & Kant 	<p>Section A: A Study of Christianity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sources of Wisdom & Authority God Self, Death & the Afterlife Key Moral Principles Religious Expression Religion, Gender & Sexuality Religion & Science Religion & Secularisation Religious Pluralism <p>Section B: Christianity & Philosophy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The influence of Philosophy on Religion <p>Section C: Christianity & Ethics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The influence of Ethical Thought on Religion

5. How are you Examined in Religious Studies?

The Religious Studies A-Level is assessed by two 3-hour written examinations as follows:

Component 1	Component 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written Exam 3 Hours Long 100 Mark 50% of total A-Level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written Exam 3 Hours Long 100 Mark 50% of total A-Level



Useful Resources

6. What Textbooks are useful for this Course?

The following textbooks are useful to purchase while studying this course:

- **AQA A-Level Religious studies Year 1: Including AS**
by John Frye
- **AQA A-Level Religious studies Year 2:**
by John Frye, Debbie Herring & Mel Thompson

7. What Revision Guides are useful for this Course?

The following revision guides are useful to purchase to prepare for exams:

- **My Revision Notes AQA A-Level Religious Studies: Paper 1 Philosophy of Religion & Ethics**
by Sheila Butler
- **My Revision Notes AQA A-Level Religious Studies: Paper 2 Study of Christianity and Dialogues**
by Sheila Butler

8. What Websites are useful for this Course?

The following websites are useful for completing wider-readings online:

- **The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy**
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato/>
- **The Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy**
<https://iep.utm.edu/>
- **RS Revision**
<http://www.rsrevision.com/contents/index.htm>
- **Kallipolis Philosophy Resources**
https://www.tes.com/teaching-resources/shop/indiana_jim

Summer Tasks



9. What transition tasks to complete in preparation for this Course?

The following tasks are a guide to help support a successful transition into A Level Religious Studies at Year 12:

Optional:

1. Watch the film: 'The Matrix'. It is readily available on Netflix etc. Do your own research, which Philosophical ideas link to the film? There is lots of information on the internet, so do some research.

[Philosophical Analysis of The Matrix \(weebly.com\)](http://www.philosophicalanalysisofthematrix.com)

Look in particular to Plato's Allegory of the Cave. What is this? How does it link? https://youtu.be/j2zr_Mmaizo



2. Watch 'The Truman Show' Again available on Netflix etc. How close do you think this is to the real world?

[The Truman Show | Issue 32 | Philosophy Now](http://www.philosophynow.com/issue-32-the-truman-show)



Compulsory:

Read the two articles attached: Write a summary of the key ideas expressed about evil and how we make decisions.

The Problem of Evil Peter Vardy

Writing an article for *Dialogue* is not easy. It will be read by teachers with degrees in Theology and Philosophy, those about to take A-levels who may have had two years studying Philosophy of Religion, and by first-year sixthformers who have done little work so far in the subject. How much does one assume one's reader knows? For those who have written on evil the problem is made worse as some readers may have read their books and there is nothing more boring than repeating the same arguments in an article as appeared in the book.

The problem of evil can be simply stated: If God is all-powerful and all-good, how can evil exist? The problem is as simply resolved - if one is prepared to give up God's omnipotence or God's goodness, then one can argue that either God was unable to prevent evil or did not want to do so. Neither of these answers, however, accords with traditional Christian belief (and the problem is much the same for Jews and Muslims as well). The answer given by the Free Will Defence appears simple: God wishes human beings to respond to him and to each other in love and they can only do this if they are genuinely free. If humans are given freedom, then God is unable to prevent them doing evil. The evil actions of human beings can then be explained and God remains omnipotent. God could eliminate evil but only at the price of doing away with human freedom, and this freedom, and the love that it makes possible, is worth the price of the evil that exists. However, this is where the problems start.

(a) The Problem of Freedom

The first problem is what is meant by 'freedom'. There are two opposing views:

(1) Freedom means that a human being can do what she wants to do, even though this is determined by background factors (this is termed a compatibilist view of freedom or liberty of spontaneity). Anthony Flew argues for this position. Take an example -

Catherine may be free to choose to fall in love with and to marry Paul. This may be her free choice, but this does not mean that her choice is not determined. In fact her decision to choose Paul was not a random decision: she did not walk along the street and grab the first man who happened to come along. She chose Paul because of her and his education, background and many other factors. It could be argued, therefore, that she was free to choose Paul in that Paul was the man she wanted but she wanted Paul and chose him because of her nature and this nature is determined. If this view of freedom is taken, then God could have given human beings a nature such that we would always *want* to choose what was good. In this case we would be free to do what we wanted, but what we wanted would be determined and we would never do evil. The Free Will Defence therefore collapses.

(2) Freedom means that a human being is not wholly controlled or determined by any internal or external factors such as genetic make-up, schooling, culture, etc. (this is termed a non-compatibilist view of freedom or liberty of indifference).

Alvin Plantinga rejects the first alternative, saying that, perhaps, human beings suffer from 'trans-world depravity'. This means that in every world in which human beings exist, they must perform at least one wrong action. Being depraved is thus part of human nature and God could not have made humans who were not depraved - since being human means to be depraved, at least to some extent. However, the problem with this is why should one assume that human nature *has* to be depraved? Also, if we are depraved by nature, then doing evil may no longer be our fault.

The supporter of the Free Will Defence has to assert that human freedom is to be understood in terms of (2) above - in other words, human freedom is incompatible with determinism. If this is the case, then God could not have given us a nature which ensured we would always do good and still make us free - the two are incompatible. This raises the question of why God 'could not' have done this.

(b) The Problem of Omnipotence

God is traditionally held to be almighty or omnipotent. There are various definitions of omnipotence but two, in particular, are relevant:

- God can do anything, absolutely.

- God can do anything that does not involve a contradiction.

The first of these was held by Rene Descartes and if this view is adopted then God can even do logically impossible tasks. God can make a cow be a spider whilst still remaining a cow; swear by a being greater than God and commit suicide. More important for the Free Will Defence, God could create people with liberty of indifference and bring it about that they always do what is right. In other words, if God can do the logically impossible, God can give us freedom from control and still control us. If this were the case, then the Free Will Defence fails as God could have given humans the freedom necessary for love and yet still have ensured that we never did wrong.

For the Free Will Defence to succeed, therefore, the second view of omnipotence must be adopted. If it is held that it is a contradiction to say that human beings are both free and determined, then if God cannot do contradictory things, God cannot make humans both free and also determined.

The Free Will Defence depends, therefore, on maintaining that (i) human freedom should be understood in terms of liberty of indifference and (ii) that God cannot do logically contradictory tasks.

(c) The Problem of Natural Evil

The Free Will Defence mainly deals with the problem of moral evil - however, it is much less effective in dealing with so-called natural evil such as volcanoes, tidal waves, cancer, smallpox, etc. Nature is, essentially, 'red in tooth and claw' and is wasteful on a huge scale. One species preys on another and huge numbers of offspring are killed or devoured by other species. The human body might well have been better designed to minimise pain and, it is argued (for instance by David Hume) that if one looks at the natural world there is little evidence of an all-powerful and wholly good creator. To be sure, there is also great beauty in the world, but the evidence for the existence of God from design is not strong.

It is important to recognise, however, that the problem of evil is not concerned with establishing the existence of God - it is rather concerned to answer the atheist's challenge that the God of traditional belief is incompatible with the existence of evil. This challenge can be rejected if one can show for what good reason God would allow natural evil.

Various attempts have been made to do this, but the important point is that these generally do not fall under the Free Will Defence heading.

Alvin Plantinga has suggested that, as an hypothesis, it is possible that natural evil could be the result of free choices made by the Devil and his angels. This thesis has two problems - firstly, the evidence for the existence of the devil is not strong nor is the evidence for some original, paradise-like state which was subsequently corrupted. More important, why should God allow the Devil freedom to disrupt creation on such a huge scale?

The Free Will Defence is one of the best replies to those who reject God on the grounds of the existence of evil. God may have had to allow evil and this, it can be argued, shows the incredibly high value attached to freedom and the human ability to be able to love and to be able to sacrifice her or himself for others.

However, this opens the way for the next challenge.

(d) The Suffering of Innocent Children

Ivan Karamazov, in *The Brothers Karamazov* by Dostoyevsky (himself a Christian), sets out one of the most effective rejections of God ever written. I will not go through his argument here since it is set out in some detail in *The Puzzle of Evil* (Harper Collins).

However, his position is, effectively, that no matter what end God has in view, the suffering of innocent children is simply not worth it.

Imagine standing by the side of the lime pits in Belsen or Treblinka where Jews were buried after being gassed. In 1943, to save gas, the SS threw live children up to the age of 5 into the lime pits and dead bodies of adults were thrown down on top of them. They died slowly and those who tried to crawl out were simply kicked back. As an alternative, imagine watching as thirteen and fourteen year-old girls were gang raped by soldiers in the former Yugoslavia whilst their officers looked on and laughed. Imagine looking on at one of these scenes whilst Ivan Karamazov stands at your side. He would, effectively, have said to you, 'How can you believe in an all-good, all-powerful God in the face of this suffering? *Nothing* is worth the suffering of these innocents and if the price for love is that human beings

can do this to each other, then it would have been better for God to have created no world at all rather than this one'. Ivan rejects God even though he believes that God exists. There is no easy philosophic answer to Ivan's challenge to God, which is probably the most devastating ever written.

Possibly Job can provide a way forward as the book of Job is also the story of a man preoccupied with suffering - first his own but later the suffering of all human beings. Ivan and Job are very similar: both are angry with God, both want to 'put God in the dock' and both want to act as God's prosecutor. The difference between Ivan and Job is that whereas Ivan wants to be prosecutor and judge, Job is, in the end, willing to trust God. In the final chapters of the book of Job, God answers Job but gives no explanation. However, Job is satisfied - he is willing to trust God even though he cannot understand him. It is significant that God says that Job is right to be appalled and concerned about the problem of suffering: God does not condemn Job for questioning God. Confronted by the suffering of innocent human beings, two reactions are possible - that of Ivan and that of Job. At some point philosophy has to be modest and to fall silent and this, to me, is the point where philosophers should be willing to say no more. In the face of extreme horror, silence may be the best reaction and we may be forced to make a decision as human beings between the response of Job and that of Ivan.

The challenge of Ivan on the grounds of innocent suffering undercuts the Free Will Defence, as whilst the Free Will Defence maintains that freedom and the possibility of love justify evil, Ivan rejects this. He thus rejects the central plank of the Free Will Defence as he maintains that *nothing* can justify the suffering of innocent children. Ivan's position is well known and generally most people studying at A-level will be aware of it.

However, there is a second challenge put forward by Ivan which is often not discussed.

(e) The Grand Inquisitor

Ivan Karamazov tells a story that has considerable contemporary relevance. The scene is Seville in Spain at the height of the Inquisition. The previous day, heretics had been burnt to death for not accepting the beliefs of the Church. Into the crowded square, Jesus comes back a second time. He raises a young girl from the dead and people rush to touch him.

Out on the steps of the Cathedral comes the aged and venerable Cardinal and looks down on the scene. He recognises what is happening and sends his guards down to arrest Jesus. The crowds part and Jesus is brought before the Inquisitor.

The Inquisitor asks Jesus why he has returned. Jesus, the Cardinal says, handed over the world to the care of his Church - but since Jesus died the Church has not served God but Satan. The Church does this out of love, because Satan loves human beings much more than Jesus ever did. Jesus, claims the Inquisitor, offered people freedom and called them to follow him - he offered a high and lonely path which was incredibly difficult and demanding. Instead of the ancient law which was clear and comparatively simple to follow, Jesus called his followers to use their freedom, to give up everything in order to be his disciples. This message appealed to the strong and, the Inquisitor said, he himself could have been one of this select band who lived on locusts and wild honey and gave up earthly joys for the sake of obedience to God. He started out on this path - but rejected it as he 'refused to serve madness'. Instead he became a leader of the Church which deceives people, out of love. The Inquisitor's point is that very few will really be able to sacrifice themselves for God, very few will be able truly to love their neighbour and to put family and friends in second place. Most people are weak and simply want to be happy. Most people wish to live in the comfort zone where they can be secure, reassured by their friends, and have few demands made of them. Provided they are nice to each other, do not do anything terribly wrong, live a conventional life and go to Church from time to time (as well as contributing financially), then the Church reassures them and makes them content. Most people rush to give up their freedom as it is too demanding to take responsibility for their own lives - instead they want security and they want the Church to tell them what to do. Certainty is very appealing. People do not want to be individuals, they just want to be 'one of the crowd'. Instead of measuring themselves against God's demands, they measure themselves against each other and are reduced to a common, low-level uniformity. This, the Inquisitor recognises, is a denial of Jesus' message and, indeed, it is Satan's message - albeit one endorsed by the Church. The aim is to help people to conform and not to face up to the reality of Jesus' call.

Jesus never replies to the Inquisitor. When the Inquisitor finishes speaking he dismisses Jesus and says 'Go, and never return'. Jesus leans forward and kisses the Inquisitor. The Inquisitor shudders - and then Jesus leaves. It is not clear what Dostoyevsky meant by his ending of the story, but his basic message is clear. Human beings are so weak that they cannot cope with the gift of freedom. Notice that the Inquisitor never says that human beings are not free - instead he says that they do not want to be and are too weak to make use of their freedom.

Crucial to the Free Will Defence is that people are free and can use this freedom to respond to God.

However, in order to do this they must first become individuals and the

Free Will Defence assumes this is possible. It is worth reading or, if there is a performance near you, seeing Ibsen's play *The Dolls House*, which deals with the theme of becoming an individual and the realisation of a woman that she is trapped in a marriage which denies her individuality. Most people do not want to be individuals - to have their lives transformed so that all the things that matter so much to so many people (power, security, money, reputation, etc.) are seen as being of little account. Most people do not want to face up to unconditional, non-preferential love for others. Instead they want the security of the comfort zone, they want to be happy, they want to conform. Most people, it may be argued, are not really free at all. They will leave school, perhaps go to college or university, have one, two or more 'relationships', live with someone or get married, buy a second hand Ford Fiesta, take out a mortgage, have one or two babies, buy a series of better cars, watch the children grow up, go through the normal mid-life crises, struggle to pay for their children's schooling and university, retire, cultivate the garden, play golf and eventually die. Most people think they are free when they make this sort of choice, but in fact the choice is normally to conform. Most young people are desperate to be 'in' with the crowd - to look the same as their peers, to behave the same and to have the same aims. Few are individuals.

The Free Will Defence is based on the assumption that human beings are capable of much, much more than this and that everyone is in principle capable of becoming an individual in his or her own right, living, if they believe there is a God, in relationship with this God and trying to show radical love, compassion and gentleness in all that they do or say. Such a position may well be ridiculed by friends, parents and family who may ask the person to 'be reasonable' and to 'conform'. The Free Will Defence assumes that all human beings genuinely have the freedom to make a decision for themselves about the sort of life they will live - and if this is not valid then the Free Will Defence fails.

(f) Conclusion

Does the Free Will Defence succeed? It is not effective against natural evil and other arguments are needed to cope with the problems that arise in this area. However, it may well succeed in explaining why a wholly good, all-powerful God should allow *moral* evil provided four assumptions are made:

- Human freedom is defined in terms of liberty of indifference,
 - God is omnipotent in the sense that God can do everything that does not involve a contradiction,
 - The suffering of innocent children is a price worth paying for human freedom and the love that this makes possible, and
 - Human beings do have the ability, whether or not they choose to exercise it, to become individuals capable of rejecting convention and living lives of radical love for God and for their fellow men and women.
- At the end of the day, however, the problem of evil is not simply a problem for philosophers - it is a challenge to us as individual human beings. The question we need to ask ourselves is whether, in the face of great human misery and suffering, we are prepared to stand up and be counted and to try to roll back the tide of despair and hopelessness and, in their place, leave compassion, gentleness and a genuine commitment to the good of others. Freedom makes this a possibility. If we try to take this path, we may well be unpopular, often lonely and isolated and sometimes afraid that we are deluded - but we may become individual human beings and perhaps that is the greatest achievement of all.

UTILITARIANISM
Geoff Cocksworth
The Basis of Classical or Hedonistic Utilitarianism

We must make clear at the outset that all moral philosophies, and indeed moral theologies, stand in direct relation to their historical setting in life. Nowhere is this more true than with the development of utilitarian thought, and it is a point not often enough made. In addition, the system of ethics known as Utilitarianism did not necessarily start with Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), neither did it end with their deaths and the subsequent criticisms of their thought. It is, in truth, an evolving philosophy with many stages and developments. However, as it is impossible to deal with all of these here, I shall limit my discussion to the views associated with Bentham and Mill, best known as Classical Utilitarianism or Hedonistic Utilitarianism, rather than some of the later forms such as Desire or Welfare Utilitarianism.

The basis of this Classical Utilitarian thought is not religious - it does not stem from a theistic belief (belief in a god). It is empirical (based upon human experience) and natural (based upon what comes naturally), that we, as humans, desire pleasure and seek to avoid pain, hence its title 'hedonistic utilitarianism' (hedonism is the doctrine that the pursuit of pleasure is good). Bentham's version of this theory can also be deemed 'psychologically motivated', that is from his analysis of the human psyche (the preference for pleasure to pain), he came to conclusions about how we should act. Thus his theory is often also described as 'psychological hedonism', the doctrine that human action is all about striving for pleasure. This might seem all rather complicated but, on the contrary, one of the attractions of utilitarian thought is its basic simplicity. In his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (written in 1789), Bentham expressed it thus: Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them to point out what we ought to do as well as to determine what we should do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects are fastened to their throne.

The doctrine of the pursuit of pleasure was certainly not a new thing. It is commonly associated with the Greek philosopher Epicurus (341-270 BC). But Epicurus himself was aware that many so-called 'pleasures' often lead to pain and he, certainly, did not seek a life of luxuries. His own ideas may have had an origin in Aristotle (384-322 BC) who saw happiness as the Supreme Good and thus as the true object of life but argued that this could only be obtained through a life of 'moderation'. In fact, it is fair to say that happiness (Greek = *eudaimonia*) is, along with virtue (*arete*), the main object of all Greek ethics.

Utility

But why utility? Utility means 'usefulness' (Latin *utilis* = useful). Bentham was concerned to promote an ethic that was 'useful' (he may have borrowed the term itself from David Hume). He found it in his appeal to the pain and pleasure theory mentioned above – an action is most useful if it avoids pain and promotes pleasure. Equating pleasure with happiness, Bentham expressed the principle of 'usefulness' in the following way:

By the principle of utility is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question ...

An action may be said to be conformable to the principle of utility... when the tendency it has to augment the happiness of the community is greater than any it has to diminish it.

John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (1863), expressed this as follows:

The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure.

We can see from these two statements that Utilitarianism is also quite clearly a teleological philosophy, that is it is concerned with the 'consequence of an action' (Greek *telos* = end) rather than the original motives. What matters is how much happiness or pleasure can be assessed as the consequence of doing the action in question. But, to this we must add something more. For Bentham and Mill, it was necessary that happiness or pleasure be seen in the widest and fullest sense. In Bentham's famous phrase: 'it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong'. Thus, there are three main areas that need careful examination: first, the notion of the greatest number, second, the notion of the greatest amount, and, third, the idea that the rightness of an ethical action can be judged according to its results (consequences).

The Greatest Number

Jeremy Bentham lived in the age of the emergence of the great democracies. He witnessed the birth of America (1776- the American revolution) and the rising up of the new France (1789- the French Revolution). But, Bentham himself did not start off as a democrat, originally thinking that an 'enlightened monarchy' would be the best vehicle of change in society, but became convinced when his own suggestions for a new kind of prison (known as the Panopticon) were not accepted by the British government.

The nineteenth century itself was a time of rapid population growth, urbanisation, industry, unemployment and social deprivation. It saw the end of many old and established orders, especially the influence and centrality of the churches which were being cast aside as new societies were growing on secular values. There were other philosophies of the day which saw solutions in terms of 'classes' and not 'individuals' (e.g. Marxism). Likewise for Bentham it was the community that mattered, the happiness of the community.

Thus, for those with education anyway, Bentham's age was rapidly becoming one for the democrat, the philanthropist and humanist. There were many great figures. Bentham himself wanted to be the most 'effectively benevolent man who had ever lived', a selfish but not altogether ignoble aim. At the same time, he was convinced of his own rightness, believing that no sensible person could disagree with him. John Stuart Mill, however although still very much a utilitarian, did disagree over certain important aspects of Bentham's theory, especially over the emphasis on the greatest number. The problems with judging goodness in such terms may seem obvious to us today – what if the greatest number in any community favours actions that cause immense harm to certain individuals or the persecution of minority groups? But, as I have said above, we must understand Bentham in his own time.

Nevertheless, in the 1820's Bentham himself had expressed some doubts about the words the greatest number in that they might lead to the impression that the happiness of the majority was all that mattered. He therefore felt the need to point out that a minority could be so oppressed by a majority that the unhappiness of the former might be even greater than the happiness of the latter. In such a case, the overall happiness of the community would suffer.

As indicated, Mill felt it necessary to come to terms with the full problems of this term.

To talk to the greatest number was admirable at a superficial level, but it took only a minor examination to reveal that, in such a world, the individual was likely not only to be lost among the crowd but never likely to be allowed to develop. Thus, Mill sought to

rescue the individual from Bentham's community.

The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not sufficient warrant.

The only part of the conduct of any one, for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others. In the part which merely concerns himself, his independence is, of right absolute. Over himself, over his own body or mind, the individual is sovereign. This famous passage still lies at the heart of so much discussion of the questions of State censorship and the relationship between the individual and society. For Mill, a State cannot prevent an individual doing something which only harms him/herself. When other people are involved, then the State can be involved; otherwise, the individual is sovereign.

In response to this it can be said that, just as Bentham's majority rule is potentially harmful to the individual, Mill's sovereignty of the individual could be harmful to the overall happiness of the greatest number. It could be said that I as an individual have the right to snort cocaine – if I wish to harm myself so be it – but where do I get my cocaine from? Surely others are affected in its means of production, transportation and selling? If I can get it, so indeed can others who might not be so strong-willed as myself; how can we protect the weak and allow me my pleasure? The indication is strongly that most actions affect others, we do not stand alone, we live in communities. Even so, this is not to say that Bentham was right and we have to recognise the dangers, both intrinsic and universal.

The Greatest Amount of Happiness

On the matter of how we measure happiness or pleasure, we again find disagreement between Bentham and Mill. For Bentham, happiness was quantitative – an action's goodness depended entirely upon the amount of happiness produced. It did not matter whether that action was simple or intellectual, menial or artistic, 'push-pin' or poetry:

Prejudice apart, the game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry. If the game of push-pin furnishes more pleasure, it is more valuable than either.

As what mattered was the amount of happiness, and as more people probably played push-pin (a simple child's game) than read poetry, then push-pin was of greater utility value than poetry. Today we might say that football creates more pleasure than Vivaldi, that reading the Sun is of greater value than reading the Independent – in each case more people do the former than the latter, so the amount of happiness is bound to be relative to the number of people involved. In order to aid the calculation of the greatest amount, Bentham suggested a 'hedonic calculus' in which pleasure and pain were to be measured according to seven criteria: intensity (how deep is the pleasure or pain?), duration (how long will it last?), certainty (will it definitely happen or not?), remoteness (is it in the near or distant future?), richness or fecundity (will it produce similar or other pleasures?), purity (is it likely to produce sensations of the opposite type), and, extent (how many people will be affected?).

In his classic essay on Utilitarianism (1863), Mill admitted that 'pleasure, and freedom from pain, are the only things desirable as ends' (consequences) but went on to distinguish between higher and lower pleasures. In comparing the human capacity for pleasure with that of an animal, he argued that 'some kinds of pleasures are more desirable than others' (following Epicurus) and that, if someone has had experience of both (that is animal and human), he will invariably never be satisfied with the former. From this he argued that no intelligent person, if he has had experience of the pleasures of a dunce or fool, would likewise be satisfied with those. Even though the intelligent person might require more to keep him happy than the fool, he will not swap places.

It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be

Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.

How would we react to soma or to the electrode treatment? We might try it now and again but would we want it in perpetuity, would we want it forced on us? We would have happy faces, we would be experiencing pleasure with no bad effects, but is this really pleasure? Pleasure is simply not quantifiable, nor is it measurable in this way. Perhaps in fact we need pain in order to measure pleasure, so the continued existence of pain is as important as the existence of pleasure.

Consequences – The End Justifies the Means

The Bolshevik revolutionary leader Lenin is reported to have said if the end does not justify the means, nothing does... The dangers of an ethical system that relies solely upon consequences are numerous and are particularly well demonstrated by a well-readable and moving account of post-revolutionary Eastern European philosophy found in Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* (1940). Here, the former revolutionary Rubashov is under arrest for having some doubts about the value of the end justifies the means. In a passionate response to his inquisitor, he unfolds the horror of the policy that he himself had once helped carry out:

... in the interests of a just distribution of land we deliberately let die of starvation about five million farmers and their families in one year. So consequent were we in the liberation of human beings from the shackles of industrial exploitation that we sent about ten million people to do forced labour in the Arctic regions and jungles of the East, under conditions similar to those of antique galley slaves... Acting consequentially in the interests of the coming generations, we have laid such terrible privations on the present one that its average length of life is shortened by a quarter ...

This is, of course, taking the policy to an extreme but extremes are sometimes useful in helping to reveal the dangers of a theory. An end justifies the means doctrine can be used to justify all kinds of atrocities in the present, a good end (e.g. one that promotes the happiness of the greatest number) would forbid nothing 'absolutely', even rape, torture and murder. But neither Bentham nor Mill would have advocated such extremes. These examples refer to what are called 'exceptional circumstances' – only in exceptional circumstances would torture be justified, e.g., if it prevents a bomb exploding in a crowded shopping area. But, even so, can it be justified? You can probably see the dangers: present people become expendable figures and statistics in the grand calculation. There are additional problems. Even if we agree that the consequences alone matter, how do we calculate these consequences? Without a crystal ball, future predictions become assumptions and assumptions are often based upon past experience (which cannot take into account new experiences of the future) and often upon pure guesswork. Put all this together with the problems stated above of calculating 'happiness' or 'pleasure' and we are faced with a need to rethink utilitarian principles.

Conclusions – The Avoidance of Suffering

This short study has tried to emphasise the three major tenets of Classical Utilitarianism, along with some of the problems in their adoption. However, despite these and other problems, the perseverance of utilitarian philosophy serves to show its lasting value. There is much that Bentham and Mill said and did that was ahead of their time and ought certainly to be studied, as should their influence on law and economics. The continual reworking of their ideas in moral philosophy (look at Henry Sidgwick, 1874, David Lyons, 1965, and R. M. Hare, 1981) are a further testimony to their value. It is indeed significant that one of the most important recent contributions to modern moral thinking, the Warnock Report on Human Fertilisation and Embryology (1984), adopted largely utilitarian guidelines. However, my own preference is to adopt what could be called a negative utilitarian approach. Happiness or pleasure are impossible to quantify, but pain

and suffering are not. We may not necessarily know what will make someone happy but we can have a good idea as to what will make them suffer, certainly in the physical sense. We may have enormous difficulties in deciding what is right or good but we can come to more immediate agreement over what is evil or bad.

Thus, the usefulness (utility) of Classical utilitarianism may lie in assessing what action will cause the least amount of suffering. Here, the suffering of the present must not be put aside for the benefit of the future – all must count. The principle of utility becomes ‘an action is wrong if it creates suffering’. To this may well be added: if two or more actions are all likely to create suffering, we can only choose the one that will bring about the least. In addition, for this philosophy to be fully 'useful' it must take on board the serious problem about consequences, it must couple its concern for end results with a concern for what is desirable in the present; it must couple its concern for numbers with a concern for individual human beings. Mill certainly realised this as did Koestler's former revolutionary, Rubashov, quoted above. In this form, I suggest that Classical Utilitarianism is a most useful, if not the most useful, way of approaching the major moral issues of today. It is certainly extremely useful for any student wishing to 'get into' a particular moral argument. As a basis for essays and analyses on the ethics of war, medicine, the environment and poverty, it is invaluable. By considering the utilitarian position, especially that of the 'elimination of pain and suffering', it is possible to get behind a question. Will gene therapy lead to more or less suffering? Will the legalisation of voluntary euthanasia lead to more or less suffering? Will the legalisation of cannabis lead to more or less suffering? Will the decriminalisation of 'hard porn' lead to more or less suffering? Do sanctions on Iraq lead to more or less suffering...? Thus by starting with this basic utilitarian principle of reduction of suffering, and by applying the facts to this principle, particular moral judgements emerge for discussion and the debate deepens as moral theory and practical ethics engage. Try it.

Sources and texts quoted or referred to:

Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, edited by J. H. Burnes and H. L. A. Hart (London: Athlone Press, 1970)

John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, and *On Liberty*, edited by Geraint Williams (Everyman Library, 1993)

Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon* (Penguin Modern Classics, 1985)

J. J. C. Smart and B. Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (C.U.P., 1973)

Mary Warnock, *A Question of Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985)

Also

Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* (London: Macmillan, 1984)

David Lyons, *Forms and Limits Of Utilitarianism* (O.U.P., 1965).

R. M. Hare, *Essays in Philosophical Methods* (London: Macmillan, 1971).

Suggested Reading (non-fiction)

For fairly specific study of the background and main ideas of Classical Utilitarianism, I suggest:

John Dinwiddy, *Bentham* (O.U.P., 1989)

William Thomas, *Mill* (O.U.P., 1985)

Anthony Quinton, *Utilitarian Ethics* (Duckworth, 1989)

J. J. C. Smart and B. Williams (above).

In addition, there are a number of general introductions to Ethics in which can be found chapters on Utilitarianism. The best of these are:

Peter Vardy and Paul Grosch, *The Puzzle of Ethics*, chapters 6 and 7 (Collins, Fount, 1994)

Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics*, chapters 12 and 17 (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966)

Richard Norman, *The Moral Philosophers*, chapter 7 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983).
Peter Singer (ed.), *A Companion to Ethics*, chapters 19 and 20 (Blackwell, 1991) – The work of Peter Singer himself, on a variety of fields from Famine Relief and Animal Rights to Abortion and Embryo Research, is an excellent example of utilitarian principles in action.

Suggested Reading (fiction)

Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*
Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*
Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*.