

Philosophy Taster Session

Intro to Epistemology (Philosophical Debates about Knowledge)

“The only thing we require to be good philosophers is a faculty of wonder....Most people get so caught up in every day affairs that they lose their faculty of wonder. To them the world becomes a habit and they forget to question why we are here. Philosophers do not do that. They separate themselves from the apathetic and approach all aspects of life with an inquiring mind.”

J. Gaardner, Sophie's World

Plato and Aristotle



What if this world isn't the real one?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3gl9ms8Fdc>

Films to watch:
-The Truman Show
- The Matrix



Plato



Ancient Greek Philosopher

He was born into a wealthy Athenian family and became a pupil of **Socrates**.

In 387 BCE he founded the Academy of Athens which became the first European University and where **Aristotle** was later a pupil.

One 20th century philosophy, Whitehead, famously said, "**Modern Philosophy is a series of footnotes to Plato**".

Plato's Allegory of the Cave

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=69F7GhASOdM>



What is the meaning of Plato's allegory?

What is the meaning of Plato's Cave Allegory?

Key Ideas in the Allegory	Plato's Concepts
Prisoners	Ordinary people
Outside World	True Reality
Cave	World of appearance
Shadow Plays	Illusions
Escaped Prisoner	Philosopher searching for the truth
Chains	Breaking free from the senses and using the mind to gain knowledge
Sun	Form of Good
The Returning Prisoner	Enlightened philosopher

It all comes from the cave...

The allegory of the cave is a grand summary of Plato's key ideas. In it he explains:

- the difference between knowledge and opinion (the shadows)
- the importance of reasoning rather than knowledge gained through the senses.
- the true nature of reality: dualism
- how society should be organised.



To Discuss:

Why was the freed prisoner in pain and confusion when he came out of the cave?

Why does the prisoner return to the cave?

If the cave dwellers are happy in their ignorance, is it better to leave them to it?

Do you think we can always trust our senses?

What is your evaluation of Plato's allegory of the cave? – What is real? How do you know?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L1QZtMI3ebc>



Plato's Philosophy in the Cave: Epistemology (what is knowledge and how is it known)

Two types of knowledge:

- **A posteriori, empirical knowledge:** knowledge gained from the senses.
eg. I know the coffee is hot because it felt hot; I know it is cold today because I am shivering.
 - **A priori knowledge:** knowledge gained from logical reasoning, wholly independent of sense experience.
eg. Something can't be red and green all over at the same time.
- Plato argues that empirical knowledge is flawed – need to escape artificial world of the senses. Only a priori knowledge enables us to know the truth.
 - This is a difficult journey.
 - Mathematics is the training for achieving knowledge based on reasoning and understanding.
 - An ultimate Good exists; knowledge of the Good is the highest knowledge a human is capable of.

A Level Philosophy: Unit 1 -Epistemology

Epistemology centres on philosophical debates about knowledge.

We explore ideas about:

- **perception as a source of knowledge, including realism and idealism**
- **reason as a source of knowledge, including innatism**
- **the intuition and deduction thesis**
- **the limits of knowledge by considering different types of scepticism.**

A Level Philosophy:

Unit 2 – Moral Philosophy

Moral Philosophy explores ethical theories and their application.

We examine the ethical theories of:

- **Utilitarianism**
- **Kant**
- **Aristotle**

We then evaluate the extent they can be successfully applied to a wide variety of modern ethical scenarios.

We also study Meta-Ethics, which approaches ethics from a more abstract position, considering what is meant by 'good' and 'evil' and explores whether ethical statements can ever be meaningful.

A Level Philosophy: Unit 3 – Metaphysics of God

This unit examines the concept of God and explores arguments for the coherence and incoherence of the concept.

We consider arguments relating to the existence of God, including:

- the ontological argument
- the teleological argument
- the cosmological argument
- the problem of evil.

We also explore debates surrounding religious language, including the empiricist challenges to metaphysical language.



A Level Philosophy: Unit 4 – Metaphysics of Mind

The metaphysics of mind centres of philosophical debates about what is meant by ‘mind’ and features of different mental states.

We consider:

- **dualist theories, including substance dualism and property dualism**
- **physicalist theories, including behaviourism, identity theory, eliminative materialism and functionalism.**

Transition/ Induction Tasks

TASK 1: Linked to the Epistemology unit

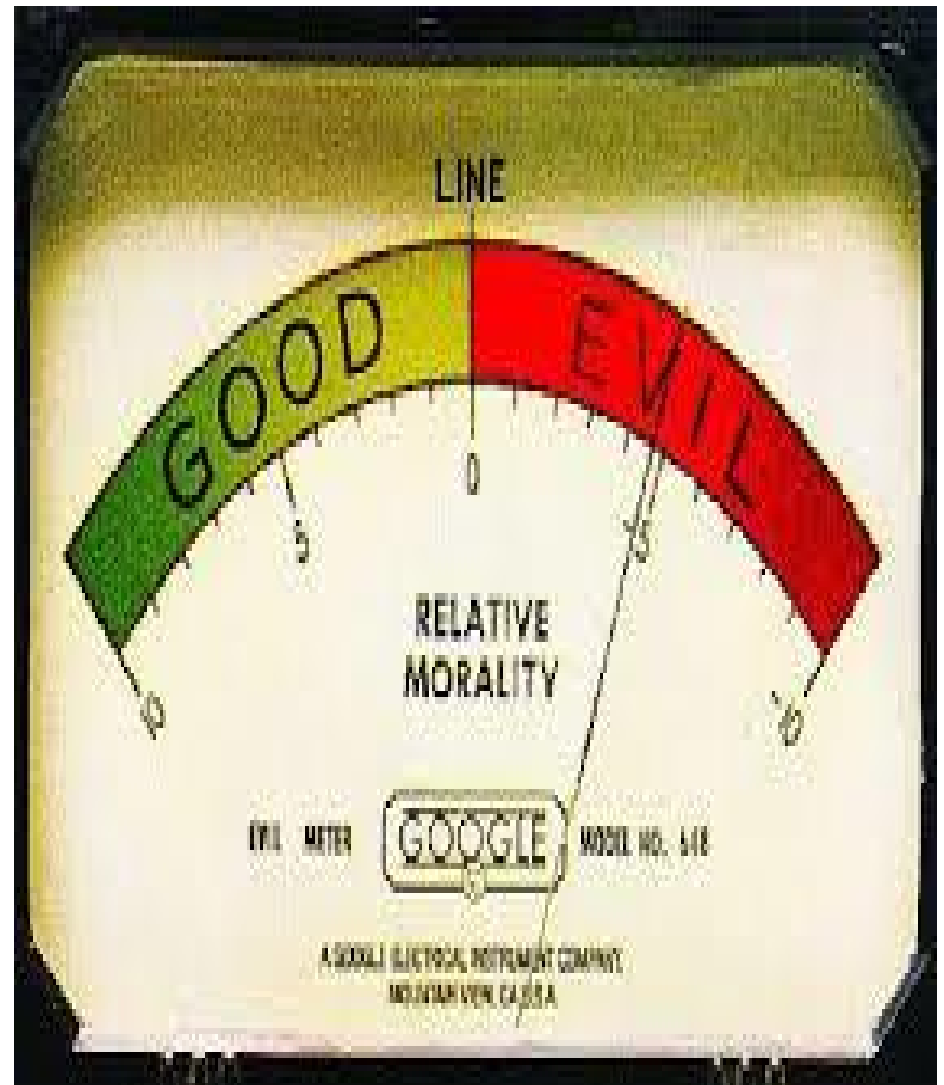
- Write an essay of approx. 750 words answering the question: “How useful is Plato’s analogy of the cave?”
- Use your learning from this PowerPoint and Audio file, as well as your own further research to complete this.



Transition/ Induction Tasks

TASK 2: Linked to the Moral Philosophy unit.

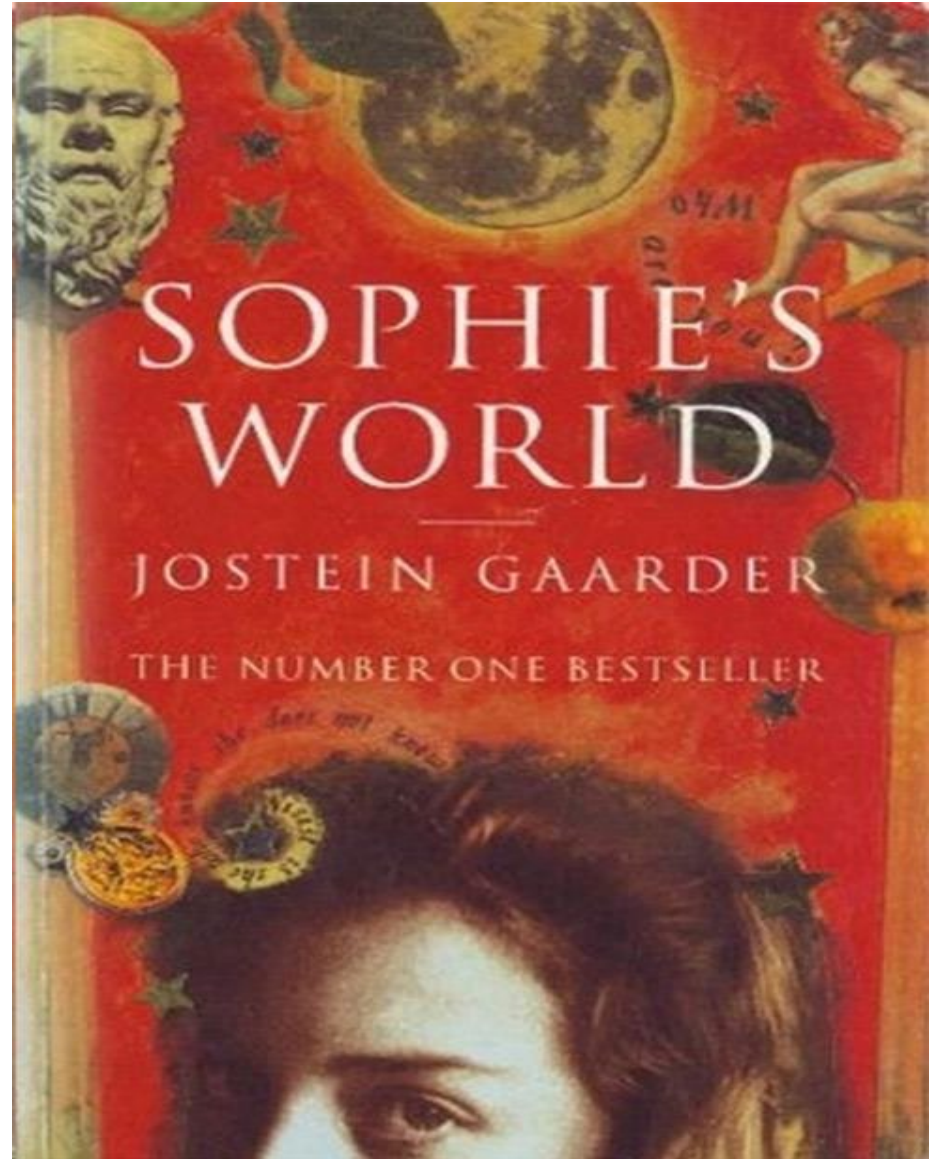
- Read the “Introduction to Ethics” PDF chapter and complete all of the tasks listed.



Transition/ Induction Tasks

Extension Challenge:

- Read the novel 'Sophie's World' - it will give a strong knowledge and skill base to start the course with.
- Write a summary of which part/aspect of the book you found most interesting and your reasons why



Other useful things to do:

Watch the films 'The Truman Show' and 'The Matrix' as they link to the nature of reality and knowledge which will be useful for the first unit on Epistemology.

Read the news: ethical dilemmas are discussed in the news every day – think about the dilemmas and the strengths of the different arguments being discussed; reflect on your opinion and your reasoning; come up with interesting questions you could ask to explore the issues further.

Discuss with anyone who will listen, any or all of the following questions: What is the nature of reality and existence? Do we have a soul? Has science disproved religion? Does God exist? Do miracles happen? How do we know anything? How can we know what is right and wrong? How can we best decide what is good and bad? Are morals just what are right for me or are they the same for all people? What did Socrates mean when he argued that “the unexamined life is not worth living” and was he right?

A Final Thought...From *Sophie's World*

All mortals are born at the very tip of the rabbit's fine hairs, where they are in a position to wonder. But as they grow older they work themselves ever deeper into the fur. And there they stay. They become so comfortable they never risk crawling back up the fragile hairs again. Only philosophers embark on this perilous expedition to the outermost reaches of language and existence. Some of them fall off, but others cling on desperately and yell at the people nestling deep in the snug softness, stuffing themselves with delicious food and drink.