Urmston Grammar Sixth Form – Transition Work
Religious Studies Department

A Level Philosophy, Ethics and Religion Transition Work

We are delighted to support you in your study of Philosophy, Ethics and Religion. Level Religious Studies involves the study of three disciplines: Philosophy, Ethics and Development of Christian Thought. The jump from GCSE to A Level is considerable and the following transition tasks are designed to make it much easier.

- Task 1 to be completed and emailed to Mr Uthman: authman@urmstongrammar.org.uk Remember to write your name on your work.

- Task 2 to be completed and emailed to Miss Stedman: hstedman@urmstongrammar.org.uk

OCR A Level Religious Studies H573 Specification

TASK 1 **OCR A Level RELIGIOUS STUDIES – PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION**

1. Watch the following clip about the Philosopher, Plato, then complete Plato's Cave transition task.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDiyQub6vpw

- Read the allegory of Plato's cave below (to familiarise yourself with the actual analogy of the cave, rather than a simplified version of it) then answer the questions following it:

PLATO'S CAVE

Plato's analogy is a simple, yet clever, one, and for it to be used by scholars and students over 2000 years after Plato wrote it suggests that it must have some value. The problem with the analogy of the cave is that, although we may think we can recount its details, how often do we stop and read what Plato actually wrote, rather than what someone tells us he wrote?

The following is a translation of the analogy from the original Greek.

It is taken from Book 7 of *The Republic:*

And now, I said, let me show in a figure how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened – Behold! human beings living in an underground den, which has a mouth open towards the light and reaching all along the den; here they have been from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads. Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way; and you will see, if you look, a low wall built along the way, like the screen which marionette players have in front of them, over which they show the puppets.

I see

And do you see, I said, men passing along the wall carrying all sorts of vessels and statues and figures of animals made of wood and stone and various materials, which appear over the wall? Some of them are talking; others silent.

You have shown me a strange image, and they are strange prisoners.

Like ourselves, I replied; and they see only their own shadows, or the shadows of one another, which the fire throws on the opposite wall of the cave?

True, he said; how could they see anything but the shadows if they were never allowed to move their heads?

And of the objects which are being carried in like manner, they would only see the shadows?

Yes, he said.

And if they were able to converse with one another, would they not suppose that they were naming what was actually before them?

Very true.

And suppose further that the prison had an echo which came from the other side; would they not be sure to fancy when one of the passers-by spoke that the voice which they heard came from the passing shadow?

No question, he replied.

To them, I said, the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images.

That is certain.

And now look again, and see what will naturally follow if the prisoners are released and disabused of their error. At first, when any of them is liberated and compelled suddenly to stand up and turn his neck round and walk and look towards the light, he will suffer sharp pains; the glare will distress him and he will be unable to see the realities of which in his former state he had seen the shadows; and then conceive someone saying to him, that what he saw before was an illusion, but tha now, when he is approaching nearer to being and his ey is turned towards more real existence, he has a clearer vision – what will be his reply? And you may further imagine that his instructor is pointing to the objects as they pass and requiring him to name them – will he not be perplexed? Will he not fancy that the shadows which he formerly saw are truer than the objects which are now shown to him?

Far truer.

And if he is compelled to look straight at the light, will he not have a pain in his eyes which will make him turn away to take in the objects of vision which he can see, and which he will conceive to be in reality clearer than the things which are now being shown to him?

True, he said.

And suppose once more, that he is reluctantly dragged up a steel and rugged ascent, and held fast until he is forced into the presence of the sun himself, is he not likely to be pained and irritated? When he approaches the light his eyes will be dazzled, and he will not be able to see anything at all of what are called realities.

Not all in a moment, he said.

He will require to grow accustomed to the sight of the upper world. And first he will see the shadows best, next the reflections of men and other objects in the water, and then the objects themselves; then he will gaze upon the light of the moon and the stars and the spangled heaven; and he will see the sky and the stars by night better than the sun or the light of the sun by day?

Certainly.

Last of all he will be able to see the sun, and not mere reflections of him in the water, but he will see him in his own proper place, and not in another; and he will contemplate him as he is.

Certainly.

He will then proceed to argue that this is he who gives the season and the years, and is the guardian of all that is in the visible world, and in a certain way the cause of all things which he and his fellows have been accustomed to behold?

Clearly, he said, he would first see the sun and then reason about him.

And when he remembered his old habitation, and the wisdom of the den and his fellow prisoners, do you not suppose that he would felicitate himself on the change, and pity them?

Certainly, he would.

And if they were in the habit of conferring honours among themselves on those who were quickest to observe the passing shadows and to remark which of them went before, and which followed after, and which were together; and who were therefore best able to draw conclusions as to the future, do you think that he would care for such honours and glories, or envy the possessors of them? Would he not say with Homer: 'Better to be the poor servant of a poor master, and to endure anything, rather than think as they do and live after their manner'?
Yes, he said, I think that he would rather suffer anything than entertain these false notions and live in this miserable manner. Imagine once more, I said, such a one coming suddenly out of the sun to be replaced in his old situation; would he not be certain to have his eyes full of darkness?

To be sure, he said.

And if there were a contest, and he had to compete in measuring the shadows with the prisoners who had never moved out of the den, while his sight was still weak, and before his eyes had become steady (and the

time which would be needed to acquire this new habit of sight might be very considerable) would he not be ridiculous? Men would say of him that up he went and down he came without his eyes; and that it was better not even to think of ascending, and if any one tried to lose another and lead him up to the light, let them only catch the offender, and they would put him to death.

No question, he said.

There follows more discussion about the meaning of the shadows, forms and the consequences for the philosopher of having to deal with this knowledge in a world where he or she is not understood. For example:

Moreover, I said, you must not wonder that those who attain this beatific vision are unwilling to descend to human affairs; for their souls are ever hastening into the upper world where the desire to dwell; which desire of theirs is very natural, if our allegory may be trusted.

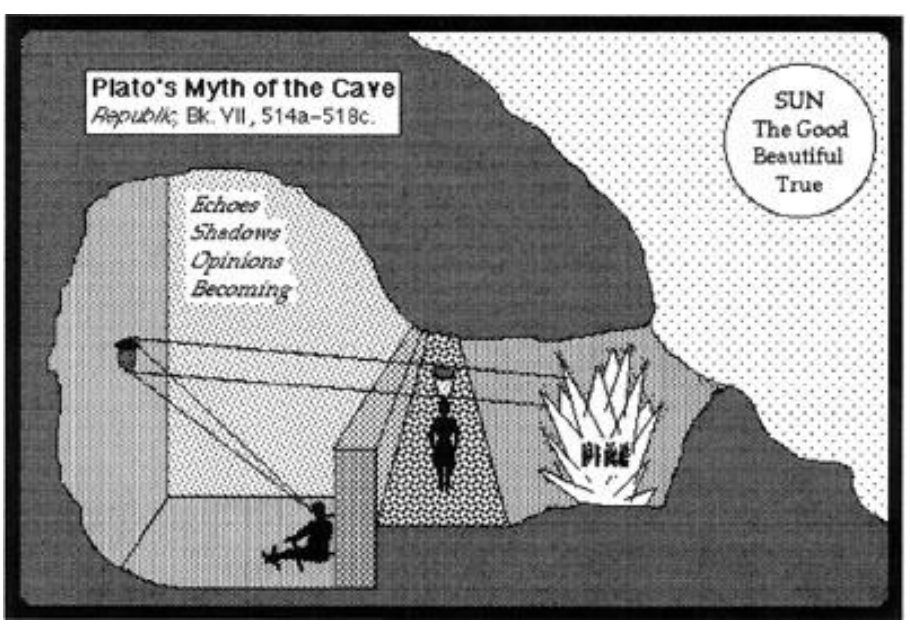
Yes, very natural.

And is there anything surprising in one who passes from divine contemplations to the evil state of man, misbehaving himself in a ridiculous manner; if, while his eyes are blinking and before he has become accustomed to the surrounding darkness, he is compelled to fight in court of law, or in other places, abo the images or the shadows of images of justice, and is endeavouring to meet conceptions of those who have never yet seen absolute justice?

Anything but surprising, he replied.

PLATO'S CAVE

Question	Answer
What parts of the prisoner's bodies are chained?	
Where do the puppeteers walk?	
Where is the fire?	
What do we know about the wall?	
What are the men carrying?	
What are the objects that the men are carrying made of?	
Are the puppeteers talking?	
Why do the prisoners think that voices are coming from the shadows?	
What happens when the freed prisoner first turns around?	
Who shows the objects to the freed prisoner?	
How does the prisoner leave the cave?	
What does the prisoner see before the sun?	
How does the prisoner fell about the people still in the cave?	
Who says: 'Better to be the poor servant of a poor master'?	
Why might people say that the prisoner came back without his eyes?	
Who kills the prisoner?	



TASK 2 | OCR A Level RELIGIOUS STUDIES – RELIGION & ETHICS

- Some background reading for you, then think of 5 questions to ask each other – write them in the boxes at the end. Think of possible answers to the questions. Bring these to your first RS A Level lesson in September. Learn the key terms.

WHAT IS ETHICS?

Ethics is the study of how people behave: what they do, the reasons they give for their actions, and the rationale behind their decisions.

There are two approaches to ethics:

Descriptive ethics. This simply describes the way people in different societies actually behave. It is closely related to sociology and psychology; it examines what we do and the background influences on us. It does not examine issues of right and wrong.

Normative ethics. This is the examination of issues of right and wrong, and how people justify the decisions they make when faced with situations of moral choice.

Religious Studies is mainly concerned with normative ethics. (Some descriptive ethics may be used, simply in order to set the scene for the moral decisions that are being examined). For a good ethical argument you need to have facts and examples at your disposal but they are only relevant if they are linked to ethical theories to form part of a reasoned argument.

Why be moral?

If you had complete freedom to do whatever you liked with no fear of consequences, would you behave differently? This is one area where there is an overlap between descriptive and normative ethics, because descriptive ethics – using insights from psychology – can challenge the reason people give for what they do. After all, a person may do what seems to be right, but do it for entirely the wrong reasons. It is possible to challenge most theories of normative ethics by arguing that people never act except in their own interest, but that they subsequently fabricate reasons for what they do. In other words, that moral principles are a sham – a way of justifying what we choose to do for own selfish reasons. The story of the Ring of Gyges, in Plato's *Republic*, tells of a shepherd who discovers a ring that has the power to make its wearer invisible. Behaving 'like a god among men' he is able to do whatever he likes without fear of being caught. The question posed is this: Would there be any difference between what the moral or the immoral person might do, given that ring? Is there value in being moral, quite apart from the fear or being caught doing wrong, or the hope of what we might gain by doing right? This is the key theme to the Republic, where Plato argues that it is better to be moral than immoral, irrespective of the consequences of one's action. This introduces another major question for all subsequent discussion of ethics; do you judge actions to be right and wrong on the basis of duty or consequences?

Do we get a choice?

We will examine the issue of free will later. From the standpoint of a scientific observer, all that we do is in theory predictable; we are determined by causes that are beyond our control.

Animals act out of instinct. We do not blame the cat for playing with a mouse before chewing its head off, that's the way cats are.

We may try to train it; by scolding it for having killed the mouse, but that is only our limited attempt to impose our own moral views on the cat. Once the threat of punishment is removed, the cat will revert to its natural state and behave instinctively. The cat is programmed. Might we also be programmed to respond to life as we do, whether that appears reasonable or unreasonable, altruistic or selfish?
On the other hand, in our everyday lives, we are well aware of being free to make choices. Is that sense of freedom real or an illusion? And if it is an illusion (in the sense that someone else could, in theory, predict what I think I have freely chosen) does that detract from the significance that the act of choosing has for me as an individual?
For the purposes of ethical argument, it is clear that obvious physical, mental or social restraints take responsibility away from the individual. But if individuals experience freedom of chose, they are able to consider the ground on which they will choose what to do and will therefore understand – and be able to justify their choices with reference to – ethical arguments.

Why are there moral principles?

One answer is that we are programmed to act this way. Perhaps there is a social form of natural selection at work, in which being moral gives members of a society an advantage over those with no morality. Some have argued that we have a natural sense of wanting to help those in trouble and this could indeed suggest that it originated in a survival mechanism for a social or hunting group. Aristotle famously pointed out that the distinctive thing about human beings is that they think. The distinctive thing about human behaviour is that humans are capable of discussing it and justifying it. It is this ability to think that has allowed us to develop and to enter into complex social relationships and manage them. It therefore seems natural – and thus probably inevitable – that humankind would develop a rational way to examine and discuss the value and significance of action. But others may point out that morality can be form of social control, with the strong keeping the weak in their place by encouraging uncomplaining moral servitude (Nietzsche might well argue that, and so might Marx). Whether that is *sufficient* explanation for the origin of morality is another matter. Moral principles may be *imposed i*n the form of social rules and regulations, they may be held unconsciously (perhaps from our early training) or they may be accepted and followed in conscious awareness of their significance. Normative ethics takes this last situation as the norm.

Some key terms:

It is important to distinguish between the following three ways of describing an action:

MORAL – an action is moral, for the person performing it, if it conforms to his or her set of ethical norms. These may be personal, religious or established by a group or profession.

IMMORAL – an action is immoral, for the person performing it, if it goes against a professed set of norms. However, that action may be immoral according to one set of norms and moral according to another, so people may not necessarily agree on this.

AMORAL – an action is amoral if it is done without reference to moral norms, or values that imply a moral perspective. In other words, falling over accidentally may have painful consequences, but it is entirely amoral, because the person did not choose to fall or not to fall. It would only become a moral act if there was some sort of personal responsibility involved.

There is another important distinction. Ethical theories that are based on rights and duties are termed DEONTOLOGICAL. In other words, actions are judged good or bad according to rules and principles; if you have a duty to do something, then it is right to do it, irrespective of the consequences.

Alternatively, there are theories that depend on the expected results of an action – for example, the idea that it is right to seek to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number (Utilitarianism) – all such theories are called TELEOLOGICAL (from the Greek word *telos* meaning 'end' or 'purpose').

Question 1	
Question 2	
Question 3	
Question 4	
Question 5	

Research Task

Option1 :
Research the issue of euthanasia, looking at the legal issues and real life cases.

Your viewpoint on why euthanasia is moral or immoral and why you believe it, real life example cases to support your idea and the benefits you believe keeping euthanasia illegal/legal would have for the future.

Key terms to include:

- sanctity of life
- quality of life
- euthanasia
- non-voluntary euthanasia
- act of omission

Respond to the question ' Is there a moral difference between active euthanasia and an act of omission that ends in someone's death?'.

Option 2 :
Research one ethical theories, choosing from Utilitarianism, Kantian ethics or Situation ethics.

Create a resource ex[Lorong what the ethical theory you have chosen would conclude on the issue of the death penalty.

You must explain the theory you have researched and then apply this theory to the death penalty, evaluating whether the theory would support or refute the use of the death penalty. Give specific examples to support your argument.

Either option can be presented in any way you choose.