

A-level Philosophy – Summer Assignment

Complete each of the tasks below and bring your work to our first A-level Philosophy lesson of the year.

Task: What is Philosophy?

- ☑ Watch the video and **write** answers to the following questions (**approx. one paragraph for each question**): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1A_CAkYt3GY

1. **How** do philosophers try to make sense of the world and the human condition?
2. **Distinguish** between the three main branches of philosophy.
3. **Why** do philosophers use '[logic](#)'?
4. How does philosophy **differ** to other fields of study (e.g., psychology, biology, etc.)?

Task 2: Cartesian Scepticism

📺 Whilst watching the video, **write** answers to the following questions:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MLKrmw906TM&t=55s>

- Pay close attention to the **definitions** of *philosophical terminology* – any specialist language the narrator discusses
- This task introduces **epistemology** (the nature and origins of knowledge), as well as key concepts and terminology surrounding the philosophical work of Renee Descartes

1. What is **scepticism**?
2. What is Descartes' **apple analogy** and how does it relate to his **method of doubt** (philosophical scepticism)?
3. What are **empirical beliefs**?
4. What is **global doubt**?
5. **Outline** Bertrand Russell's example illustrating global doubt.
6. Why could Descartes know with absolute certainty that he was a "thinking thing"?

Task 3: Descartes' Method of Doubt and The Cogito Argument

- 📖 Read the text 'Knowledge – Chapter 1 in Simon Blackburn's *Think*' (pages 15 – 21) and **write** answers to the following questions based on the different sub-sections in the text
- This task aims to familiarise you with Descartes' **method of doubt** (philosophical **scepticism**) and his attempt to overcome his own doubts about what we can know to and prove that we can guarantee **knowledge** of *at least one* thing

Losing the world

1. What was Descartes' intention in the *meditations* (1641)? Why is his work of such significance for the development of modern philosophy?

The Evil Demon

2. According to Descartes, are the human senses (sight, sound, touch, taste and smell) a reliable source of knowledge?
 - Consider the following points when addressing this question: *illusions*, *dreaming* and *the evil demon/deceiver*

Cogito, ergo sum

3. Even if the **evil demon** can deceive Descartes about the existence of his own body – and the reliability of his senses – **why** does he **know** that he exists?
4. What is Descartes' understanding of the *self*? How is it possible to have knowledge of the *self*?

