

Welcome to A' level Philosophy at Great Barr Academy

Philosophy is simply “thinking about thinking”, an intellectual journey. It will amaze and inspire you as we study the work of some of the foremost thinkers in western philosophy. You do not need to have studied the subject before, but you should have an open mind and be willing to question everything!

At A' level we study Ancient Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle. We also study many of the grand masters of philosophy including Kant, Descartes, Locke, Hume and Aquinas. In Year 12 we will be studying the topics of Epistemology and Moral Philosophy.

To be prepared to understand these topics and the processes philosophers use to build and justify their arguments you need to distinguish between the main approaches to knowledge:

Rationalism – Rationalist philosophers believe that **all knowledge** can be understood through a process of **reasoning**, without any external sources.

Empiricism – In philosophy, empiricism is a theory which believes that **all knowledge** comes from **experience**.

You will need to understand these terms and be able to explain them/use them appropriately in Philosophy.

Deductive Arguments and Reasoning

Deductive reasoning, or deduction (top-down logic), starts out with a **general statement**, or hypothesis, and **examines the possibilities** to reach a **specific, logical conclusion**.

Deductive reasoning **links premises with conclusions**. If **all premises are true**, the **terms are clear, and the rules of deductive logic are followed, then the conclusion reached is necessarily true**. The scientific method uses deduction to test hypotheses and theories. In deductive reasoning, if something is true of a class of things in general, it is also true for all members of that class. For example, "All men are mortal. Harold is a man. Therefore, Harold is mortal." For deductive reasoning to be sound, the hypothesis must be correct. It is assumed that the premises, "All men are mortal" and "Harold is a man" are true. Therefore, the conclusion is logical and true.

It's possible to come to a **logical conclusion** even if the **generalisation is not true**. If the generalisation is wrong, the conclusion may be logical, but it may also be untrue. For example, the argument, "All bald men are grandfathers. Harold is bald. Therefore, Harold is a grandfather," is **valid logically** but it is **untrue** because the **original statement is false**.

Inductive Arguments and Reasoning

Inductive reasoning, also known as induction, or, informally, "bottom-up" logic, is a kind of reasoning that **constructs** or evaluates **general propositions** that are **derived** from **specific examples**. Here's an example: "Almost all people are taller than 26 inches. Gareth is a person. Therefore, Gareth is almost certainly taller than 26 inches." Inductive arguments are concerned with probability – how likely is something to be true.

Even if all of the premises are true in a statement, it is possible, in inductive reasoning, for the conclusion to be false. The conclusion does not follow logically from the statements.

Contrast

Deductive reasoning (top-down logic) contrasts with inductive reasoning (bottom-up logic) in the following way: In deductive reasoning, a conclusion is reached from general statements, but in inductive reasoning the conclusion is reached from specific examples.

A priori statements or knowledge

A statement is considered ***a priori*** if it is true or false **without** the need for observation, can that be known by reason alone (***prior*** – meaning **before**). A statement is considered ***a posteriori*** if it is true or false **with** the need for observation, that cannot that be known by reason alone (***post*** – meaning **after**).

Example

The intuitive distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge is best seen in examples.

A posteriori: "George V reigned from 1910 to 1936." This is something that (if true) one must come to know an empirical fact unknowable by reason alone.

A priori By contrast, consider the proposition, "If George V reigned for at least four days: then he reigned for more than three days." This is something that one knows *a priori*, because it expresses a statement that one *can* derive by reason alone.

Synthetic and Analytic Statements

The **analytic–synthetic distinction** (also called the **analytic–synthetic dichotomy**) is a semantic (to do with language and logic) distinction, used primarily in philosophy and ethics to distinguish propositions (in particular, statements that are affirmative subject–predicate judgments) into two types: **analytic propositions** and **synthetic propositions**.

Analytic propositions are true by virtue of their meaning. In other words, they are true by definition and need no further information in order to prove. For example: 'All bachelors are male' or 'All triangles have three sides'. You do not need any extra information to prove these true.

Synthetic propositions are true by how their meaning relates to the world. The statement is not true in and of itself and so in order to prove or disprove the statement, additional information is needed. For example: 'All bears are white' – in order to prove or disprove this you would need to check all bears to see if they are white.

Compulsory Tasks – Work to be handed in to Mr Ridgway in the FIRST LESSON in September:

1. Write your own example for each of the following:

- a) An Inductive Argument
- b) A Deductive Argument
- c) An a Priori Statement
- d) An a Posteriori Statement
- e) A Synthetic Statement
- f) An Analytic Statement

2. For sentences A-G:

- How many of these things would you **agree** to know?
 - How many do you **really** know?
 - How could you be **mistaken** about each one?
- a) You know what you will do tomorrow
 - b) You know that the moon landings happened in July 1969
 - c) You know you are travelling through time
 - d) You know what you will have for dinner
 - e) You know that you exist
 - f) You know what the weather will be like tomorrow
 - g) You know that Harry Potter is not a real person

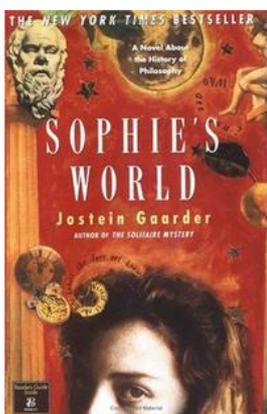
3. Research what Descartes said about e). Write a summary of his findings.

4. Can you be certain of anything?

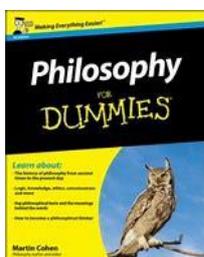
- Introduce your answer by outlining the question and what it is asking
- Work through an argument for and against
- Come to a conclusion which is a judgement responding to the question

Recommended Reading, Listening and Watching

If you want to achieve a high grade in A' level then you need to be reading, watching and listening to things related to the subject outside the classroom. You need to engage with much more than just the textbook!



So you should try to aim to read any book about philosophy including:
 Sophie's World by Jostein Gaarder, Anything by Peter Vardy, 50 Key Philosophy Ideas you really need to know, Philosophy for Dummies, Anything by Nigel Warburton, Anything by David Hume,



The Hitchhikers' Guide to the Galaxy (not a true philosophy book, but is an excellent introduction to philosophical ideas written in a humorous way)



It would also be worth your while watching one of the following films:

I Robot, The Truman Show, Inception, Million Dollar Baby, The Meaning of Life, The Matrix (original), Minority Report and Groundhog Day



It would also be worth your while watching the following on TV and YouTube:

Alain de Botton 'Philosophy – A Guide to happiness' available on All 4.

The School of Life & CrashCourse channels on YouTube (Look for their philosophy playlists)

It would also be worth your listening to:

Radio Programmes - The Moral Maze: BBC Radio 4, Beyond Belief: BBC Radio 4

Podcasts - Philosophy For Our Times, Philosophy Bites, Philosophy: The Classics, Making Sense with Sam Harris

