AQA Religious Studies: Ethics
Year 12 Pre-course task

Essay Title: What does it mean to be moral?

As part of your A Level RS course you will be studying ethics and exploring how moral principles can guide people in making decisions and how they choose to lead their lives.

Task 1

Like any subject, Religious Studies has specialist vocabulary which you will use to express your ideas and back up your arguments. Research the following key terms and write out a definition for each one in your own words. This will introduce you to some of the key concepts you will be studying at A Level and will help you respond to the essay in Task 3.

a) Ethics   Morality   Philosophy
b) Descriptive ethics   Normative ethics   Meta-ethics   Applied ethics
c) Conscience   Free will   Duty
d) Moral relativism   Moral absolutism
e) Teleological ethics   Deontological ethics Virtue ethics
f) Aquinas' Natural Law   Divine command theory

Use the following website to research the key terms:
https://www.britannica.com/
https://www.philosophybasics.com/branch_ethics.html

Task 2

You will also be exploring the ethical theories and arguments of a number of philosophers, who have contributed to the field of ethics. Research the following philosophers and provide a brief biography and summary of their ethical theories.

Aristotle
Thomas Aquinas
Immanuel Kant
Jeremy Bentham
John Stuart Mill
Joseph Fletcher

Use the following website to research the philosophers and their ethical theories:
https://www.britannica.com/
https://www.philosophybasics.com/philosophers.html
https://www.reonline.org.uk/subject-knowledge/16-ethics/ ('Thinkers')

Task 3
Write an essay responding to the question 'What does it mean to be moral?'
Your essay should be a minimum of 3 sides of handwritten A4 or 2 sides of typed A4.

You may wish to consider some of the following ideas:

- Is being moral about following rules?
  Should we follow our conscience?
  Moral relativism   Moral absolutism   Conscience   Immanuel Kant
  Joseph Fletcher

- Can we have morals without religion?
  Duty   Divine command theory   Aquinas' Natural Law   Joseph Fletcher
  Thomas Aquinas

- Is what is 'wrong' and what is 'right' the same for everyone?
  Are some societies more moral than others?
  Moral relativism   Moral absolutism   Teleological ethics   Immanuel Kant

- Are we always free to do 'good'?
  Free will   Duty

- Is it sometimes bad to do a good thing for a good outcome?
  Teleological ethics   Deontological ethics   Jeremy Bentham   John Stuart Mill

- Can a person become more moral by developing certain characteristics?
  Virtue ethics   Aristotle   Thomas Aquinas

For the ideas that you choose, you will need to carry out further reading and research on the above key terms and philosophers to deepen your knowledge and understanding of the debate. I have given suggestions in italics that you may want to use as a starting point to explore each question – however this should not limit your research!

In addition to the websites given above, use the following websites to enhance your understanding and knowledge of your chosen areas:
https://plato.stanford.edu/index.html
https://www.iep.utm.edu/

The following websites may also be useful for your research:
https://www.reonline.org.uk/subject-knowledge/16-ethics/exploring-ethical-theories-1/
https://www.reonline.org.uk/subject-knowledge/16-ethics/exploring-ethical-theories-2/
https://www.reonline.org.uk/subject-knowledge/16-ethics/four-questions-to-ask-of-ethical-theories/
http://www.philosophical-investigations.org/ (The search bar is in the bottom of the right column)

The question of what it means to be moral is a huge area of philosophy and the essay is designed to make you think and start exploring some of the key issues you will be exploring over the Religious Studies course. I look forward to reading your essays and discussing your ideas with you in September.