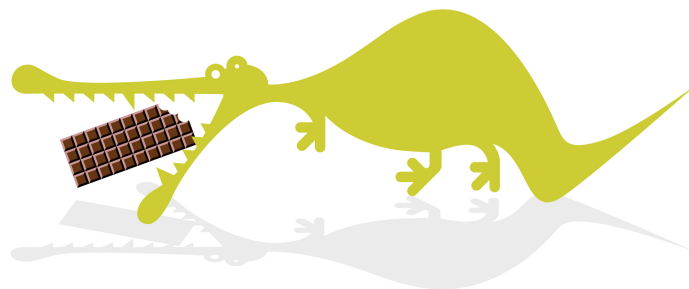


Windows on Worldviews: exploring secular beliefs in A-level and GCSE Philosophy, Ethics and Religious Studies

Teacher's guide to video series, discussion questions and useful links



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This teaching resource (new for 2023-24) concentrates on non-religious faith and will support students in exploring aspects of humanism including secularism, materialism, consumerism, scientism, atheism, 'new-age' ideas and religious syncretism. The written guidance below also suggests discussion questions which might stimulate ideas of how to compare and contrast aspects of humanism with Christian thinking and teaching. The story films are engaging, intriguing and based on true narratives and issues in popular culture. They use humour and, in some places, a gently ironic approach to stimulate thinking and discussion.

With its complementary parts, this resource will engage and challenge critical thinking and can be used at different learning levels as deemed appropriate by the teacher.

The pack comprises:

- Six short story films (about five minutes each) exploring worldviews (<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLfgTxb7HTGsXSPTyZNTGWID6Bw4-o2Uj->)
- Six accompanying 'Boffin Slots': explanatory videos (about five minutes each) opening up philosophical thinkers and roots of commonly held beliefs where teacher, philosopher and author Mark Roques plays 'professor' - undergirding the learning points in the story films (<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLfgTxb7HTGsVGzrgMmZMHDLH9EY8dM1gs>)
- This written guide for teachers to using the materials (<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/jmwr5yb3fv9kii/AACDav2nlhxQITN5GT4arSWla?dl=0>) including discussion starters for class use and guide to further resources.

Aims of the resource

This resource recognises the growing importance of worldview education within the subjects of philosophy, ethics and religious studies. While many of its themes are overarching, its aim is to support teachers in meeting the objectives of the current (UK) GCSE and A-Level examination syllabuses and papers. For example:

AQA A-level Religious Studies both Philosophy of Religion and Ethics and Study of Religion and Dialogues, particularly Section A: self, death and the afterlife; good conduct and key moral principles; expression of religious identity; religion and science; religion and secularisation, religion and religious pluralism. Section C: the dialogue between ethical studies and religion.

Educas A-level Religious Studies, particularly Challenges to Religious Belief paper: A) the problem of evil and suffering and secondly, Religious Experience paper : C) Challenges to the objectivity and authenticity of religious experience.

Edexcel A-level Religious Studies, Philosophy of Religion paper: problems of evil and suffering; works of scholars; points for discussion about life after death; religion and science debates. Religion and Ethics paper: environmental issues; ethical theories; the relationship between religion and morality.

OCR A-level Religious Studies, Philosophy of Religion paper: philosophy of language and thought; Religion and Ethics paper: sexual ethics. Developments in Christian thought: the challenge of secularism.

GCSE Curricula post-2018 have changed/are changing. However, this resource addresses themes common to current OCR, AQA, WJEC/CBAC and Edexcel syllabuses including: matters of life and death; environmental issues; crime and punishment; sexual relationships; religious experience; good and evil.

What is a Worldview?

While recognising that the concept of worldview is used in different ways by different authors, we use the definition of worldviews offered in the Report of the Commission on RE (2018) which, in brief, defines worldview as: "A person's way of understanding, experiencing and responding to the world." (<https://www.commissiononre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Final-Report-of-the-Commission-on-RE.pdf>)

That Report also distinguishes between an individual's worldview and 'organised worldviews' where a set of beliefs is accepted by either an informal or formal group or community. In this resource we aim to help students explore how both personal belief and the influence of groups (including social media and popular cultural communities) help to form and reinforce an individual's understanding of their place in the world and the ways in which their values and beliefs might be lived out in everyday experience.

Structure of the resource

Each short film and its accompanying 'Boffin Slot' is complete and standalone. The series can be used in any order. The characters within each narrative are different in each, but relatable by young people aged 15-18. The discussion starters can be adjusted or augmented as preferred.

Content:

1 What Goes Around Comes Around? (<https://youtu.be/BMdrCBiKPtE>)

This story [5:32] explores the relationship between sin, suffering, punishment and life after death.

Story synopsis: friends Dawn and Jimmy meet up in a cafe. They are young adults. The subject turns to football, a famous football manager and his controversial beliefs about life after death which deeply offended disabled people. During their banter Dawn teases Jimmy playfully about being a 'fat badger' as he scoffs a jam doughnut. Their conversation raises questions such as: who believes in life after death? Who doesn't believe in life after death? What difference does it make?

Boffin Slot 1 (<https://youtu.be/ZeJ7vmq7mMY>) describes four ways that humans make sense of life after death. We outline Plato's belief in karma and reincarnation - views which are also embraced by some traditionally Eastern religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism. This view contrasts strikingly with the Western materialist views of Democritus and Epicurus who proclaimed that when we die we rot. The Roman Catholic view of the Beatific Vision is also contrasted here with the more Protestant emphasis on bodily resurrection in the context of a renewed and restored creation.

Group discussion starters:

- Q Do you agree with Plato's view of life after death?
- Q How do Theists from different traditions disagree about life after death?
- Q How has the materialistic view of life after death impacted people living today?
- Q How can some humans believe in an afterlife without believing in a supernatural God?

Useful links to further resources

- <https://thinkfaith.net/2015/09/04/outcastes-karma-and-plato>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/football/1999/jan/30/newsstory.sport7>
- <https://thinkfaith.net/2016/05/24/glenn-hoddle-story-karma-or-grace/>
- <https://thinkfaith.net/2023/02/08/sex-and-the-revival-of-epicureanism/>

2 Mars Will Save Us (https://youtu.be/xsU0WP_6904)

This story [5:33] outlines the Humanist worldview and faith in human progress.

Story synopsis: minor TV celebrities, Buzz and Sally are chatting in a USA space centre before the two amateur astronauts take-off on an exploratory space mission (Starship) developed by the SpaceX organisation. Buzz and Sally are committed humanists who reject all forms of superstition and the 'false crutches of religion'. Like entrepreneur funder and launcher Elon Musk, Buzz and Sally trust in scientific and technological progress to solve all of mankind's problems. This raises questions such as: what do Humanists trust in? How does Humanism contrast with religious worldviews? How do Humanists view science and technology?

Boffin Slot 2 (<https://youtu.be/P30Sj2X8qTA>) outlines the beliefs of the well-known humanist and rationalist Isaac Asimov. We unpack the Enlightenment faith in progress by telling an amusing story about French thinker and writer Voltaire. Faith in progress proclaims that science will make humans all-knowing. Technology will make humans all-powerful. This narrative is very optimistic. We then contrast this mindset with the anti-humanist views of Friedrich Nietzsche who affirmed exploitation and slavery.

Group discussion starters:

Q Is Humanism a faith? Discuss

Q Will technological progress make humans all-powerful or redundant?

Q What threats might AI pose to humanity

Q Will entrepreneurs like Elon Musk save the Planet?

Useful links to further resources

<https://thinkfaith.net/2019/11/07/young-people-serving-the-technology-god/>

<https://www.spacex.com/human-spaceflight/mars/>

<https://thinkfaith.net/2018/07/17/dangerous-faith-in-artificial-intelligence/>

<https://thinkfaith.net/2021/05/19/six-ways-of-looking-at-cruelty/>

3 That Spell is Pants (<https://youtu.be/60pX3N-ulOY>)

This story [6:58] helps us to understand how the Voodoo faith contrasts with Humanism.

Story synopsis: Paquita is a Voodoo priestess who is selling her services to Don, a client. The sketch is based on the true story of ‘Scary Spice’ aka singer Mel B who hired a Voodoo priestess to put a bizarre spell on Hollywood actor, Eddie Murphy. The spell didn’t work, but millions of people all over the world, like Melanie Brown do believe in supernatural powers. This raises questions such as: what do animists believe in? How do these beliefs impact the way we live? How does Humanism contrast with animism?

Boffin Slot 3 (<https://youtu.be/6jEs4ye62SA>) describes the distinctive beliefs of animists who trust in magical spells, amulets and a superstitious way of life. We show how an animist believer trusted in his bullet amulet and how this led to a traumatic visit to the hospital. Many British people can also engage in superstition as they trust in lucky rabbit charms and coins. Why do people ‘touch wood’? Humanists reject all these animist beliefs and behaviours because they are materialists.

Group discussion starters:

Q Why is witchcraft becoming so popular in western societies?

Q Can paganism co-exist with humanism in modern life?

Q ‘Touch wood’ is an everyday expression - how far do humans depend on such superstitions for their safety?

Q Why is Mel B (aka ‘Scary Spice’) so attracted to voodoo beliefs and practices?

Q Can humans access spiritual powers through rites like voodoo or prayer?

Useful links to further resources

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WI-s0AK0MxE>

<https://thinkfaith.net/2019/06/07/queen-victoria-and-the-occult/>

https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/535279/Parable_of_touch.aspx

<https://thinkfaith.net/2019/12/31/superstition-can-lead-to-murder/>

4 Million Dollar Virgin (<https://youtu.be/BJQ7YDThW-l>)

This story [5:41] explores the ethics of a young woman, Natalie Dylan, who became infamous for her decision to auction her virginity. The highest bid was for \$3.5 million.

Story synopsis: Sally and Derek meet up in a pub. Sally is studying Women's Studies at university and Derek is an electrician and a friend of Sally's family. The subject turns to Natalie Dylan who Sally is researching. Derek is shocked by the proposed auction but Sally is more sympathetic. Derek believes that the auction might be just prostitution by another name. Sally suggests that Natalie is pro-choice. This raises questions such as: Is sex just a commodity? Can we buy and sell human beings? Are moral codes just human constructs?

Boffin Slot 4 (<https://youtu.be/ioqC5Z1QNBs>) outlines the pervasive and powerful consumerist worldview. 'I shop therefore I am'. For many today the world is a giant shopping mall. How do consumerists answer the five worldview questions? Where am I? Who am I? What's gone wrong? What's the solution? What happens to me after death? Many today also consume beliefs in much the same way as they consume cars, popcorn and shampoo. How does this consumerist mindset impact the way we live?

Group discussion starters:

Q "Everyone has a faith."

Q Should humans create their own moral codes?

Q "Her body, her choice"?

Q If any religious basis for ethics is rejected where do our ethics come from?

Q How right can it be to use people as a commodity?

Q How does consumerism nurture the commodification of human beings? How and where is this justified today?

Useful links to further resources

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yeha_3BTuU8&t=5s

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/why-im-selling-my-virginity>

<https://thinkfaith.net/2020/04/15/become-a-consumerist-today/>

<https://thinkfaith.net/2022/09/22/expressive-individualism-and-genghis-khan/>

<https://thinkfaith.net/2021/08/10/buddhist-despair-with-rampant-consumerism/>

5 The Woo-Woo Crew (https://youtu.be/evY3DT_gf2Q)

This story [3:34] introduces us to the New Age movement that is becoming increasingly popular in the western world.

Story synopsis: New Age friends, Denise and Frank are having lunch at the Glastonbury festival. They are enthusiastic about using mystical crystals and praying to the universe. They are spiritual but not religious. Frank used to be a lonely Sci-Fi geek but he has now discovered a New Age, Woo Woo faith. This raises questions such as: What do New Age people believe? How does this faith influence how we live? How does New Age faith contrast with the Humanist faith?

Boffin Slot 5 (https://youtu.be/Hz_2OCXKx3A) outlines the distinctive features of a pantheist, New Age worldview. For pantheists the universe, itself, is divine and this means that we should pray to 'Mother Nature'. We also explore how mystical crystals are believed to be amulets imbued with supernatural power. We contrast this New Age faith with the theistic beliefs of Christians, Jews and Muslims who contend that God is distinct from the universe.

Group discussion starters:

Q Why is the use of crystals, amulets, charms and other so-called 'magical objects' so popular?

Q Should we conquer or worship nature or is this a false dilemma?

Q If we don't believe in God will 'The Universe' answer our prayers?

Q Is there any power in superstitious practices and, if so, what?

Useful links to further resources

<https://thinkfaith.net/2022/07/18/how-to-worship-trees-today/>

<https://thinkfaith.net/2023/05/18/new-age-faith-and-the-cosmic-ordering-service/>

<https://thinkfaith.net/2022/04/11/the-danger-of-trusting-in-lucky-charms/>

<https://thinkfaith.net/2018/04/07/sumo-wrestling-and-faith-in-salt/>

6 The Beast (<https://youtu.be/-4IB6ASaMw>)

This story [6:28] introduces the important idea of syncretism.

Story synopsis: Marco, a journalist is talking to the daughter, Lucia Riina, of the infamous Mafia mobster, Toto Riina. Lucia defends her father's brutal deeds. As Marco probes her, she unpacks the ill-fitting and contradictory beliefs of her father's personal worldview. We call this syncretism. This raises questions such as: 'does a murderer have free will? How do we make sense of evil? What happens when we make up our own moral rules?'

Boffin Slot 6 (https://youtu.be/TV_vpCdLgG) unpacks the syncretistic features of Toto Riina's (aka 'the Beast') worldview. Toto Riina combines Roman Catholic ideas with the anti-humanist beliefs of Nietzsche and the Mafia idolatry of the family. We also introduce the materialist belief in determinism that rejects free will. We could say that the Christian faith is domesticated by this complex syncretism. Riina rejects the orthodox Christian beliefs in both repentance and hell.

Group discussion starters:

Q As suggested by Richard Dawkins: "Isn't the murderer or rapist just a machine with no free will that has gone wrong"? (cf chapter 'The roots of morality' in his book *The God Delusion*)

Q Why do some materialists believe that everything we do is determined?

Q Is forgiveness essential to human health and well-being?

Q The Beast believed that after death he would go to Heaven. Discuss.

Useful links to further resources

<https://thinkfaith.net/2022/03/07/putin-and-dawkins-why-im-tempted-to-return-to-the-atheism-of-my-youth>

<https://thinkfaith.net/2021/04/15/the-handyman-and-his-faith-in-science/>

https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/585962/Black_lives_and.aspx

<https://thinkfaith.net/2019/10/03/how-to-evangelise-with-mafia-boss-toto-riina-to-help-you/>

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Authors:

Patricia Gray, Executive Director Thinking Faith Network

Mark Roques, Director RealityBites, an activity strand of Thinking Faith Network

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Contact details

Mark Roques is available to give online or in-person presentations, talks and Q&A sessions about these topics. Contact: realitybites@thinkfaith.net