Religion and Philosophy Department

Department Overview

"An extraordinarily rich secondary philosophy and theology curriculum…the best I have seen."
John Milbank, Emeritus Professor of Theology, University of Nottingham

Religion and Philosophy at Tiffin is an established, popular and successful subject. The Department not only plays a central role in the boy's social, moral spiritual and cultural development, it is also essential to the School's aims to promote critical, reflective and empathetic thought across the curriculum. The Department's strengths have been recognised by OFSTED, The Good School's Guide, academic philosophers and theologians and other pedagogical and academic bodies like the London Society for the Study of Religion.

It does so by focusing on "Three Rs". That is to say "what is real?", "what is right?" and "what is reasonable belief?" As such, particularly in the lower school, religion is taught as a concrete tool for theological and philosophical reflection in a tolerant, open and inclusive way. The subject provides students with the opportunity to freely inquire into a rich horizon of ideas that extend across the humanities, sciences and arts. We believe they leave the Department, and the School, with a relatively sophisticated knowledge of self and others, in addition to an advanced set of technical academic and vocational tools.

The Department currently has three experienced subject specialists. By happy coincidence each staff member is a specialist in each of the Departments' three curriculum areas: metaphysics, ethics and theology. We are currently reviewing this arrangement and can offer the applicant a theology or philosophy specialism, or both, depending upon the applicant's interests and experience. The Department provides extensive in-house training in philosophy and theology. NQTs or experienced humanities teachers who are wishing to develop a different subject specialism are invited to apply.

Curriculum Overview

Key Stage 3

The Curriculum at KS3 has three overarching themes which could be roughly described as historical, metaphysical and ethical. In Year 7, we start with an introduction to the philosophy of religion and then historical depth studies of Judaism, Christian theology and Hinduism. In Year 8 we investigate Buddhism, mysticism, Plato, Aristotle and Descartes, the evolution of the Christian Church and logical fallacies. In Year 9 we critically examine materialists and sceptics (Marx, Nietzsche and Dawkins), Islamism and the sociology of religion, and normative ethics. The boys also complete critical thinking units that draw upon case studies from across the curriculum. A personal extended essay project is completed at the end of each year and requires the boys to apply critical thinking, independent study and research skills. Given the breadth and depth of the curriculum staff are encouraged to take ownership of particular units and develop them.

GCSE
The AQA GCSE in Religious Studies (Theology, Philosophy of Religion and Ethics) is taken by all students. It provides them with an introduction to important issues at the heart of contemporary debates concerning theology, philosophy, ethics, politics and science. The major theme for Year 10 is the Philosophy of Religion and Theology. Here we cautiously interpret and evaluate arguments made by medieval and modern Christian, Islamic and secular scholars concerning theology, cosmology, anthropology, eschatology and theodicy. The central theme of Year 11 is moral philosophy where we investigate Christian, Islamic and secular arguments concerning medical ethics, human rights issues, war, liberalism and communitarianism.

The five-year result average is 81% A*-A.

A Level
The OCR A Level Religious Studies (Philosophy of Religion, Theology and Ethics) specification is taught as a history of philosophy survey course. It provides an overview of the major currents of philosophical thought from Antiquity, the Middle Ages to Post/Modernity. In doing so, it explicitly focuses on metaphysics, theology, epistemology and ethics and the arguments of influential Western intellectuals. Examples include: the Pre-Socratics, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, St Paul, Plotinus, Augustine, Aquinas, Ockham, Descartes, Hume, Kant, Marx, Hegel, Darwin, Nietzsche, Freud, Wittgenstein, McIntyre, Putnam and Radical Orthodoxy.

There are three modules (Philosophy of Religion, Theology and Ethics) with the new appointee specialising in one or more of these areas.

The five year A Level result average is 84% A*-B. On average there are between 30 to 50 students studying the subject at A Level. At least five students go on to read philosophy at Russell Group universities every year.

Resources

The Department has two dedicated classrooms which are equipped with interactive whiteboards, DVDs and enriched in-house text books for every student in every year group. The Department Office has a specialist library of primary texts and, via the HOD, access to JSTOR and other online journal databases. The Learning Resource Centre has an excellent selection of philosophical texts and magazines. The HOD also has well established links to academics at the Universities of Oxford, London and learned societies.

Wider Opportunities

In 2017 the Department intends to run trips to London, Oxford, Vienna and the local Kingston area.