Some comments students have made:

"always engaging and interesting" – *"essays were well commented on and provided useful feedback"* – *"frequent use of novel and witty stories"* – *"classes are dynamic, inclusive and kept me interested"* – *"trippy ideas about candle wax and demons"* – *"makes you ask all the right kinds of questions"* – *"class discussions were very beneficial to my learning"* – *"very inspirational"* – *"lecture-style teaching methods and practical demonstrations were really good"* – *"the teacher's way of expressing things using similes was good as it helped with understanding and made the exam more enjoyable"* – *"I found the handouts useful as they provided clear and to the point detail which proved vital for note-taking during the revision period"* – *"clearly explained and got me thinking outside of the classroom"* – *"It has changed the way I view the world and has developed my ability to critically evaluate problems which are both overtly and not so overtly philosophical. It makes me appreciate the nuance and utter complexity of the world that one normally takes for granted. 100% recommended"*.

Some questions you might like to ask:

How will I be taught?
How will I be assessed?
What areas of Philosophy does the course cover?
Is there any coursework?
Who will teach me?
What's the ratio of males to females in a Philosophy class?
Are there any special requirements to do Philosophy?
How logical do you need to be?
Are there any trips?
What kind of occupations do Philosophy students go into?
How do universities regard Philosophy at A Level?
Is this all a figment of my imagination?
What subjects does Philosophy go well with?
What useful reading could I do before starting the course?

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A Level Philosophy

**I couldn't do Philosophy;
I've never done any Philosophy before**

This is, in fact, doubtful as although you may not have formally done any philosophy before it is highly unlikely that you have managed to avoid philosophical issues in your life. It has sometimes been said that there are three basic philosophical questions: Who am I? What can I know? How should I live? If you have ever thought about these questions, then you have done some Philosophy before. If at school you have ever had discussions on issues such as 'does God exist?' or 'why is there evil in the world?' or 'should animals have rights?' or 'is war ever justified?' or 'what is the purpose of punishment?' or, even, 'what's the meaning of life?' then, at some level, you have formally engaged with philosophical issues. It's not that you haven't done any Philosophy before; it's just that you may not have called it Philosophy. Doing Philosophy at some level is a natural part of living. It's unavoidable.

Well okay, we all ask these questions some of the time, but they don't get us anywhere

Well that depends on where you want to get to.

Well I'd like some firm answers and Philosophy is all about opinions. There aren't any answers; it's all just a matter of opinion

In which case you would have thought the exams would be easy. There would be no right or wrong answers; all you'd have to do is state your opinion. On the other hand they might be difficult, because all the examiners would do is mark you on how much they agreed or disagreed with you. This is in fact not the case. In many ways Philosophy might be better described as the enemy

What you will study:

Year 1:   Epistemology
             Moral Philosophy

Year 2:   Metaphysics of God
             Metaphysics of Mind

Supposing that studying Philosophy does make me good at arguing, where could that possibly get me in life?

Well how about Prime Minister of the country or a top media interviewer or a leading lawyer? In fact, any major role in society that demands that you have good critical, imaginative and communication abilities. These are all skills that Philosophy can help you develop. Also, an almost standard criticism made by university lecturers is that A' level students simply are not critical enough of whatever subjects they are studying when they arrive at university. Well, Philosophy at A' level can help you arrive in a critical frame of mind and help you cope with the more theoretical demands of degree level study in whatever subject you choose.

of opinion. What we care about, and what can get you through the exams, is the quality of your understanding of and your assessment of the arguments of Philosophers. To do this we learn to logically deconstruct philosophical arguments from Philosophers and then carefully assess these according to our own arguments and counter-arguments. So one 'place' you can 'get to' in Philosophy is being better at reading and understanding complex arguments and better at assessing these in a sophisticated well organised manner. This is an important life skill.

Yeah, well there aren't many jobs for Philosophers

This is true. But then again, there aren't many jobs for people who study English Literature or History or Politics or, for that matter, Physics. Well there aren't many jobs if you expect to become a writer or a historian or a politician or a physicist. Of course, there are loads of jobs if the skills that you are learning in these subjects are transferable. Philosophical skills of clear, imaginative, logical thinking and communication are all highly transferable. In fact, Philosophy is much more about how to think than what to think about. Moreover, published evidence about the earnings of various kinds of graduates looks really good for Philosophy: Philosophy graduates, females in particular, are often in the top earnings brackets along with graduates in subjects like Dentistry and Engineering and, most amusingly of all, earning better salaries than graduates in subjects like Accountancy!

Funnily enough, the ancient Greek philosopher Thales, often thought to be the founding father of Western Philosophy, made the same point about two and half thousand years ago when he made a financial killing by stock jobbing on the olive market. So much for the impoverished Philosopher!

## So studying Philosophy might make me rich and famous?

Of course, there are no guarantees! However, it might just be that rich and famous is not where you want to get. In which case, what could Philosophy offer you?

Well so far I've said Philosophy is unavoidable, will develop in you good thinking skills, and is a good bet for future prosperity. Perhaps most importantly though, Philosophy should help you to think more freely, be more curious about the world in which you live, and to be clearer in your thinking about those issues about which you care and feel most passionate. Wittgenstein on his death bed is reputed to have said:

It's been interesting...

Day after day in our interactions with others, in the endless presentation of ideas and issues in the media, and in the pattern of our own thoughts we wonder at and make decisions about our lives.   Philosophy should help!

As Lao Tzu once said:

From wonder into wonder existence opens
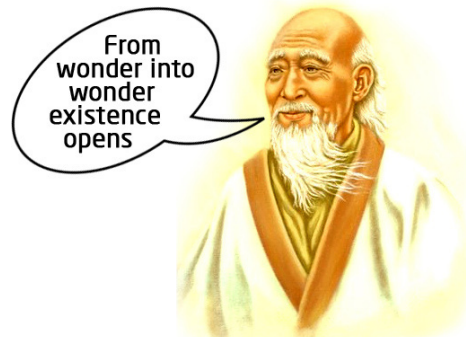
Yeah, right. Trouble is I did once read a bit of a Philosophy book and I couldn't understand a word. It's just too weird and difficult

Well I've got to admit that the last time I looked at a book on Physics or Accountancy, or read a poem, it all looked a bit weird and difficult. The point is that, although written in ordinary language, there is no reason to think that you should automatically be able to understand and follow all that's written in a philosophical text any more than you should have an automatic understanding of the other things I've just mentioned. Some philosophical texts and arguments are fairly easy to understand, but there's no doubt that others are difficult. This is what the lessons are there for, to help you to understand what's going on in philosophical arguments and to develop your own arguments in relation to them. Like anything else this takes a certain amount of learning and quite a bit of practice. Ironically, the fact that some philosophical arguments are difficult is a strong reason for doing Philosophy. A great many thinking people do become interested in Philosophy at some point in their lives, but like developing an interest in classical music or exotic cookery or wine or computing they know what they liked but have no idea how to develop their interest and end up just feeling bewildered. Also, as I've said before Philosophy is unavoidable so you might as well get to know your way around now!