

Since a very young age I have always been fascinated with some of life's big existential questions: who am I? Is there a God? What makes some human beings good and some others evil? And what is 'knowledge', and how do we achieve it?

These are some of the very same questions which have been puzzling philosophers for millennia. When I started my A Level in Philosophy at the beginning of Year 12, I realised that the questions which had perplexed me for so long could be answered by studying this fascinating subject. My studies in Philosophy at A Level have made me realise just how passionate I am about this subject and I hope to complete a Philosophy degree at university so that I can explore my passion in life even further. In addition to my A Level in philosophy I am also studying for two other A Levels in History and Mathematics.

Philosophy is the study of general and fundamental problems concerning matters such as existence, knowledge, values, reason, mind, and language. It has a history of thousands of years, and the term "Philosophy" was probably first used by the philosopher Pythagoras. My favourite areas of philosophy are ethics and political philosophy – two recent debates we have had in class recently which I particularly enjoyed were on the ethics of abortion and also on whether the Government should interfere to stop adults from engaging in behaviour which is harmful to themselves.

I have read extensively around the subject of philosophy. This has included reading many extra books in my spare time which have taken me beyond the A Level syllabus. My extra reading began in the world of ancient philosophy and on my summer holiday last year I worked my way through "The Republic" by Plato and "The Nicomachean Ethics" by Aristotle. This gave me an excellent grounding in the basics of ethics and political philosophy. I was therefore able to move on to more modern material, and I learnt more about deontological ethics by reading the work of Immanuel Kant. I complemented this with reading some material by a consequentialist – John Stuart Mill (I have read both "On Liberty" and "Utilitarianism"). I've developed a particular interest in the philosophy of "Stoicism". I've read many books on this subject including "Discourses" by Epictetus. I've also read books on how ancient Stoic philosophy can be applied to solve some of the problems of modern living, such as "A Guide to Rational Living" by Albert Ellis and "A Guide to the Good Life" by William B Irvine. I am looking forward to learning more about ancient philosophy at university.

In my spare time I take part in a wide range of hobbies and extra-curricular activities. I am a keen pianist and have got up to Grade 7 on the piano. I recently performed the piano at a recital at a celebration evening at my school to a crowd of over 150 parents and students. I enjoy watching films and some of my favourite films are "Natural Born Killers", "Goodfellas" and "The Greatest Showman". I enjoy football and from Year 7 up until Year 10 I was the goalkeeper in our school football team. I keep up to date with current affairs and often read newspapers and topical magazines also like reading books and newspapers and always keep up to date with current affairs, for this reason I have especially enjoyed my Saturday job at WH Smith. My roles in this job include dealing with customers, replenishing stock and keeping the stock room tidy.

After I have graduated from university, I am interested in working in either the publishing industry or would like to become a newspaper columnist or blogger.

Thanks for taking the time to read my personal statement, and also to consider my university application.

When I was taking my GCSEs, my favourite subject on my school timetable was Religious Studies. I chose to do a GCSE course in Religious Studies with some reluctance as I am not an especially religious person. During this course however I realised what it was which appealed to me most about this subject – it was not necessarily religion per se which interested me most but rather the opportunity to grapple with some of the big ideas about life and tackle some of the biggest questions which face human beings. I wanted to find out more about the nature of good and evil, what constitutes genuine 'knowledge' and think about how we can work together to create the fairest possible society.

I am extremely grateful to my former Religious Studies teacher who recommended that I take an A Level in Philosophy. He had realised that it was philosophical questions which interested me the most. Within just a couple of months of beginning my A Level in Philosophy I was certain that this was the subject which I wanted to pursue to degree level and the decision on which course I should choose at university has been effortless. The parts of my philosophy lessons which I enjoy the most are when we engage in class debates. For example, recently my teacher has organised class debates on the ethics of abortion and also on whether the Government should interfere to stop adults from engaging in behaviour which is harmful to themselves. In these debates I enjoy listening to other people's opinions equally as much as expressing my own. They have taught me the skills of careful, respectful listening and presenting a clear and reasoned argument. I have also learnt the importance of remaining open minded and always being willing to change my opinion on a particular issue if I am presented with a compelling enough argument. The two other A Levels I am studying have complemented my studies perfectly. My A Level in History has taught me to critically analyse texts and my A Level in Mathematics has taught me how to think in a rational and logical way. These are two essential skills which every philosopher needs.

In my spare time I have enjoyed reading philosophy books which have taken me beyond the A Level syllabus. I read an ancient text called "Discourses" by Epictetus. I struggled with this a little at first, but once I found an updated translation of the original text by Robert Dobbin I was able to fully comprehend Epictetus's ideas. In the book, Epictetus observes that when human beings suffer it is not because bad things have happened to them. Rather, they suffer because of their interpretation of these events and their internal narrative which tells them that these events are bad and ought not to have happened. This observation led me to develop a more general interest in the philosophy of Stoicism, which Epictetus espouses. My philosophy teacher then recommended that I read a book called "A Guide to Rational Living" by the psychologist Albert Ellis. In this book Ellis explains how he managed to use Epictetus's ancient advice to improve the quality of the psychotherapy he was offering to his patients. By using these ancient Stoic principles, Ellis was able to make his patients feel less depressed about their lives. The final book I have read on the topics of Stoicism is "A Guide to the Good Life" by William B Irvine. This has shown me how I can use Stoic principles every day to improve my own life, such as imagining that my life is less successful than it actually is to enable me to realise how fortunate I am. Now that I have developed a particular interest in Stoicism I hope to write a dissertation on this subject at university.

One of my hobbies is watching films and during the month when I was in charge of my school's film club I arranged to screen a series of films by one of my favourite directors Oliver Stone. I used the skills of forming a reasoned argument to persuade our headteacher to allow me to screen the film "Natural Born Killers" to a small group of Year 13 students. The headteacher agreed on the basis that we collected permission slips from parents and followed the screening with a debate about violence in the media and censorship. The debate helped to get a wide range of different Year 13 students more interested in the subject of philosophy. Another hobby of mine is music and I have recently passed my Grade 7 examination in piano. Studying the piano has taught me the skill of self-discipline as I have to practise at least five times a week maintain the standard I have reached. This self-discipline has helped me with my studies, for example meaning that I have the self-discipline to prepare for exams and meet essay deadlines. In addition to my studies, I work for six hours every Saturday at WH Smith. This has meant that I have had to improve my time management skills to ensure that I am able to balance the demands of work and study successfully.