



Independent
Schools
Religious
Studies
Association

Theology, Philosophy and Religion Essay Prize 2025

Yet again this year the general standard of essays was very good and in some cases essays were written with a maturity beyond the years of the writers. It was particularly pleasing in both categories to see an increase in essays on religion and theology.

Disappointingly there were slightly fewer essays in the Years 6-7 category but the standard was just as good as in previous years. The best essays on Jesus' use of parables picked up on the problem of allegorisation and Jesus' own saying (Mark 4: 11-12) that the parables were intended to be difficult to outsiders. There were many thoughtful essays on the nature of punishment especially those who focussed on the morally ambiguous status of retribution (many discussed Bentham and Kant). There were many mature and wide-ranging essays on the purpose of religion, especially those who contrasted monotheism with Buddhism.

There were many excellent essays in the Years 8-9 category where candidates had clearly spent much time researching and planning. The best essays were those which exhibited a personal engagement with the topic. I was impressed by those who contextualised and struggled with the issues about the nature of God as raised in the Baal/Elijah contest. There were some very interesting sociological, psychological and doctrinal reflections on whether humans are innately religious - the best essays reflected on the apparent rise in Western secularism. The Mill/Bentham essay was popular but there was a tendency to become too descriptive and not analytical. Most focused on the quantity/quality debate but few really teased this out sufficiently.

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