

Learning Grids

For A Level OCR Component 1:
Philosophy of Religion (Year 2)

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Teacher's Introduction

These learning grids are a tool designed to help you deliver the A Level Year 2 OCR Philosophy of Religion specification. The concept is that your students are assigned a topic to learn about (e.g. by giving them a set of pages to read from the course companion), possibly for homework, and then asked to complete the relevant learning grids. These activities may be particularly useful for your weaker learners, who may benefit from both the requirement to find the information and the act of writing the answers down.

The grids cover the specification content comprehensively and are designed to ask questions which your students should be able to answer correctly when they have studied the relevant topics. Each section begins with questions on basic concepts, or the background of a particular philosophical issue, before progressing to longer questions designed to test both a student's knowledge of a particular topic and their ability to evaluate between different academic perspectives.

Completed grids are provided so that your students' answers can be marked or checked. It may also be useful to hand them out to students during their revision to assist them with answers they cannot find.

Advantages of using these learning grids are:

- Some students will find this method of studying of great value, particularly if they find it difficult to absorb information in class.
- Completed grids contain a sample answer that may be useful for revision.
- They are an easy-to-set yet valuable homework.
- They are a useful catch-up tool to help students who have missed a lesson.
- They can be used as a basis for cover lessons that require minimal preparation and no interaction from the cover teacher.
- They are an independent learning resource.

You may want to photocopy the sheets onto A3 paper, particularly for students with reading or writing difficulties.



Word + PDF

Note that there is the option to pay an additional 30% to get this resource in PDF format or an additional 50% to get this resource in Word format. The latter allows you to edit the resource to adapt it for your students, and also to put it on your intranet or VLE so students can fill in the grids electronically.

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Selected Question and Answer Pages

For demonstration only, the sample answer pages immediately follow their corresponding question pages

The Nature or Attributes of God: Omnipotence

Topic	Question	Answer
Omnipotence: Basic Issues	What other traditions or thought has Christianity been influenced by in its conception of God?	
	Why has divine omnipotence been viewed as self-contradictory?	
	What other issues have traditionally arisen when describing God as omnipotent? Give two examples.	
	Why have Christians traditionally still asserted the omnipotence of God in light of these issues?	
	Give and explain a Bible passage that supports an omnipotent God.	

The Nature or Attributes of God: Omnipotence





Hodder: pp. 4-7
OUP: pp. 13-22

Topic	Question	Answer
Omnipotence: Basic Issues	What other traditions or thought has Christianity been influenced by in its conception of God?	<i>Christianity has been influenced by a wide variety of traditions and religions. It arguably inherited monotheism and the idea of an omnipotent, omniscient God from Judaism, while also adopting ideas from Greek philosophy (Platonism) such as God being immutable (unchanging).</i>
	Why has divine omnipotence been viewed as self-contradictory?	<i>If God is omnipotent it can be questioned whether God could create a stone so big that even he himself could not lift it. If God cannot either create such a stone or lift it, it would seem that he is not all-powerful. Therefore, the concept of a being unlimited in power can be seen as self-contradictory.</i>
	What other issues have traditionally arisen when describing God as omnipotent? Give two examples.	<p><i>One issue is what omnipotence, and in turn a being that is omnipotent, actually entails. It could mean a being that is more powerful than anything else, or perhaps a being that possesses the maximum amount of power possible for anything conceivable.</i></p> <p><i>Another issue is how omnipotence relates to other characteristics of God such as his benevolence or omniscience. The former leads to the problem of evil, whereas the latter leads to the issue of whether God has the power to know new things, or develop knowledge of things that have not happened yet.</i></p>
	Why have Christians traditionally still asserted the omnipotence of God in light of these issues?	<i>Biblical tradition, and the image of God as the creator of the world, support the idea of God as omnipotent – the accounts of his power over nature, and the idea of God that is all-powerful rather than one who is constrained in some way.</i>
	Give and explain a Bible passage that supports an omnipotent God.	<p>Bible Quote: <i>There are many different examples, e.g. Matthew 19:26, 'For God all things are possible.' (NRSV) This, for example, in the context of the disciples' doubt that they could inherit the kingdom of God, supporting the idea that God is omnipotent.</i></p>



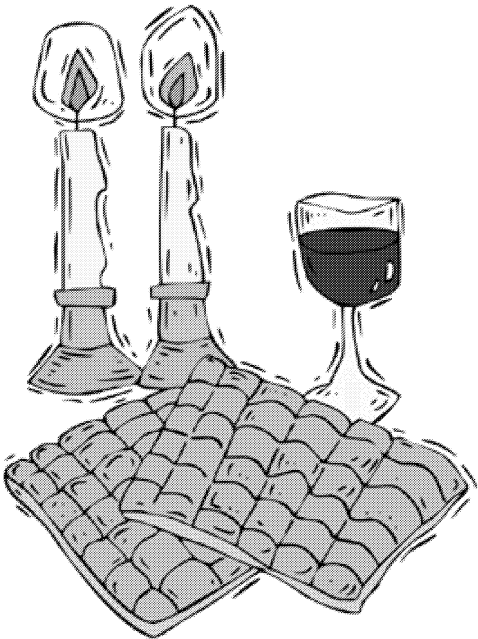
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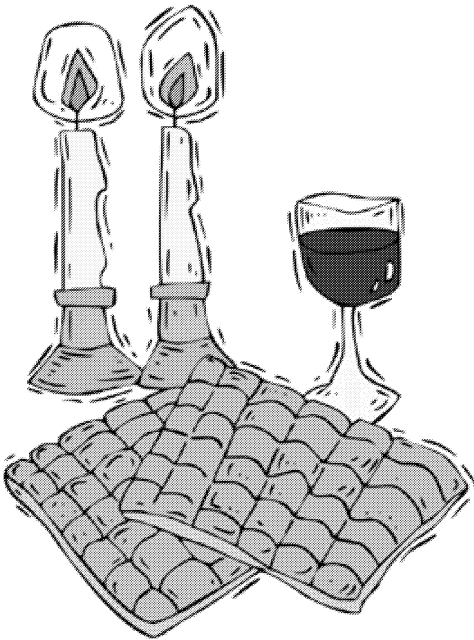
Topic	Question	Answer
Critical Evaluation (cont.)	<p>Is a God who self-limits his own omnipotence no longer omnipotent?</p> 	
	<p>Does a God that only has more relative power compared to humanity fit in with the God of the Bible and traditional Christianity?</p>	

Topic	Question	Answer
Critical Evaluation (cont.)	<p>Is a God who self-limits his own omnipotence no longer omnipotent?</p> 	<p><i>It can be argued that a God who self-limits his power is still omnipotent so long as the self-limiting is from God's own choice and not from any other constraints in the outside world. This means that human agency is preserved and is able to challenge God to some degree, but equally means that these challenges can never meet the overall power of God. Once the universe comes to an end, or completes its purpose, God is no longer self-limited in that sphere. It can also be stressed in these positions that a transcendent God might retain complete power over everything, but the immanent God is restricted by his own will and purpose.</i></p> <p><i>However, others might argue that if God is essentially omnipotent, it can never be the case that he self-limits his own power, as this means that God is instead accidentally omnipotent. If it is in God's nature to be omnipotent, then any change to his power in any circumstance is a change to this nature, rendering it invalid. This is a difficult issue, and it is even possible to argue, as Flew does, that these qualifications to what omnipotence means, especially in the case of self-limiting, are attempts to avoid that fact that the idea of an omnipotent God in classical theism is fundamentally contradictory, and ideas of self-limitation only open up further philosophical issues that theologians will attempt to endlessly qualify.</i></p>
	<p>Does a God that only has more relative power compared to humanity fit in with the God of the Bible and traditional Christianity?</p>	<p><i>It can be argued there are moments in the Bible where God appears to have limits to his power, especially when it comes to acts that would seemingly be immoral. For example, Hebrews 6:18 indicates that God cannot lie, so a view of omnipotence that notes this, such as Craig's, which indicates God cannot do anything not consistent with his nature, is more appropriate. Throughout the Bible it is typically asserted that God is all-loving, and, while a full idea of omnipotence is not overtly developed, it can be determined that God's power cannot override aspects of his nature. In the same way, it may make more sense, considering the many times human sin seems to challenge God, such as in the atonement, to put forward that it is best to understand God's power as relatively much greater than that of human beings.</i></p> <p><i>However, in both Luke and Matthew it is asserted that all things are created and sustained by God's power from which all things are created and sustained. Even in Job 42:2 – it is stated that God can do all things, and Romans 1 has always been perceived. In this way, Descartes' interpretation considering biblical interpretation, especially if one adheres to a biblical view of the Bible.</i></p>



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Topic	Question	Answer
<p>Critical Evaluation (cont.)</p>	<p>Do Flew's criticisms of religious language force theists to accept a non-cognitive understanding of religious language?</p> 	

Topic	Question	Answer
<p>Critical Evaluation (cont.)</p>	<p>Do Flew's criticisms of religious language force theists to accept a non-cognitive understanding of religious language?</p> 	<p><i>It can be contended that Mitchell's response to the challenge of Flew is inadequate as he still does not define the parameters of what might count as reasonable faith compared to blind faith. If this is the case, then theists arguably have to look towards solutions such as Hare's, which put forward that the truth claims cannot be assessed without looking at their place within a blik, and so are to a large degree non-cognitive. If religious claims are thought to be cognitive, then it should be possible not only to admit they could be hypothetically falsified, but to state the limits at which they would be falsified. To not define the limits is arguably to not really accept that there is real evidence that would lead to one abandoning religious belief and so admit religious claims are not really cognitive in a meaningful sense.</i></p> <p><i>However, there are numerous other responses. One is to point out that there are internal problems with the way falsification views propositions as meaningful, such that it unintentionally rules out many important scientific theories, such as evolution or key elementary particles. It might be contended that Flew's challenge renders much more than religious language non-cognitive and so is not a fair assessment of what is cognitively meaningful. Another response is to perhaps point out that certain limits on faith are defined for many people. The problem of evil causes many to lose faith, while the cosmological or design arguments cause people to have faith. In this way, it can be argued that religious belief regularly does weigh up evidence, and it is not simply a case of faith versus empiricism. A last response is to suggest that all claims are contained within language games and the proper cognitive element of religious language is only accessible fully within a particular form of life, to which Flew does not participate and so cannot understand. Therefore, for Mitchell, the fighter operates in a different form of life from his sceptical allies, and so the two different parties are not fully able to appreciate each other's arguments.</i></p>




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Additional Selected Question Pages

Religious Language: Negative, Analogical or Symbolic: The Apophatic Way

Topic	Question	Answer
A Study of Religious Language: Analogy; Language Games; Myth and Symbol; Verification and Falsification Debates	What is religious language?	
	What are some of the purposes of religious language?	
	Why can it be difficult to find the right words to talk about God?	
	What is cognitive/realist language?	
	What is non-cognitive/anti-realist language?	
Via Negativa	Give a short definition of the via negativa.	

Topic	Question	Answer
Via Negativa (cont.)	What other term is used to describe the via negativa approach to religious language?	
	Why might the via negativa be a useful way to talk about God?	
	How do other religions apart from Christianity, such as Buddhism, use the via negativa to describe the ultimate reality?	
	Outline at least two strengths or benefits of the via negativa.	
Pseudo-Dionysius See in particular: Hodder: pp. 44–46 OUP: pp. 48–49 	Who was Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite?	
	What did Pseudo-Dionysius argue were the benefits in human beings trying to move beyond sensory or rational ways of understanding God?	

Topic	Question	Answer
Pseudo-Dionysius (cont.)	How was the via negativa important to Pseudo-Dionysius in becoming closer to God?	
Maimonides (Twelfth-century Jewish Theologian) See in particular: Hodder: pp. 46–47 OUP: pp. 49–50	How did Maimonides use a ship to demonstrate the importance of the via negativa?	
	Why might it be important to talk about God without being limited by human understanding of the world?	
Issues with the Via Negativa	Why might religious believers want to be able to make positive statements about God?	

Topic	Question	Answer
Issues with the Via Negativa (cont.)	How might it be difficult to arrive at a concrete conception of God through the via negativa?	
	Can the via negativa be reconciled with Christian scriptural and doctrinal descriptions of God?	
	Why might the via negativa prevent theists from asserting the lovingness, or even the existence, of God?	