



Key words:

- **Analytic statement:** In an analytic statement the words in the statement will verify if the statement is true or false.
- **Synthetic statement:** A synthetic statement requires further external information to verify if it is true or false. The evidence will normally be empirical- using our five senses.
- **Cognitive statements** are realist and univocal. **Cognitive statements:** factual statements proven true or false via empirical evidence.
- **Univocal:** word means the same when applied to God when using RL.
- **Realism:** the world exists objectively and independently of the way we think or describe it. To interpret religious statements in a realist way includes asserting these statements are either made true or false by something that exists objectively and independent of the way we think about it
- **Non-Cognitive statements** are anti-realist and equivocal. **Non-Cognitive statements:** context dependent statements that cannot be verified or falsified.
- **Equivocal:** saying something and meaning different- never know what is meant when applied to God.
- **Non realist/ anti-realist:** religious statements are not made either true or false by anything objective.

The purpose of religious language

- Specific terminology Eg. Christianity: “The Eucharist”, “The Messiah”.
- **Truth claims “There is no God but Allah” “God created the world”**
- Expressing feeling and emotion. “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour”
- Unique descriptions of God. “Omnipotent”
- Everyday terminology given religious meaning “God is love”



The Verification Principle

1920s/ 1930s there was a small group/association of philosophers called **The Vienna Circle. Known as logical positivists**

They suggested that any statement that cannot be proven empirically or verified to be true (or is a tautology) was literally meaningless.

*“A statement which cannot be conclusively verified cannot be verified at all. It is simply devoid of any meaning.”
Waismann.*

For Verificationists language about God is meaningless as there is no way to show the truth or falsity of ‘God-talk’ by observation and experiments.



Issues?

1. It would make many statements that people say meaningless. Swinburne (“*God talk is not evidently nonsense*”) gives the example “All ravens are (at all times) black”. He highlights that whilst we generally accept ravens are black there is no way to confirm this statement, because no matter how many ravens you look at, there may be another one which is not black. Therefore the statement cannot be verified, so is meaningless.
2. No meaningful statements can be made about History. For example- The Battle of Hasting happened in 1066. Yet there is no way to empirically verify this...so a statement about this event is meaningless.

Key philosopher for Verification Principle= A J Ayer

“The criterion we use to test the genuineness of apparent statements of fact is the criterion of verifiability”.

If a statement is not verifiable it is either meaningless or tautology (which are meaningful).

People do make other types of statements that are important to themselves, but such statements are not factually significant. E.g. “God answers my prayers”. “The sentence expressing it may be emotionally significant; but it is not literally significant.”

Ayer called a statement that needed to be verified a **putative statement**. There are two types of verifiability according to Ayer.

1. **Practical Verifiability:** such statements can be tested in reality. E.g. If you said “*Mr Smith’s car is red*” I could observe the car and verify if this statement was true or false.
2. **Verifiability in principle:** a statement that could be verified if we had the correct technology. E.g. “*There is life on Mars*”.

Strong verification= is applied to anything that can be verified conclusively by observation/ experience. No doubt. “Mr Smith’s car is red”.

Weak verification= statements that can be shown to be probable by experience or observation. “All humans are mortal”

According to Ayer, religious statements are meaningless because they cannot be supported by empirical evidence that goes with what is probable. So cannot be verified even in the weak sense. Ayer also says the religious statements are meaningless because metaphysical ideas are beyond our senses so could never be verified with empirical evidence. Ayer rejects all arguments from religious experience as someone who claims to of had such an experience is actually just recounting emotions that are religious rather than a verifiable experience.

After criticism Ayer did make changes. Most notably he changed the definition of verification to:

“A statement is held to be literally meaningful if and only if (iff) it is analytic or empirically verifiable.”

Ayer lost the distinction between strong and weak verification and he decided strong verification could not apply to any statement. Ayer wanted to lose the distinction between strong and weak verification and he decided strong verification could not apply to any statement. Ayer suggested two new criteria for verification: directly and indirectly verifiable.

Directly verifiable: a statement that is verifiable through an observation.

Indirectly verifiable: a statement whose truth cannot be directly observed but could be supported by directly verifiable evidence. Also refers to analytic statements.

Evaluation:

1. **Verification is unverifiable.** You can’t verify the statement “statements are only meaningful if verifiable by sense observation” with a sense observation and it is not analytic.
2. **God talk is eschatologically verifiable:** Supported by **John Hick**. The truth of religion will be verifiable in principle at the end of time.

Hick gives an example of two travellers on the journey through life to the Celestial City. One believes the city is real, they other does not. Whoever is right will be verified at the end of the journey.
3. **Strong verification** was widely criticised as is excluded many areas of knowledge such as history, because no sense observation can confirm historical events. It also excludes any universal statements (think Swinburne and the ravens). However, Ayer did make amendments to his theory to deal with these issues.
4. **Evidence problem:** what evidence should count? Whilst Ayer reject religious experience others have stated that these should be accounted for.
5. **Meaningful but not verifiable.** A statement can still have meaning without being verified. E.g. Schrodinger's cat. You can never verify if the cat is dead or alive but there is still meaning to the idea of the cat in the box.

The Falsification Principle

Simply put: the Falsification Principle is not concerned with what may make something true, but what may, in principle, make it false. If something could not, in principle, be falsified then it is meaningless.

Antony Flew 1923-2010

Flew stated that often to the non religious person there is no event or series of events that would ever convince the “sophisticated” religious person there wasn’t a God at all.

“Now it often seems to people who are not religious as if there was no conceivable event or series of events the occurrence of which would be admitted by sophisticated religious people to be a sufficient reason for conceding ‘There wasn’t a God after all’ “.

Parable of the explorers in the jungle:

- Two explorers in the jungle come across a clearing with flowers and weeds.
- One explorer concludes that a gardener must be responsible for looking after the plot. But the other explorer disagrees.
- They wait for the gardener to appear, set up an electric fence and even use a bloodhound to track its scent. NO sign of the gardener.
- The explorer who is convinced that the gardener exists states:
 - He has no scent
 - Makes no sound
 - Secretly comes to look after the garden he loves.



Religious believers act in the same way as the explorer who believes in the garden. They won’t let anything falsify their belief.

A religious believer may claim God loves people like a father and is omnibenevolent. Then there is a Natural disaster. Eg. Tsunami 2004. No help from God? Why didn’t God prevent this? Love from God is “inscrutable” (impossible to understand/ interpret). No experience will falsify a religious believer's faith.

So for Flew, religious language is meaningless as it not falsifiable. For Flew, God dies a **“death by a thousand qualifications”**. When a religious believer is challenged, they modify the way they talk about God. They end up changing their statement so much it no longer resembles the original claim.

R.M Hare 1919-2002

Hare agreed that falsification could be used to determine the usefulness of a statement, but this did not apply to Religious statements. According to Hare, Flew took Religious statements to be factual or scientific statements, that could either be true or false. Such statements can be called assertions. Hare believed it was a mistake to view Religious statements this way.

Hare did not agree that Religious statements had to be factual. So whilst a Religious statement may not be falsifiable they could still have meaning. They have meaning because, despite not being factual, they have an impact on the lives of religious believers.

Key word: “Blik”- a word coined by Hare to mean the way we look at or interpret the world.

Parable of the lunatic: The lunatic has an insane blik, the way in which he views the world makes him believe all dons will kill him. You can see he won’t let it be falsified (no matter the number of nice dons he meets he still believes they will kill him), but it still impacts his life, so has meaning. We too have bliks about dons/ teachers...but ours are sane. Your blik about teachers has meaning and impacts behaviour.

A blik is not falsifiable and does not make claims about the world that can be tested (remember it is just the way each person interprets the world). Religious statements are bliks and therefore are meaningful because they have significance to the people using them.

Flew’s response to Hare:

Christianity is not a blik as its followers make assertions about the universe.

“If Hare’s religion really is a blik, involving no cosmological assertions about the nature and activities of a supposed personal creator, then surely he is not a Christian at all?”

It is a fundamental element of Christianity that they believe certain statements about God are true. “God created the world”. This is truth, not just an interpretation of the world. This can take us back to Flew’s original argument that a Christian then does not allow this statement to be falsified.



Basil Mitchell 1917-2011

Mitchell states Flew makes the error in his analysis of religious believers of claiming a religious believer is a detached observer, rather than a believer.

Mitchell states there is evidence against religious claims and religious believers are aware of this. Key example= Problem of Evil. As a result Religious Language is not meaningless.

Whilst believers may recognise evidence that counts against their belief they may not reject religious beliefs. This is because they have a bias not to reject the belief, because of their faith.

Experience/ evidence that could count against God are put into the wider context of their faith and belief. Therefore statements such as ‘God loves men’ are not falsifiable but are “significant articles of faith”.

Mitchell disagrees with Hare about “bliks”. He maintains (like Flew) Religious Language makes assertions. Rather than just a statement that represent how the individual interprets the world.

Evaluation of Falsification.

Richard Swinburne 1934-

A response to falsification. Just because a statement can’t be falsified does not mean it is meaningless.

Example= Toys in the Cupboard. The toys only come out and move when no one is watching. This can never be falsified. Yet we still understand the idea of the toys coming out and moving. So falsification cannot work.



Braithwaite

Whilst religious language is not cognitive, it can have meaning in a variety of ways, for example in giving moral imperatives. However, people who make these claims mean what they say, they are making cognitive claims.

Tillich

Religious is symbolic, therefore non cognitive. They are neither verifiable nor falsifiable, but symbols can still have meaning.

Donovan

Truth claims are a small part of how Religious Language is actually used. It also used to make commands and expressions of preferences. It can be used as part of a ceremony “I baptise you in the name of the Lord”. He claims that most of the time RL is not used to make truth claims.

Language Games: Ludwig Wittgenstein

Wittgenstein began to liken language to a game (after initially holding views more similar to the verification principle). Games have different rules. Eg, Chess and Netball have different rules, and the rules of Chess would make no sense applied to Netball (and vice versa). Wittgenstein said there are many different language games- people using language in different contexts and circumstances. In these different contexts and circumstances language has different meanings and purposes.

To use language is to participate in a game where you know and accept the rules.

Understanding the rules: Wittgenstein's example= chess. You may be told a piece is called the 'King', but without understand the rules of chess you couldn't use the piece in a game.

Accepting the rules: You have got to understand that words have different meanings in different contexts and use language appropriately. You can't play chess if you partner is trying to play checkers.

Words only have meaning because of their context, so meanings can vary depending on the context. This can cause problems if someone is using a word in a different context, and the other person doesn't realise.

Applying to an example: The word result would mean different things to the three different groups of people below.

- An athlete involved in sport.
- A scientist working in a medical lab.
- A student after an exam.

Inside the game = You know the rules. Outside the game = Don't know the rules.

Wittgenstein's example: Imagine you found yourself standing in the drivers cabin of a steam train. In front of you would be a large array of controls that you have no understanding of, whilst the driver would have a perfectly good understanding of their function. The only way to engage with these controls is to attempt to learn how to drive the train.

The only way RL can be understood is by playing the RL game. You need an "insider's view" so that RL can be put into its proper context.

"Was Jesus God?"

Not a yes/ no answer. It depends which RL game you are playing. Christians and Jews are likely to give different answers, but both are equally valid in their language game.

So this implies RL cannot be criticised by an outsider as you don't know the rules of this game.

So when RL is discussed we are not testing whether religious claims are true, we are looking at how the RL is used...what is its function?



Language games supported by **D.Z Phillips (1934-2006)**- adding strength

Statements such as "God is Love" and discussion of religious experience are to be understood within their language game. Therefore RL can only be judged by those who understand the rules. RL is meaningful to those who genuinely use it. So cannot be criticised by those outside the game.

Strengths	Weaknesses
It recognises the distinctive nature of Religious Language.	Who makes the rules? Can the rules be changed? If so, who by?
As a non-cognitive form of language (meaning it is context dependent, so in this case the meaning of language is dependent on the game being played) Religious Language makes no assertions (truth claims), so it cannot be criticised like it was by verificationism and or falsification. It provides boundaries for the correct use of language. You have got to follow the rules.	Believers' claims can't be empirically tested.
Believers can be initiated into the game.	How can we be sure that the rules are going to be interpreted correctly?
Highlights how language games are used to express different forms of life. Example: Science and religion- if we recognise that they are employing different language games and not undermining each other you will be able to recognise the distinctive contributions of each.	Does not allow for believers claims to be objectively true. This leads to language being understood as antirealist (can't be made true or false by anything objective). But do some religious believers want to make cognitive statements (factual claims)? Both Flew and Mitchell say they want to make assertions.
Looks at the use of language, rather than if it is objectively true or false. Allows the language to have meaning through its use.	D Z Phillips supported Language Game Theory and emphasised the idea that Religious Language is separate from other language. But religious believers partake in many other Language Games...so is Religious Language games really totally isolated from other language?
Compare to verificationism and falsification: They seem much more suited to scientific discussion- examining assertions. Language Games gives depth and value to Religious Language by emphasising its use in the lives of Religious Believers.	

The Via Negativa Also known as the Apophatic Way

The example "God is good" is using language in a positive way. We have only a human understanding of what goodness is. We are told the goodness of God is beyond our comprehension. So how can we talk about God using this positive statement when we can't understand how it applies to God. We cannot truly ever understand how good the goodness of God is.

As a result some people suggest in order for language about God to have meaning, you should only talk about God in negative terms. This doesn't mean to criticise God. By talking negatively about God it emphasises the difference between God and humanity. It means we avoid anthropomorphism – bringing God down to the same level as humans/ belittling God. You won't accidentally suggest that a good human is the same as good God.

Positive descriptions of God can be misleading. "God is Love"- God's love and humans love are completely different. Human love is flawed and inconsistent. To talk positively about God can therefore make statements about God inaccurate and damage our understanding of God. It is better to accept the mysteries of God than use flawed concepts to discuss God.

Many of the philosophers who use the V.N say we can experience God, but we cannot describe God. God is ineffable= incapable of being expressed or described in words.

Plato: His God is indescribable in nature. The mind of man can ascend mysticism through wordless prayer and draw him close, almost to the point of union with God.

Moses Maimonides: By understanding what God is not we can understand what God is.

"There is no necessity at all for you to use positive attributes of God with the view of magnifying him in your thought".

Ship analogy.

Brian Davies – criticism of Maimonides

Quote: "Only saying what something is not gives no indication of what it actually is, and if one can only say what God is not, one cannot understand him at all. Suppose I say that there is something in my room, and suppose I reject every suggestion you make as to what is actually there. In that case, you will get no idea at all about what is in my room. Going back to my quote from Maimonides ...it is simply unreasonable to say that someone who has all the negations mentioned in it ' has almost arrived at the correct notion of a ship'. He could equally well be thinking of a wardrobe."

By saying what something is not doesn't give you any indication of what a thing is. People may in fact get completely the wrong idea of what a thing is. Also if you are going to work on the basis of a process of elimination should you start with a list of options/ outcomes?



The cataphatic way / via positiva and Analogy

The cataphatic way / via positiva aims to use positive terms to convey meaning of God. Aquinas maintained we can't talk in literal terms about God (same pitfalls via negativa is trying to avoid). What we know of God will always be limited, we will have a partial understanding.

Aquinas: we could make positive claims/ convey positive ideas about God if we speak analogically.

We can use language in a **univocal** way: using words in a way to mean the exact things. "Green hat" "Green grass" "Green car". This is a univocal use of "green", in all situations it is being used to describe the colour.

We can use language in an equivocal way: same words being used in a different sense. "Dining table" "Periodic table". The word "table" is being used differently.

Analogical language- using language in a similar/ related sense, but not in exactly the same way. Example: metaphorical language in poetry. "Blanket of snow". "Blanket" has its obvious and literal meaning but it also has connotations allowing us to gain greater insight to the idea to be understood.

Types of analogy

- **Analogy of attribution:** a causal link between the two things being described/ compared. Example: a "healthy seaside", causes good health if you live there. Aquinas: To say God is living is to say God causes life.
- **Analogy of proportionality:** words relating to something in different proportions. Example: "Clever dog" "Clever scientist". We recognise there is a different scale of clever. To say God is loving – God's love is on an infinitely vaster scale.

Criticism: William Blackstone: We are going to have to translate into univocal language for it to mean anything. So we are still left with a very limited understanding of God.

Response:

Stephen Evans: Nothing wrong with God being mysterious, you just need to be able to understand 'enough'.

Rudolph Otto: God is "*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*" a fearful and fascinating mystery. This should be conveyed, not disguised by language.

Ramsey: We need to use models and qualifiers to talk about God. **Model:** eg. Loving. Something we have a reference point to. **Qualifier:** eg. Perfectly. Shows that God is proportionality different. We may not understand God completely but not guilty of anthropomorphism, but neither does God become completely incomprehensible.

Analogies are a useful way to create an understanding of a complex idea. (Think back to the watch analogy given my Play in the Teleological. You don't need to explain this analogy in the exam, but you could highlight it as an example of using an analogy to simplify a complex idea.)

Myth

Theological definition: a story or metaphor which is not historically accurate (but may have some base in history) but nonetheless conveys the important truths that are hard to express.

Vardy says that you can see that myths across cultures share common themes, eg. Great floods, creation.

- **Myths in Christianity:** Communicate Christian values and Respond to ultimate questions about life and God. Genesis- God as the creator.



Positive: myths are retellable/ easy to communicate.

Myths are not concerned with literal truths. Arguments about the truth of Genesis still rages on today within the Church. Must remember the purpose of myths is to communicate values.

Origin of the myth: If it is made up like a fable= meaningless. If the myth is an expression of values, in story form and it points to something beyond itself then it has meaning. Religious myths point to God/ reveal something of God. Issue? Can we know the origin or purpose of religious myths? From ancient times?

People have tried to demythologise the Bible. Rudolph Bultman wanted to remove the super natural element of the New Testament (due to conflicts with modern science). Abandoned! The value of myths is that they communicate key values in an easy to understand story

Problems?

- What if there are competing myths?
- If it is a story can the values it is communicating be rationally assessed?
- Can values change? Genesis: Dominance- Stewardship

The use of symbols in Religious Language

- You could argue a lot of language is symbolic, in the sense it is used non literally. For example we can use language figuratively: "I'm going to kill my sister for taking my shoes"
- You could say this leads to a problem: how do we know when language is being symbolically or literally?
- Analogy and myth can both be seen as symbolic use of Religious Language. As they are both non literal uses of language to talk about God/ Religion.
- Signs: Signs are used to represent a specific object, person or event. Convenient shorthand way of communicating meaning. The meaning of a sign has to be learnt.

Paul Tillich: Signs are chosen arbitrarily.

Symbols also stand for something other than themselves. Symbols take an everyday image to direct our thoughts to something else, in the case of religion they point to the transcendent. Tillich maintains that a symbol 'participates' with the object being represented. Eg. National flags evoke feelings of pride and loyalty.

Tillich maintained that all religious language is symbolic as it is pointing beyond itself. God is what concerns us ultimately. God is not a physical reality, bound in a physical world. Any language/ statement beyond "God is a being itself" is symbolic.

"God does not exist. He is a being itself beyond essence and existence. Therefore to argue that God exists is to deny him"

When you are talking about God you are using physical and contingent language. The majority of claims about God are non physical and non contingent. So you want to point to something transcendent – hence the use of language is symbolic.

Examples of symbolic religious language: The symbol of light- used in most religions. It can represent truth, purity, knowledge.

J H Randell- Four Functions of Symbol:

1. **Motivation:** inspire people to take action.
2. **Socially binding-** people who have the same understanding of a symbol are brought together.
3. **Communication-** of something non literal.
4. **Disclosure-** reveal the hidden depths of spiritual matters.

Macquarrie: Signs can have an intrinsic connection with what it represents. (Some symbols eg. Mathematical are also arbitrary). He states there are two types of symbol: conventional and intrinsic. "The conventional symbol has no connection with what it symbolises other than the fact that some people have arbitrarily agreed to let it stand for this particular symbolizandum. The intrinsic symbol, on the other hand, has a kinship with what it symbolises."

Evaluation

Adequate and appropriate: Using language symbolically is to say something can represent something else. Can a symbol really represent something beyond our experience? Will it adequately represent that thing, in this case God?

Realism: The implication of saying RL is symbolic is that it is claiming RL does not refer to something that has an objective reality (so it is a non realist use of language). There are other philosophers who state that religious believers ARE trying to make realist claims when they talk about God. Eg. Flew.

Open for interpretation: Not only can symbols convey meaning but leaves it open for the believers to make their own interpretation. Highlights the private nature of religion. Could it also be problematic?

Do we need to be inside the community to understand? Think back to Wittgenstein's language games. In order to truly understand a word you have to be inside the game, does the same apply to symbols? In order for people to have a shared understanding of a symbol do they need the same beliefs? Symbols can mean different things in different cultures, religions societies.

Outdated: Tillich "It is necessary to rediscover the questions to which the Christian symbols are the answers in a way which is understandable in our time".