Religious language is found in scripture or holy books, liturgy or worship, prayer and hymns.   Religious Language makes truth claims, evokes worship, expresses emotion and solemnises actions. *But can we use finite, human language to describe an infinite God beyond our limited experience and comprehension?* **Falling in love is difficult to describe but the limits of language are magnified relating to God.**

The Theory Of Analogy Proposed by St. Thomas Aquinas: This is an example of the cataphatic way or via positive – the idea that God can be spoken about in positive terms. Aquinas said language about God was not literal but analogical. With analogy, we describe the unfamiliar using the familiar. *"A-Levels are like GCSEs but…"* **Words we use about God are not univocal. Univocal words are used identically in the same sentences e.g. cat. Nor are some words about God equivocal. This is where the same word means something completely different** e.g. bat. *We cannot use words about God UNIvocally as, for example, our love is not God's love. To do that is to speak ANTHROPOMOPHICALLY about God or reduce God to human level. We cannot use words about God equivocally as we would say nothing.* **Analogy is a middle ground (*via eminentiae*) of comparison** - something positive is said but in a restricted sense. Words used about God have a partial resemblance. **God made understanding possible within our own limits. There are two types of analogy for Aquinas. 1. Analogy of Attribution: As we are created by God and are attributed to God, *we can talk of the Creator*. A good baker makes good bread**. *Characteristics are attributed to God from the world. There is a causal relationship so words we use about humans are related to God. Our love and wisdom is a pale reflection of God and the divine attributes. .* **Aquinas gave the example of the health of the bull being connected to urine. 2. Analogy of Proportion: From a lesser object we can say something else has proportionately the same quality**. *Properties are relative or in proportion to what is described. Meaning is in proportion*. **Hick gives the example of faithfulness of a dog. The faithfulness is a dog is proportionate to a human being's faithfulness.**   An 8 year old is a good tennis player and Andy Murray is a good tennis player. Their goodness is proportionate to their nature. **Positives of analogy: 1. It avoids anthropomorphism and agnosticism. 2. Jesus used this in parables. He said "The Kingdom of God is like…" 3. We cannot do theology or philosophy unless language has some meaning. 4. It provides some knowledge and understanding of God**. We can describe God in visual terms. **Negatives of analogy**: *1.We are still picturing an aspect of God. 2. It is open to interpretation. "The Lord is my shepherd" may mean different things to different people. 3. To understand the word being used about God we need to translate it into univocal language. 4. Swinburne believed all RL was univocal as everyday – the meaning of our language is stretched to fit God. 5. Vincent Brummer – analogy does not say much about God – what does good in proportion actually mean?*

The Theory Of Symbol: Paul Tillich, a 20th century theologian, argued that religious statements were not literally true but symbolic. Religious language attempts to express ideas about God symbolically. Of course, all language is symbolic. Words stand for things. *Tillich distinguished between signs and symbols*. A sign, like a road sign, literally points to something. A symbol participates in that which it points to. A flag is not merely a sign, it represents the nation. A poppy symbolises Remembrance.   Symbols appeal to the heart, **represent and communicate significant beliefs and values, open up new levels of reality beyond themselves.** . **Music and art is symbolic – they touch emotion, awaken a world**.

Tillich states God is not part of the empirical world and cannot be represented by literal language. We can only say God is the "Ground of Being" or "Being itself." God is the source of everything. All other statements must be symbolic. These symbolic words cannot be random and invented. They may emerge from the collective unconscious and many do work subconsciously or unconsciously in society. **Symbols may have a limited lifespan**. Words we may use for God may change over time. **But symbols can open up new levels of reality and unlock hidden depths.** *Like art, symbols enable us to grasp deep truths about the world. Symbols, Tillich said, are double edged. They open up new levels of reality and the soul.*

Symbols: Positives: 1. Preserves the transcendence and mystery of God . It does not reduce God to a human level unlike analogy. 2. Tillich gets across that the most important things in life are beyond words. Symbols communicate in a way that ordinary language cannot. 3. Symbols changing over time ensures relevancy. 4. Symbolic language enables us to reach God in our own way. Like everyone has their own favourite music. Different interpretations can be a strength. Symbols: Negatives: 1. How does a symbol participate in that which it points exactly? The flag is not a country. We do not destroy a country by destroying a flag. 2. JH Randall says symbols are non-cognitive providing no information about God. Religion is a human activity with no reality. 3. Religion is not art. 4. If everything participates in God how are symbols unique? 5. They are culturally dependent, change over time and are open to (mis)interpretation. 6. What is an appropriate symbol and who decides? Are they arbitrary?

The Theory Of The Via Negativa: The apophatic way or via negative claims that because words are unable to adequately describe God, the only possible statements that can be made about God is what God is not. *God is beyond our ability to describe.* **In Judaism,** the name of God is not uttered. **In Islam,** God is not pictured. *The danger of using human language of God is that we will imagine or picture our human version of the word we use. When we say "God is good" we cannot help but think of our goodness.* **Yet, God is not good in this sense however good may think we are. This theory states that all words applied to God are equivocal.** *We have limited understanding with limited words*. God is beyond our ability to describe. God is beyond comprehension. Timeless. Incorporeal. Invisible. **It avoids making God too small. Initially, this idea came from Platonic philosophers saying the Form of the Good was beyond description. The fifth-century Christian writer Pseudo-Dionysius** believed **God was beyond assertion**. He was influenced by Plato too and was aware of the limits of our senses. If *we make positive statements about God we risk an anthropomorphic idea of God in human terms*. **Only negative terms can preserve the mystery and otherness of God.** Bible terms like "Light of the World" give only provisional knowledge. **God is too great to be distorted by logic/ argument. The Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides stated that the only positive statement that can be made about God is that he exists. All other statements about God but be negative to avoid being disrespectful**. This negative approach can bring us to some knowledge of God. He uses the example of a ship. By the tenth statement we would know what a ship was, he said. **Ploticus** stated he highest understanding of God is prayer without words/ images – a bare awareness of God. **Basil and Gregory said we cannot know the mind of an ant, let alone God**. We cannot know God's essence. A 14th century monk said we enter a cloud of unknowing when we see the ineffable God. We find darkness when we seek God.
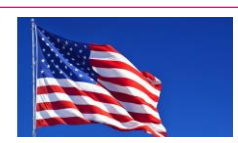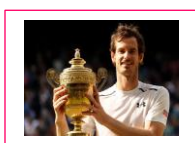
Positives: 1. It prevents anthropomorphism. 2. It is more respectful. 3. It recognises God as transcendent and beyond human level.   4. It links to religious experience, particularly mysticism. James said RE was ineffable. Negatives 1. It leads to incredibly limited knowledge of God. Little being said. 2. Maimonides' example of a ship does not work. 3. Religious believers and their scriptures make positive statements. 4. They have no means of communicating with the non-believer about God. 5. We lose a connection between God and the world as we annihilate God (WR Inge). 6. God becomes invisible and intangible. Is this no God at all? (Flew)

The Verification Principle states statements are only meaningful if they can be verified or checked by the senses and empirically checked by actual experience. If they could not be checked they were meaningless.   *We know it is sunny outside as we can check this.*   This principle was influenced by the empiricism of David Hume who said there was a priori (relation of ideas) and a posteriori knowledge (matters of fact) and discussion of God could be neither. They were also influenced by the early philosophy of Wittgenstein who stated that we should be silent about that which we could not speak and philosophical problems arise "when language goes on holiday." **The Verification Principle was proposed by the Vienna Circle**. This was a group of philosophers who met in the 1920s and 1930s. They became well-known under leadership of Schlick. **They identified that the verification principle identified which statements were meaningful and which not. A statement is only meaningful if it can be verified by an actual experience.** *Scientific claims were meaningful but not religious and moral ones.* They reacted to Hegel's idealist philosophy who said universe was progressing as part of a spiritual reality. *They were logical positivists. The aim of philosophers, they believed, should be to analyse language and the logical structure of sentences and whether language can be scientifically investigated.* Philosophers are *certification officers or gatekeepers sorting out those propositions empty of meaning from those not worthy of investigation*. "*Ben Nevis is the highest mountain*" *is untrue but can be investigated.* **There are two types of meaningful propositions in Logical Positivism that make up the Verification Principle: 1. Tautologies** which are true sentences by definition or a priori sentences. Eg a triangle has 3 sides. *The definition of the subject contains the meaning of its predicate*. These do not tell us about the content of the world or facts in the real world as this has to be investigated. They tell us about the rules of language.   **2. Empirically verifiable propositions** determined by sense experience. This tells us something beyond itself.

AJ Ayer popularised these ideas in "Language, Truth And Logic" (1936). This was the classical statement of logical positivism in the UK. Ayer noticed a problem with the VP. **It ruled out statements of science and history as we could not directly and conclusively verify them**. *We cannot be at the Battle of Hastings or experience the law of gravity of everywhere. This was an impossibly high standard of proof.* **So, Ayer distinguished between the strong VP (we need direct conclusive evidence) and weak (state the observations/ experience that make it probable).** We need to say how it would be possible to verify it rather than conclusively prove something by observation. He gives the example of "there are mountains on the far side of the moon." **At the time off writing, it could not be conclusively verified but if we were able to orbit thee moon we could verify it.**

LANGUAGE
TRUTH &
LOGIC
by A. J. AYER
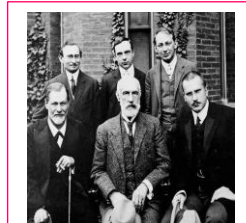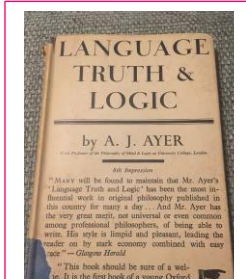
Verificationism Positives: 1.Ayer offers a significant improvement. History and Science have meaning now. 2.Religious/ moral statements are rightly excluded as they are different. 3.Subtle critique – God not worthy of serious philosophical discussion. **Negatives: 1.** *.Strong verification too rigid - historical statements meaningless.* **2.***Ethics and art not meaningless. Agreement on goodness/beauty.* **3.***Richard Swinburne: The resurrection of Jesus would be verifiable.* **4.***The VP fails its own test. It is self-refuting. It cannot itself be verified. It is therefore guilty of foundationalism – idea that knowledge based on self-evident truth. VP cannot be justified by simply asserting it.* **5.***The only informative language is not just scientific. Poetry, politics, economics, music and art are still valuable contributions to human knowledge. A Shakespearian sonnet still has meaning though it may not be straightforwardly verifiable. Not reduce sentences to 2 types.* **6.** *Hick states religious language will be verifiable in the after life. He calls this eschatological verification. He tells the story of 2 travellers who only see the celestial city (Heaven) when get to the final corner.* **7.***V. Brummer- just because something not verifiable does not make it meaningless. We do not apply science too poetry. VP is an "alternative metaphysic" based on assumptions.*

Karl Popper. a philosopher of science, devised the falsification theory to test science from pseudo-science. *When scientists make a claim, they invite others to test their hypothesis to see if it can be disproved*. Scientific statements are tested and evidence stated to **see if they were false.** If a statement cannot be *falsified it is not scientific. Real science is falsifiable. It tests to destruction. True statements assert something and deny something else.* **Any theory that can be proved wrong is not a theory.** Science would make no progress if it was all about proving beliefs right. Popper uses these ideas to criticise Freud's theories which he states are pseudo-science as they are not falsifiable.

"Science may be described as the art of systematic over-simplification."

Karl Popper

Antony Flew applied this principle to religious language. He said the problem with RL was that it cannot be falsified and so religious statements are not statements at all. *He uses a parable from John Wisdom. Two explorers in a jungle find a garden*. *One believes there is a gardener, the other not. They wait and watch and set up trip wires and dogs to sniff out the gardener. No gardener is found but the believer continues to argue there is a gardener who is invisible, intangible and works in secret. The sceptic responds by saying:* **"But what remains of your original assertion? Just how does what you call an invisible, intangible, eternally elusive gardener differ from an imaginary gardener or even no gardener at all?"** Flew believes religious claims are not really claims or genuine assertions because they cannot be tested. **When tested, the believer waters down their claim and ends up saying nothing. Religious claims suffer "the death of a thousand qualifications."** Religious believers "move the goal posts" just like they do with The Problem of Evil. What would need to occur for God to be disproved for a religious believer? **If the assertion denies nothing it asserts nothing. Religious Language is endemically evil (Flew).** *For a statement to be meaningful it has to be in principle falsifiable.*
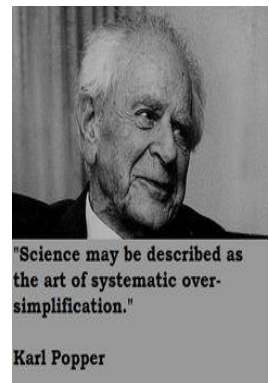
Response to Flew : 1. RM Hare *tells the parable of a lunatic who is convinced all the professors at university want to kill him. Even meeting the kindest professors does not convince him.* **Hare calls such a belief a blik - a basic unfalsifiable belief**. **Religious language cannot have scientific criteria applied to it and be empirically tested**. *Religious statements have meaning for the individual.* Hick criticised Hare saying there is no criteria for the truth/appropriateness of bliks whereas Flew said religious believers do think they are making genuine assertions. **2.Basil Mitchell tells the story of a resistance fighter who meets a stranger.** *The stranger says he is a secret member of the resistance. But the resistance fighter is concerned when he seems the stranger consorting with the enemy. The resistance fighter thinks about the arguments against but, on balance, trusts the stranger.* **Religious believers work in the same way. They do consider arguments against, they are not fanatics, delusional or illogical but they do not allow arguments against to decisively count against**. There is a role for faith. **3.Richard Swinburne states that there are statements that are neither verifiable or falsifiable but they still have meaning**. *He gives the example of the toys in the toy cupboard that come alive at night even though someone can see them.*

Ludwig Wittgenstein was the greatest philosopher off the 20th century. *He believed all problems of philosophy were problems of language.* He wrote little about religion but had a religious mood and lived the life of a monk in many respects. He studied Engineering at Manchester and then with Bertrand Russell at Cambridge. His first philosophy expressed in "Tractatus Logico-Philisophicus" was the **"the picture theory of meaning."** *Our language is a pictorial representation of our world. He was influenced by a French court case he attended where a model represented an accident. He was aware of the Vienna Circle but not a member.* **But he would change his views.**

Wittgenstein changed his philosophy of language. In "Philosophical Investigations" he came to see that meaning was not fixed or rigid but we needed to understand the meaning of words and how they are used. "Meaning is use." He used the analogy of a game. *Language is like playing a game with rules and in our groups (friends, family) we have agreed rules on how words are used.* "**The meaning of a piece in chess is its role in the game."** *When we learn a new subject we learn a new "language game."* Games like football and tennis have their own rules and the meaning of the word depends on the game. **Language has meaning in that "form of life" or context.** The philosopher analyses differences and similarities of each game, to reflect of the meaning off language, providing conceptual clarity. **Religious language is itself a language game. There is not one right and one wrong view. There are just two different ways of seeing like the duck/rabbit example. Religious statements are meaningful to those in the group.** *Wittgenstein recognises religious and scientific statements are different. Religious language is non-cognitive or non-factual (unlike Aquinas). But, unlike the verificationists, he still sees it as meaningful*. A non-cognitive approach to Bible stories sees them as symbolic not factual. Only those within the game understand religious language.   He recognises meaning changes with use and context. He recognises there are groundless beliefs that we cannot give reasons for. *In response, religious believers would defend the truth of RL and say it is cognitive. They would say Wittgenstein over-analyses.*

LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN