

RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE (PART 2) PART A REVISION

Make a list below of everything that you know you need to learn for part A questions on the second are of 'Religious Language'

A) Explain Randall's view of the function of symbols. (20)

Draft Mark scheme:

On a scale of 1-10, how do you feel about answering a question on this topic?

A) Explain Randall's view of the function of symbols. (20) Page 212-123 of the text book!!

Into to Randall's view/background on religion and symbolism

- He believed that all religious beliefs were mythology, i.e. all religious beliefs are religious symbols. *'all ideas of God, indeed, like all religious beliefs, are religious symbols'*.
- If symbols contained any kind of truth, it was not the truth of factual statements of the empirical sense or any other realist-based rational discipline
- Randall held a coherence theory of truth in relation to religious belief - when it came to belief in God, Randall, can be said to accept 'anti-realism': *(the truth of something is determined by it fitting in with the views/beliefs of the group who espouse it)*. It is against this background that the function of symbolic religious language can be understood.

Functions of symbols according to Randall:

- The function of symbols is to provide *'a revelation of truth'*
- Symbols are a *'form of communication within a religious sphere'*
- Randall drew a distinction between a sign & a symbol:
 - A sign: *'stands for or represents something other than itself'*
 - A symbol: *'provokes a response from those that see it or use it'*
- Randall drew a distinction between symbols used in the scientific field, and symbols used in art and religion
 - Scientific fields: symbols could be identified as cognitive symbols, as they provided factual knowledge about the empirical world
 - Arts & religion: they were exclusively non-cognitive in that they produced an emotional response, they did not provide empirical knowledge
- Religious symbols acted as motivators—they led those who are influenced by them to forms of action
- Symbols were able to communicate qualitative or shared experiences - experiences often considered difficult to put into words! The power of the symbol was to evoke the feelings of those shared experiences and as such, gave a particular power to the symbol itself
- Religious symbols had the ability to reveal or disclose something about the world in which they function—it was at this juncture that the religious symbol and religious knowledge shared common ground: *'religious symbols are commonly said to reveal some truth about experience'*
- Randall drew parallels between religious symbols & Platonic ideas—the function of symbols was to make us see something, something which would not have otherwise have been transparent. Symbols disclose to us what the nature of reality truly is - Religious symbols served as instruments of revelation
- It is only through symbols that individuals could approach the divine and only through symbols and symbolic language could we truly live a religious life in any meaningful sense

A) Explain Tillich's view of God as that which concerns us ultimately. (20)

Draft Mark scheme:

On a scale of 1-10, how do you feel about answering a question on this topic?

A) Explain Tillich's view of God as that which concerns us ultimately. (20) Page 124-125 of the text book!!

Draft Mark scheme:

Intro to Tillich's contribution to symbolic language

- In his *'Dynamics of Faith'*, Tillich describes the contribution of symbols to an understanding of faith
- To properly understand his work on symbols, we must understand that Tillich saw faith as the state of being 'ultimately concerned'

Tillich's views on humanity's 'ultimate concern' & the function of symbols

- Beyond basic needs such as food, water etc, Tillich saw the need for spiritual concerns, leading to humanity's ultimate concern.
- He argued: 'Mans ultimate concern must be expressed symbolically, because symbolic language alone is able to express the ultimate'. Symbols are able to express the ultimate because:
 - They point beyond themselves to something else
 - They participate in the reality they point to
 - They open up new levels of reality that were closed to us
 - They unlock dimensions and elements of our soul
 - Symbols cannot be produced intentionally—they grow out of the individual or collective unconscious
 - Symbols grow and die

Why must man's ultimate concern be expressed symbolically?

- Everything which is a matter of unconditional concern is made into a god—if the nation is someone's ultimate concern, then the name of the nation becomes a sacred name and the nation receives divine qualities. The nation then stands for and symbolises the true ultimate, but in an idolatrous way.
- Tillich argues that 'that which is the true ultimate, transcends the realm of finite reality infinitely' - no finite reality can express it directly and properly. Therefore, god transcends his own name, which is why his name easily becomes an abuse or blasphemy.
- Whatever we say about that which concerns us ultimately, whether or not we call it God, has a symbolic meaning—it points beyond itself, while participating in that to which it points. Therefore, in no other ways can faith express itself adequately—'The language of faith is the language of symbols'

What did Tillich view as the ultimate concern?

- For Tillich, the language of symbols was the language of power
- He viewed God as the fundamental symbol of ultimate concern—therefore, the language of symbols was entirely non-cognitive in that it evoked a response at the deepest emotional level of the believer
- Tillich also saw symbols the symbols of faith as being closely linked to the idea of myth

Explain the challenges to Randall and Tillich's contributions to symbolic language. (20)

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Randall recognises that the language of the symbol is inherently non-cognitive

- Therefore, religious language does not provide information about the empirically knowable, objective world in an objective and empirical way—to do this would make it cognitive language, which it is not! Therefore, it is at odds with the Vienna Circle and logical positivism and could be considered meaningless.

Tillich's work on symbols is a 'philosophical confusion'

- Paul Edwards recognised this, and noted that Tillich himself recognises in his 'systematic theology', the inability to express in literal terms anything meaningful about God: "It does not automatically tell us what he does mean or whether in fact he means anything at all" (Tillich).

Symbols change overtime

- Tillich also recognises this himself, but this did not deter him. But, if one takes a symbol and changes its meaning, then one is not just altering the symbol but is also altering something even more fundamental—the association of that symbol from and for the cultures that is associated with it. Egs of symbols changing: swastika was originally a symbol from Eastern religions associated with harmony and peace, which is now a symbol of hatred in the West because of its association with the Nazis.
- What insight can a symbol truly give, if its meaning can change over time?
- How adequate is it at providing that necessary spiritual insight, if the context of the symbols means that the meaning is entirely different?

A) Explain how Randall and Tillich can be used to help understand religious teachings. (20) Pages 126-128 of textbook!

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Tillich & Randall's work was to show how symbols can help us gain insight into the world of religion

- Randall nor Tillich claimed to having a theological 'Rosetta Stone' or a firm declaration, their works were to help us gain insight into the world of religion.

Randall - understanding symbols leads to a greater understanding of religion

- Randall's views were that religious beliefs were not to be understood in a literal sense. He stated that in early religious tradition, worshippers realised that the objects they worshipped were to be understood symbolically not literally. Therefore, religious ideas and beliefs were to be understood symbolically instead - by understanding symbols, we are led to a greater understanding of religious beliefs & their associated teachings. (Use quote as example on page 127)

Tillich—symbols point beyond themselves and lead to the ultimate concern

- Tillich argues by participating in the reality of what symbols pointed towards, the symbol illuminates the meaning of the object or idea that it represents and provides an insight that would not have been possible. E.G reference to God: 'God is the basic symbol of faith, that's not the only one'
- Understanding how symbols work in the mundane world, Tillich provides guidance of how religious teachings can be understood - that is, as ideas expressed symbolically, to be interpreted by those that participate in them and therefore accept them for what they are. Then, the believer is led to their ultimate concern.

A) Explain the values of myths in society. (20)

Draft Mark scheme:

On a scale of 1-10, how do you feel about answering a question on this topic?

A) Explain the values of myths in society. (20) Page 134-135 of the text book!!

Different understandings of myths & the problem associated with this

- Falsehood, a story that has fantastical elements, but bears no resemblance to the truth in the empirical world, fairy stories to entertain children with no value to life
- But, to reduce myth to these elements is to misunderstand the purpose of mythical language!!

The purpose of myth within religious studies

- Myth is a highly specialised term that refers to accounts that contain truths, communicated in the form of picture imagery & symbolic text
- To deconstruct a myth through empiricism is to miss the meaning of these accounts—a reductionist approach, popular in 19th and early 20th century led to the view that myths are fantasies today
- But, to dismiss myths as simplistic, is factually inaccurate. They must be interpreted with care and understanding the original context is important. (look at page 134 here, and link in 'sitz im Leben' - German Scholars here stated to understand the 'situation in life' of the New testament writers to understand the myths properly.

The Values of myths in society

- Myths exist in all human cultures—reflecting their value for all societies. They provide insights into elements that each society holds as important. There are commonly reoccurring ones such as the creation of the universe and the struggle between good and evil.
- Myths talk about events surrounding the natural world, and how it came to be— but not purely as simple narratives. They hold them within the deep and lasting truths that are integral to the identity of the culture and society to which they belong. At the very heart, myths explore what it means to be human, what are relationship should be with the world which we inhabit, how we should relate to one another and what are responsibilities are
- The role of myth within religion is integral - many aspects of religion depend on myth to provide a means of expressing fundamental truths that cannot be expressed in any other form of language.
- Myths reveal truths about human existence, the universe we inhabit and where appropriate, the divine.

A) Explain how mythical language can be used to communicate important ideas about religious, social and ethical values. (20) Pages 136-140 of textbook!

Meaning of Creation Myths

• **Religious: Order comes out of Chaos:**

-The beginning of the creation story account describes a vastness of emptiness, yet populated by primordial waters—these would traditionally be signifying chaos. The Judeo-Christian creation myth the primordial waters is brought under the control of the God-figure, symbolising order is brought out of chaos. The God of the myth is a God who possess the ability to conquer chaos!

- Chaos into order is signified again when God brought forth the land and when he filled the waters with life and populated the land, as well as when he created light - a symbol for knowledge and understanding, which has no place in the chaos.

• **Social: The primacy of human beings within creation & the role they have**

- Genesis 1v26-2:3, communicates through mythical language for humans to take on the role of stewardship for God and to look after the created order.

- Humankind in the only created thing to be made in the image of God—therefore demonstrating that human beings have the ability to transform into God’s likeness through fulfilling his commands and developing God-like qualities

- This communicates directly what the purpose of humankind is to be—it provides purpose into the insight of existence

* **Ethical Values: Meaning of Heroic myths and myths of good against evil**

- Heroic myths focus on either one or a small number of individuals and recount stories of how they are able to conquer great adversity and be triumphant as a result—these provide insight into the daily struggle human existence and provide inspiration

Examples of Heroic myths:

- Myth of the Solar Hero: Ancient Egyptian sun god Ra, is responsible for creating air and moisture. He is known as the role of life and light giver, as his heroic deeds are based around his ability to provide the life-giving properties of the sun and to battle the forces of chaos and darkness

- Ramayana in Hinduism - Rama battles the forces of darkness and is restored to his rightful throne

- Jesus of Nazareth is seen by some as a myth - he is taken prisoner, his friends abandon him in his hour of need and he is killed and eventually rises from the dead and heralds the dawn of a new age with the promise of eternal reward for those who follow him

- Siddhartha becoming the Buddha also echoes these themes, as he becomes separate from the world and eventually achieves enlightenment and can teach others his message of hope

These heroic triumphs teach through mythical language, the ability to overcome insurmountable odds, but also show how good will always triumph over evil. They provide inspiration.

A) Explain how mythical language can be used to convey meaning. (20) Pages 136

-140 of textbook!

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A) Explain challenges to myths and problems associated with them. (20) Page 140-141 of the textbook!

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On a scale of 1-10, how do you feel about answering a question on this topic?

A) Explain challenges to myths and problems associated with them. (20) Page 140-141 of the textbook!

- What happens when another myth stakes a claim to competing truths or competing values? Does this challenge the meaningfulness of the original myth or is it that the competing myth should be disregarded? E.G. creation and evolution are competing myths—who has the claim of truth here?
- The Genesis myth of creation is the direct action of the Judeo-Christian God—what happens then, when a very similar account can be found in a culture that precedes the Judeo-Christian tradition by several hundred years? If the myth is not unique, does that mean that the faith-based claims from the myth are likewise not unique? Does this weaken them?
- The central theme of Jesus' resurrection for Christians was a unique event in history—if treated like mythical literature, it seems to have parallels in other cultures, suggesting it may not be unique.
- The value of mythical language will change as the values of societies change. The meaning of the myth may alter to fit the intellectual mood of the day or it may change as we better understand the ancient cultures from where the myth originated from.
- Bultmann rejected the mythological language in the new testament as unhelpful to the modern mind. He believed it obstructed a modern faith

A) Explain Wittgenstein's contribution to the debate about religious language. (20)

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Intro to atheism:

- Definition of atheism has changed through the centuries
- Allister McGrath define atheism *'the religion of the autonomous and rational human being, who believes that reason is able to uncover and express the deepest truths of the universe'*

Negative & Positive Atheism

- Antony flew *'The presumption of atheism'* - atheism should be the default position
- **Negative** - the atheist does not make the positive claim that god does not exist—*'I don't believe that God exists, but tell me why you do believe in God?'*
- **Positive** - believes that both the atheist and theist have to give reasons to defend their belief - *'I know God does not exist, and here are my reasons'*

Protest atheism & new atheism

- **Protest** - A revolt against God on moral grounds - *'Even if God did exist, I could not accept God on moral grounds'*
- **New Atheism** - Religion is a threat to the survival of the human race - *'I don't believe God exists, and neither must you'*

Intro to agnosticism:

- A suspension of the decision to accept or reject belief in God
- First used by Thomas Huxley
- Greek meaning—*'Without knowledge'*
- Existence of God is unknowable, as our knowledge is limited
- Agnosticism is a 'middle way' between atheism and theism
- It is not about belief in God, but about knowledge

Strong & Weak

- **Strong** - Impossible to know whether God is real - *'I don't know whether God exists'*
- **Weak** - existence of God is currently unknown, but is not necessarily unknowable - *'I don't know whether God exists or not, but maybe you do'.*

Agnosticism has changed in recent years - **Nicholas Everitt** (2004) - *God's existence and his non-existence are equally probable*

A) Explain the challenges to Wittgenstein's theory of language games. (20)

Draft Mark scheme:

On a scale of 1-10, how do you feel about answering a question on this topic?

A) Explain the challenges to Wittgenstein's theory of language games. (20) Pages 152-153 of textbook!

- **Language games is a non-cognitive use of language** - this recognises that it is not open to objective scrutiny and we cannot prove it to be objectively true
- **Rush Rhees challenged Wittgenstein's analogy:**
 - language was about making sense to other people, not just following protocol that was agreed upon, like the rules of a game
 - Whilst it is possible to explain a game to someone who has never played it before, it is not possible to explain language to someone who has never spoken language or heard language.
 - You do not necessarily need to understand the game in order to recognise that they are playing a game. However, in terms of language, it is not enough to just know what they are doing, you also need to be able to understand it.
- **Language games alienates people**
 - Each game has its own rules, which do not extend, Therefore, suggesting that it is not possible to communicate in any meaningful way between two users of different language games. This could lead to misunderstanding and confusion as how can they find a middle ground between them to communicate meaningfully?
- **If the word God has no objective meaning, how can we talk meaningfully about God?**
 - If God is applied to a language game, then that would imply there is no definite, cognitive objective way to use the word and could therefore lead to uncertainty about what the word means. Many Theists would disagree with this and struggle to accept that God has a different meaning, in different contexts.