

9EN0 04

GCE English Language
Coursework

Folder 1

Make a Promise

You walk deeper into the desolate forest, safe and alone. These same meticulous steps walked daily, in the same fashion, not a foot out of place. Your head is held down, close to your beating chest, looking no further than the placing of your feet. The more encased you become in your surroundings the harder it becomes to turn back, change track or find a way out. You are addicted to your routine. Little do you know, or perhaps you do, that your actions are slowly killing you. Your hair begins to fall at your feet, your heart beating slower with every moment, your body feels weak, but a sense of numbness in your mind hides the destruction from your thoughts. Creatures surround you, luring you further into the woodland, proposing empty promises and yet feeling like the closest friends.

Beams of light shine through the canopy, you step back, blinded, desperately trying to adjust to the brightness. Distorted, you continue, deciding that this is safer than trying to comprehend the difference to your routine. Your eyes are dazed, deprived of energy, deprived of joy, deprived of light. You see your family, stretching their arms out towards you, tears splattering on the crisp autumn leaves below. But your feet do not stop walking, your mind does not stop racing. How did I get here? Why did this happen to me? Am I ever going to find a way out? Now you have stopped walking. Tired. Weak. Dying. The light still shines through the gaps in the trees, so you turn, seeing more of the journey towards it. A thorn-encrusted path reaches far into the exit of the forest. You take a single step and the spikes stab at your skin and deep blood begins to pour from the wound. This will not deter you. The next step is softer, a root of the nearest tree. Whilst most of this journey does not look painless, you have had more than enough of the lying creatures in the depth of this forest and you are yearning for a way out. Now you know how it feels.

The forest is your life; a metaphor of the obsession. You live for your routines, discipline and emptiness. But this cannot and will not continue. Now is the right place. Now is the right time. Now is the beginning. Ignore who you were before, focus on who you are going to be. Start embracing this precious time

you have been given. Stop denying yourself the right to happiness; you deserve everything that your mind is telling you that you do not. You know too well now how the depths of this illness feels.

Inner war. Darkness. Inescapable nightmares. Emptiness. Losing friends. Fighting. Crying hysterically over meaningless numbers. Numbness. Seeing no light at the end of the tunnel. All of this is weaker than you. It will not win. It will not succeed. It will not last forever. Anorexia, in the moment, takes your warmth, your strength, your sanity, your smile, your friends, the shine in your eyes, the glow of your skin and too much time of your life. This is not the way to live.

Recovery is not easy either; you are fighting a mistaken thought-producer, one that will continually live inside your head. But once you have battered it down, you become you again. The only voice inside of your head is the one full of ambition, plans, joy, the one who sees a future full of opportunities other than avoiding food and how to burn it off failing that. You were lucky. Your treatment was only quick because of a slowing heart. Others are not as lucky. I urge you to grasp this gift of life with both hands.

You are going to find that whilst you are not alone with this fight with anorexia, people that are trying to help you are not always going to be helpful.

Sometimes they can be quite the opposite. Would someone ever ask a stomach cancer patient why he or she thinks they got it? Would they ever ask someone with meningitis just to take their medicine and get on with it? Would they tell someone with Alzheimer's that it is just a phase? No. But all of these phrases will be uttered to an anorexia sufferer without a second thought.

Anorexia, out of all mental health illnesses, has the highest mortality rate. This is something I want you to know. It was never going to be easy.

Even after anorexia recovery, birds aren't going to be singing every morning, there will not always be sunshine and daisies growing. There are still days that feel so raw and broken. Why am I not just like everyone else? You are special, unique and irreplaceable, that's why. Do not regret what has

happened to you. Savour the invaluable lessons it has taught you. Wish not that you never became ill; be thankful that it did not come at a more vulnerable stage in your life. Be thankful that it taught you to love yourself. Be thankful that you were strong enough not to let it kill you.

You can be thankful. Allow yourself this. Be thankful for the treatment, for your family, for yourself. For this skin, bones and blood that the stars have aligned to give you to explore this planet. Be thankful that your skin glows with the warmth of an evening sunset, that your body is strong, that your eyes are bright, beaming with life. Be proud of how far you have come since the hospital bed, the A&E rooms and the heart monitors. Be mindful, not daunted, of how far you have to go to another birthday, a marathon finish line, a graduation day. You will make it. Your life is bursting with positivity, possibility and power. Make a promise for it to always continue this way.

Is Religious Language Meaningless?

Father. Omnibenevolent. The Alpha and the Omega. Shepherd. Holy Spirit. Saviour. How can words, each with their own nuances, ever be used to talk about God in a coherent, meaningful way? In the 20th century, many philosophers have debated this question and extended this idea to how religious language is ever used to convey any meaning. Since God is often comprehended as an intangible, invisible being, many atheistic thinkers, such as Antony Flew, believe that it is not possible to think or hear about God, since there is no empirical evidence with which to test, or experiment on in order to conclude that His existence is fact. Comparatively, theists have always found that their belief imbues the language they use with meaning especially when communicating their understanding of God. Take the religion of Islam for example; they have over ninety-nine names for Allah, describing his nature, including that of “the giver of life”. For theists, the belief that Allah did give life to humanity means that this epithet designates meaning for its users. But does this description still hold any meaning when; arguably, there is no physical evidence to prove He gave anybody life? Of course theists counter-argue this by saying that whilst there is no empirical proof of a God, religious language can still be used to infer the sense of His being.

Before we can entirely tackle this debate, it is significant to discuss in what sense religious language can be used, whether this is univocally; words having only one meaning, or equivocally; words holding more than one meaning. To use language univocally is problematic as it is incredibly rare for any lexis to hold only one meaning. Take the epithet of “shepherd”, by using the term equivocally, God is seen as caring, powerful and protective. But, if we use the term univocally instead, God would be lessened to the status of a tender of sheep. This use of language equates God to the same level as humans, which breaches the belief that God is superior to the human race, a concept known in philosophy as anthropomorphism (not to be confused with the literary concept of anthropomorphism, which is entirely different).

Many people believe that a simple solution to this problem is to propose that all lexis used to describe God is equivocal. For example, if the word "higher" is applied to humanity, it will often mean a higher social status. Comparatively, when applied to God it will reflect his omnipotence. However, this solution, though simple on the surface, also brings complications. If calling God "good" means something different to calling a painting "good", then what does God's "goodness" mean? On this occasion, what does "good" even mean?

This is a philosophical idea that has been debated for centuries. To avoid this debate, Thomas Aquinas proposed the theory of analogy as a way of providing a possible solution to the question of whether meaning can be found in religious language. Aquinas suggested that religious language should just be understood as analogical. He proposed the concept of analogy of attribution, which argues that the qualities that we assign to each other are merely a reflection of the qualities of God. For instance, if humans are defined as "good" it is because they are products of God and reflecting his "goodness". Brian Davies clarifies this definition by using the example of a baker and his bread, arguing that if we claim that both the bread and the baker are good then there is a relationship between them; the baker's goodness at his job is reflected in the goodness of his bread. Therefore, it can be concluded that religious language is as meaningful as language used to describe peers, since descriptive lexis can still be used about God as the ultimate reflection of when it is used on a human level. Aquinas gave another example to aid in giving a solution to anthropomorphism, analogy of proportion, arguing that the type of properties something has depends on the nature of its being. For example, to propose that a younger sister was good at art would be in an entirely different proportion to how Van Gogh was good at art. Therefore, the same words can be used to describe humanity and God meaningfully, as long as it can be comprehended that God's qualities are much greater than humans. Aquinas most successfully shows how language can meaningfully provide us with a sense of understanding about God.

However, there is much opposition to the theory of religious language holding meaning. The verification principle, for example, offers one of the most

effective oppositions to the use of religious language and was theorised by the logical positivists, a group influenced by the Vienna Circle. The principle was based on similar ideas to that of empiricists Locke and Hume and was a way of distinguishing what is meaningful language and what is not. They decided that a statement is only meaningful if it can be verified with empirical evidence or if it is a tautology – a logical statement that we know is true by definition. So for example, if one were to say that, “triangles have three sides”, this statement would be true without having to find the evidence to verify it. Verificationists, therefore theorise that religious language faces the problem of lacking the ability to be verified and therefore is meaningless.

Although, many philosophers argue that the verification principle is not conclusive. To declare something meaningless just because it cannot be verified would mean that scientific laws are also nonsense, since in the same way, many cannot be verified entirely. For example, I cannot be at the start of the universe in order to know if the big bang happened and even many scientists claim that this theory is not certain, but does this make it meaningless and a proposal for our existence that we should forget about?

Furthermore, Wittgenstein more successfully argued against the ideas of the verificationists, believing that humanity exists within “language games”. Essentially, this means that people in the same culture or belief system mutually understand their use of language, whilst those in another may not. For example, to theists “God is omnipotent” is a comprehensible statement, whereas atheists would find minimal meaning within it. Atheists and theists are therefore in different “language games” and so should not expect each other’s use of language to match their own. Wittgenstein did not appear to be a religious believer, but took the admirable stance of respecting religion and the use of language surrounding it.

Ultimately, whilst there is some clear opposition to the use of religious language, such as the strong argument of the verificationists, it is impossible to conclude that no meaning can be found. Aquinas’ theory of analogy provides significant reasons as to how we can strongly infer attributes of God

through our language, even if it cannot be used literally. Finally, Wittgenstein's "language games" gives the ultimate reasoning behind viewing religious language as meaningful. If it is accepted that everyone's beliefs belong to their own "game", then people can continue to use language suited to their own principles and understanding whilst showing respect to others. Religious language, as with all language, cannot possibly be said to be meaningless, as it holds significant meaning within each specific cultural group.

Commentary

The genre of my assignments is blog posts, each featuring a different purpose and audience. Assignment one has been successfully constructed to fulfil the purpose of inspiring, encouraging and persuading people to recover from Anorexia and is therefore aimed at an audience of Anorexia sufferers and the people surrounding them. This assignment features a partially formal register, reflecting the serious topic and creating the sense of a reliable writer, through the use of sophisticated lexis such as “meticulous” and “deprived”. This creates overt prestige, ensuring that the reader will trust the writer’s knowledge. The article was crafted towards the style of the blog *Beating Eating Disorders*, and aimed at a similar audience of 16-20 year olds. This platform was found to be particularly effective for my audience, as it is a private method of seeking help with eating disorders. Whilst at first I drafted in the genre of speeches, in my research I found a blog post to be the most expressive genre to create a long, effective and developed narrative.

In my research, I found on the website *Beat* that in my first assignment I had to be sensitive to potential triggering topics for my audience such as specifics of weight loss or gains, quantities of food and details of specific behaviour. Therefore, I used a more poetic anecdote of a “forest” rather than a literal account. Examples of this consideration can be seen within the imaginative lexical choices such as “a thorn-encrusted path”, as a metaphor for the struggles a person in recovery may face. This enabled my audience to empathise with the way in which an Anorexic would feel during both the depths of the illness and recovery without upsetting them. Although, I found that it was still important to create interpollation with my audience and therefore chose to use details such as “your hair begins to fall at your feet”, which whilst upsetting, is much less graphic and drastic than the process of bone and heart weakening, symptoms I researched on the *NHS* website. This is an example of member’s resources, as the symptoms are what mostly sufferers of anorexia will relate to. In terms of graphology in my first assignment, I have used italics in the first section as this features a more metaphorical voice in comparison to the rest of the blog post, which features

more direct address and therefore changes to a serious tone. This effectively splits the blog post into a narrative of experiences and advice for the reader.

Furthermore, the use of direct address and emotive language in “you are fighting” combines with imperatives such as “be thankful”, “do not regret” and “savour the invaluable lessons”, create a positive rapport with my assumed audience in order to inspire empowerment and strength. I found this effective during my research on the Instagram account *@projectheal*, recognising that they had a similar audience to my own and used imperatives throughout their post in the aim of powerfully inspiring their reader. One of my closing statements of the triadic parallelism of “your life is bursting with positivity, possibility and power” confirms the direct and positive message and utilises alliteration to increase the pace and rhythm to end the post with a more upbeat phonetic structure, with the repetition of plosives also strongly implying strength. To continue audience engagement I used rhetorical questions such as “why am I not like everyone else?” to encourage the reader to empathise with the writer and subsequently identify with them, a feature I saw within my research in Matt Haig’s technique of listing in his book *Reasons for Staying Alive*. I used this technique within my blog post as the bluntness of the short sentence structure creates a thought-provoking text; I used similar lexical choices in the semantic field of desperation such as “darkness” and “inescapable nightmares”.

Conversely, I composed assignment two towards the purpose of educating an audience of philosophy students aged 16-18 on the revision blog *Philosophical Investigations*. This is an interesting contrast to my first piece because it features an intellectual semantic field, with lexical choices such as “anthropomorphism”, “omnibenevolent” and “verificationists”, creating a strong sense of overt prestige, to convince the audience that they can rely on the writer’s information for their course. Continual use of examples suits my audience of philosophy students, as whilst they will hold some basic understanding, for example, not needing words such as “empiricists” explained, more complex terms should be explained to further aid in student comprehension, the sole purpose of the text. My similar formal register to

piece one can be seen within piece two in the complex lexical choices, for example “equivocal”. This achieves the same purpose of ensuring that the audience feels that the writer is reliable with the information that they provide, with both featuring standard grammar and orthography throughout.

Initially, I created an unbiased blog post, but found that a firm viewpoint would spark more of an interest with my educational audience. Then from my research, I found that giving both sides of an argument was typical of the discourse of an academic philosophical text; this included a style model blog post on Augustian theodicy on the blog *Philosophical Investigations*. I included this discourse in my own post, as I saw how it would give the best foundation for students to form their own conclusion on, which I found vital for a philosophy course. The discourse of both assignments takes the stereotypical form of blog posts, with specific audiences and concise expressive information. Whilst assignment one suits the traditional more conversational tone for a casual reader, assignment two maintains its academic tone with the attractive concept of a blog to the young audience. The use of my title, in assignment two, has been crafted to create controversy and attract an audience interested in the philosophy topic. The portrayal of religious language as “meaningless” would be an insult to religion and therefore encourage a debate in the subject, suiting my purpose of educating.

Additionally, assignment two features a semantic field of factual lexis, compared to the highly descriptive and imaginative lexis of assignment one, as shown by phrases such as “atheistic thinkers, such as Antony Flew, believe”, reflecting the educational purpose. Throughout my research, writers regularly used examples directly from philosopher’s works, which I replicated with Brian Davies’ own example of the “baker and the bread”, as I felt it increased the effectiveness of understanding complex theories. Meanwhile, use of imaginative and emotive language in assignment one, such as the metaphor “beams of light shine through the canopy” for hope, suits the purpose of inspiring the audience. My careful choice of syntax with the use of an impersonal passive voice, such as “to declare that” instead of “we can declare that” creates an academic tone, suiting the education purpose of the

text. I also avoided using personal pronouns in order to create this more academic and detached voice. Ultimately, both assignments are thoroughly successful for their genre of blog posts, conversely suiting their audiences and purposes.

Bibliography

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