

Wittgenstein & D.2. Phillips - language games

SECTION C

Strong verification + weak verification (sensible grounds for evidence)

Phil - falsification (link to Popper and science) ^{good day, good human}

4 Evaluate the claim that religious language is meaningless.

^{god is not} ^{god is greater} ^{attribution of} ^{side}

In your response to this question, you must include how developments in Philosophy

of Religion have been influenced by one of the following:

^{Verbs: not really, no meaning}

- Religion and Ethics
- New Testament Studies
- Study of a Religion.

^{Antropomorphism + phoria}

Interpretations of scripture

^{to suppose for language to be meaningful?}

^{to or is this more meaningful?}

Mitchell - parable of the ^{good} ^{change}

Rilich - symbols and signs, participation.

Vienna Circle - logical positivism.

Via Negativa - can only say what God is not.

^{name: the only way we can speak about God}

Univocal - the same

Equivocal - different contexts

^{symbolic: principle of credulity}

^{Hick - eschatology & testimony?}

^{verification: parable of the ^{good} ^{change}}

Religious language refers to the way we speak about God and his attributes. Many scholars argue that our language is impossible to be used to speak adequately about God, as language is man-made and thus not on the same level of transcendence and greatness ~~when it comes~~ as God. It almost, then, appears impossible to talk about God at all, as we physically are unable to use words that match God's perfect and incomprehensible state of being - however, some scholars have attempted to get around this problem and find ways in which religious language can contain meaning, and this is what my essay will discuss.

First and foremost, Wittgenstein and D.2. Phillips would argue that religious language is not meaningless, as it applies to a specific language game. Wittgenstein's theory of language games ~~more~~ is drawn from his previous private theory, and states that we cannot ~~understand~~ understand language unless we are to participate in the "game" that said language belongs to, for example, we cannot fully understand the language of chess without ever participating in the game itself. D.2. Phillips then takes this theory and applies it to religion, arguing that although religious language may appear meaningless to us, to those who participate in



religion and its beliefs, it is incredibly meaningful - however, a criticism can easily be found here, as it can be argued that one does not need to participate in a "game" to fully understand the language behind it. For example, one can completely understand the language behind chess without ever needing to play the game, just by observing it or having the rules explained to them by a chess player ~~themselves~~ for themselves. The same appears true of religion. Similarly, Tillich would argue that one does not have to participate in religion and its language to find it meaningful, but rather has to engage in religious symbols in order to find meaning; for example, the Christian cross ignites feelings of strong belief within a Christian and acts as a reminder for the sacrifice of Christ and the redemption it brings; as opposed to a simple sign within the world, such as a road sign, which points one in a certain direction. This is a strong argument when contrasted with the theory of language games, as Tillich suggests that symbols are what really "participate" in the meaning of what they stand for, including religion. For example, like the Christian cross, a flag may ignite power and pride in the king or his nation, just as the Star of David ignites a passionate belief within Jews of Judaism. However, Ayer would criticise this suggestion and argue that we do not require symbols in order for language to be meaningful, but instead simply need a way to verify it, which he called the Verification Principle - religious language is unable to be verified, and that is why it cannot hold meaning. Situationists would criticise Ayer for this. Those who follow Fletcher's religious ethical theory of Situation Ethics would argue that so long as the language holds meaning for the individual and their beliefs, then it should be considered meaningful, as it is most loving to allow people



to experience and believe in the meaning of their own beliefs. This is a particularly strong argument, as ^{it is} supported by Vardy, who argues that not being able to verify religious language does not render it meaningless, as meaning does not come from verification, ~~but~~ but from maintaining faith even when there is nothing to verify this faith; an argument ~~on~~ further supported by McGrath. However, in order to avoid this issue, Ayer developed the weak verification principle. This argues instead that we should accept religious language provided ~~there~~ there are sensible grounds ~~of~~ for evidence that could verify it, but this argument still does not appear to solve the problem presented by Vardy ^{and McGrath}, as even if there are no sensible grounds for evidence, what makes it meaningful is what it signifies to the believer.

Plew aimed to support the claim that religious language is meaningless, whilst ~~also~~ simultaneously solving the problems that Ayer's verification principle posed - and by doing so, he devised the theory of falsification, suggesting that religious language cannot be meaningful unless there is something that could, in theory, count against and falsify it. This is an extremely strong perspective, as, as Plew points out with the parable or analogy of the gardener, people of faith tend to continuously change the properties and religious language surrounding God whenever there is something to count against the propositions and language they originally used to describe him. There is nothing that a religious believer would accept to ever count against their belief in God, and thus, their religious language and attempts to describe him become meaningless. However, Mitchell's criticism of Plew posits a



strong threat to his claims with his own parable of the resistance fighter, whereby the believer sees that there is contrary evidence opposing God, yet chooses to trust him regardless — which is an immensely strong argument, as it further signifies how faith is not simply blind and that believers do recognise that religious language may appear meaningless to others, but to them, it is their key for describing their deep connection ^{and faith} with God. As Hume put it, we have no other way of describing our adoration for him besides our unequivocal language, and thus, it must be meaningful. However, the idea of God being personal and the language ^{and its meanings} surrounding him being unique and individual to every person suggests that the religious language used is completely subjective and open to interpretation for each person, initially making it appear less factual, less believable to those who do not already believe, and therefore, meaningless; similarly to biblical interpretation of scripture, it is impossible to completely understand the meaning of the Bible when there are so many alternative interpretations and lenses to view it from, and the same can be applied to religious language. Alternatively, though, Aquinas argues that religious language is not subjective, but instead, analogous. His analogy of proportion (the idea that we speak of God in a lesser proportion to what it actually is) and his analogy of attribution (the idea that we attribute lesser meanings to God, as it is our only way of understanding that he is, in fact, far greater) are strengthened by John Hick, who uses the example of the faithfulness of a dog, then the faithfulness of a human, and then the faithfulness of God to indicate how ~~and~~ we are able to use religious language to explain God, provided we are aware that its meaning is greater than we can comprehend when applied to him, making it still



immensely meaningful.

On the other hand, though, it could be argued that religious language cannot be meaningful, as it anthropomorphises God and puts him on our level - for example, Spinoza argues that speaking of God in human-like terms or ways lowers his state of perfection, meaning he is no longer perfect, as human language cannot be perfect. However, the idea of the *via negativa* highlights an immediate weakness to this argument, as it suggests that religious language can be meaningful provided we only use it to speak of what God is not. Thomas Wemandy would show support for this argument, as ~~so~~ he argues in favour of God's transcendence being something completely impossible for us to comprehend, and, as such, we cannot speak of a perfect God like we would a suffering human: and so, we can only speak of what this God is not.

Ultimately, in conclusion, the claim that religious language is meaningful ~~is~~ appears to itself be meaningless. Religious language is, by definition, religious, and so those who do not associate with religion cannot claim that it is meaningless when, for people of faith, it is integral for their expression of ~~and~~ belief. Quinlume's principles of credulity and testimony come into play here, as he suggests that people usually tell the truth, and this can be applied to religious language, as their language about their God is their truth. Uniquinaxal language, as Quinlume suggests, is the only way that we, as humans, can speak about God, as even if it is not as great as we are aware that God is,



we have no other way of expressing our beliefs as we cannot fathom his magnitude of greatness. Even if no words come to mind that match God's magnitude and transcendence, we can still use religious language to speak of what God is not, which does help us picture what he is. Religious language is thus meaningful for the believer, and should not be undermined and undervalued by those who simply do not believe in God at all.

