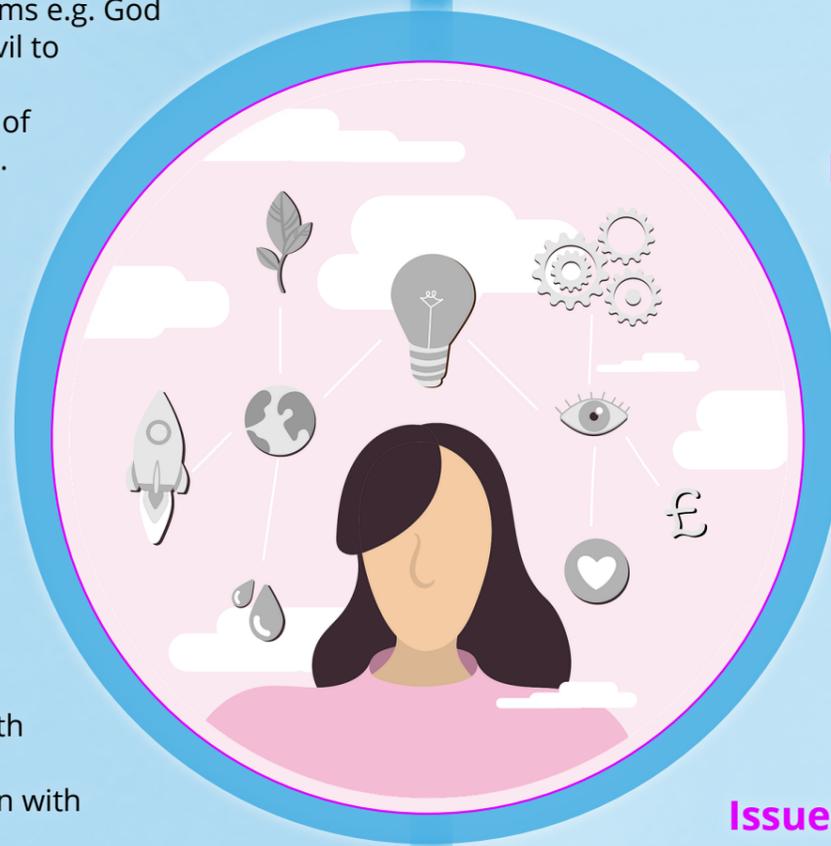


Key concepts

- Religious language makes **assertions** about God's nature and God is said to have numerous qualities e.g. infinite and timeless.
 - Descriptions of God as infinite or timeless are outside of shared human experience so it is impossible to support these claims with **empirical** evidence.
 - Infinity or timelessness are **abstract** qualities, they are impossible for human beings to conceive of reliably because humans are finite and within time.
- Sacred texts and religious doctrine and teaching requires the use of language that relates to **metaphysical** ideas and concepts.
 - Such claims are unintelligible because they are not based upon a shared experience of the world and their meaning is unclear.
 - Religious language often makes contradictory or **paradoxical** claims e.g. God is described as omnipotent and omnibenevolent and yet allows evil to exist.
 - Other paradoxical claims include death being considered the end of life, yet religious teachings and scriptures speak of life after death.
 - If these claims are not literal, there is difficulty in understanding what the intended meaning is. There are difficulties even amongst believers about how this language is to be understood.
- Everyone can experience the empirical world, so to talk of it is meaningful to everyone.
- Religious language attempts to communicate information about things that are not **universally** experienced by all people.
 - This makes it difficult for religious people to communicate meaningfully with those who do not share that experience.
 - E.g. God's **grace** is not a universal experience. Explaining it to a non-religious person, requires more religious language (**atonement, salvation, forgiveness, holiness**) none of which can be known outside of a religious context.
 - Religious language is often specific to the individual religion or faith perspective or is used differently between faiths.
- Cognitive** language is language for which the meaning can be known with certainty.
- Cognitive language makes factual claims about the empirical world (what we can apprehend with our senses).
- It expresses **propositions** that can be known to be objectively true or false and can be tested with empirical evidence.
- E.g. clouds consist of water droplets; the cat is sitting on the mat.
- If religious language is cognitive then it should be possible to prove its truth or falsity, but it is impossible to test assertions of religious language.
- Non-cognitive** language is **subjective** language for which the meaning may be interpreted.
- Non-cognitive language expresses attitudes or interpretations.
- Non-cognitive language communicates information not restricted to empirical facts. This could include ethical, emotional, and religious language.
- E.g. I feel happy, God loves me, murder is wrong.
- If religious language is non-cognitive, it is difficult to understand what is being expressed. It also means that it cannot make cognitive claims. e.g. 'God exists' or 'God is good' is not a claim that can be described as true or false.



Key quotes

'Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter or fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing by sophistry and illusion.' (Hume)

'No statement which refers to a 'reality' transcending the limits of all possible sense experience can possibly have any literal significance... those who have striven to describe such a reality have all been devoted to the production of nonsense.' (Ayer)

Key words

assertions	empirical	abstract	metaphysical
paradoxical	universally	grace	atonement
salvation	forgiveness	holiness	cognitive
propositions	non-cognitive	subjective	

Issues for analysis and evaluation

Key arguments/debates

Some argue that it is necessary for a statement to be based on empirical evidence for it to be considered meaningful.

Others respond that such attitudes eliminate other kinds of statements about human experience, such as statements about love or disappointment.

Some point out that language has many different uses, not just to label items, but also to question, command or promise, none of which can be said to be cognitive.

Key questions

Is non-cognitive language meaningful?

Can a non-believer understand what is meant by religious language?

Is the empirical world the only thing of importance for philosophers?