AO1

What is ...
Knowledge and understanding ?

This is the skill that involves *selecting* the relevant and appropriate information, *organising* it and then *presenting* it through a *personal explanation* that may involve the use of supporting *evidence* and *examples*.

Aquinas believed in a relationship between our experience and a greater reality – but this is not a literal relationship that can be explained through univocal language. For, God is beyond human experience.

'TRIGGER QUOTES'

Univocal terms mean absolutely the same thing, but equivocal terms absolutely different.   **(T. Aquinas)**

The names said of God and creatures are predicated neither univocally nor equivocally but analogically ...   **(T. Aquinas)**

... our intellect ... in order to understand God, forms conceptions proportional to the perfections flowing from God to creatures.   **(T. Aquinas)**

Theme 4C: Religious language as non-cognitive and analogical

Aquinas and analogy

- Thomas Aquinas explored the possibility of speaking about God, given that God is, essentially, unknowable.
- Univocal language has the same meaning in different contexts. For example, 'carpet' can mean the same thing whether we are talking about a living room carpet or a carpet in a mosque.
- Aquinas rejects the view that language for God can be used univocally because God cannot be reduced to the language of time and causation.
- This leaves the possibility that the language of God is equivocal; equivocal language is language which has wholly different meanings when the context changes. For example, 'set' can refer to a television or a series of repetitions when working on physical fitness.
- Believing that our language about God is equivocal means, for example, that there is no correspondence between the meaning of 'good' as we use it to describe any person, place or thing and when we use this same word to describe God.
- Aquinas also rejects this view because we live in relationship to God: we know causes, we know God's created world and we have been created by God.
- Aquinas says that the compromise between these two positions is analogy. An analogy is a comparison between one thing and another which is based on the idea that there is a partial similarity.
- The analogy of proportion states that we share aspects of a common nature to God since we are made in her/his image. However, it is only in proportion to God's nature.
- When we say that God is powerful, we mean that God has that nature totally (omnipotence), but we have that nature only in proportion to being human beings (i.e. we are not omnipotent).
- However, we have some understanding from our experience of power of what it means to say that God is omnipotent.
- In a similar way, the analogy of attribution focuses on the fact that we reflect something of the attributes of God (e.g. wisdom).
- We are 'wise', but not independently of God; we have insight on God's wisdom because God has created the attribute of wisdom in our lives.

Ramsay's approach

- Ian Ramsay taught that religious claims begin with the observable world but do not end there.
- Central to Ramsay's approach is the idea of 'disclosure'. This is the moment where the 'something more' quality has become conscious.

- For example, a judge who is conducting a court case suddenly realises that the defendant is her old school friend 'Alli'. Thus, a 'normal' work situation contains a 'disclosure' which has made it personally **meaningful**.
- A believer has a similar sense of **discernment** in the midst of everyday situations about the ultimate source and meaning of life.
- A **model** is a quality or situation with which we are familiar (e.g. 'wisdom', 'causation'), but which can be used for reaching another situation with which we are not so familiar.
- A **qualifier** is word which points to a way or direction in which we may understand the model until a moment of discernment occurs. (i.e. 'infinite', 'first', 'eternal').
- Religious believers describe God using models: wise, **shepherd**, powerful – we understand the meaning of these models from everyday life.
- However, believers do not mean these to be interpreted literally: God is beyond everyday life. 'Qualifiers' must be employed to show how the model is being used **differently**.
- For example, God is described as a 'cause' (model). Then, a qualifier is used ('first') to direct one in their interpretation, to ask what caused each cause until one arrives at a mystery. This **mystery** is a moment of discernment in which one apprehends a mystery – God.
- 'God' is the end of this direction of travel; **God includes** all experience and language.
- Ramsay did not believe that a logical formula could establish God as the 'first' cause or as 'infinitely' wise; belief is a discernment that occurs when contemplating a model and its qualifier.

Agreements and disagreements

- Both Ramsay and Aquinas give believers **permission** to use language and concepts with which they are familiar to express their faith.
- Aquinas and Ramsay use language about God from the observable world but **avoid literalism** (univocal language) through the concept of analogy.
- The analogical approach provides a way for non-believers to **understand** religious teaching as insights into a mystery.
- Aquinas' analogies of proportion and attribution mean that believers need not be silent about a transcendent God but can **express** their beliefs.
- Ramsay's discussion of 'discernment' might **relate** to the 'something more' experience of life that many have had.
- **Hume** noted that an analogy is only as good as the point at which two things are similar.
- If one cannot establish the meaning of the word 'God' in the same way in which we establish the meaning of everyday words ('house', 'car', etc.) then the **analogy fails**.
- Both Aquinas and Ramsay assume the existence of God; their views only have weight for those who share their **assumption**.
- If one has no empirical knowledge of God/the Divine yet assumes that God exists, one will have to use language about God equivocally. Therefore, statements about God would be **meaningless**.
- Ramsay's model-qualifier approach only claims to give insights into a 'mystery' rather than give **verifiable** knowledge of God in any way that would satisfy a non-believer.

Quick Revision

Write down three analogies that have nothing to do with religious language. Now, write down three analogies that religious people might use to describe the Divine/God. Explain why these analogies are not using language in a univocal, equivocal, or literalistic way.

Model	Qualifier
Shepherd	All-loving
Cause	First
Wise	Infinitely
Creation	Ex-nihilo

Specification Link

Challenges including how far analogies can give meaningful insights into religious language. A consideration of how these two views (Aquinas/Ramsey) can be used to help understand religious teachings.

Ramsay: truths about God become real in a moment of 'discernment', when we perceive that there is something more going on than our normal observations.

❝ TRIGGER QUOTES ❞

Neither a catholic nor a pagan knows the very nature of God as it is in itself ...
(T. Aquinas)

We should expect religious language ... to be constructed from object language which has been given appropriately strange qualifications. **(I. Ramsay)**

AO2

What is ... Evaluation and critical analysis ?

The AO2 skills of evaluation and critical analysis mean engaging with the controversies surrounding a subject. This is more than merely describing or listing the points made about a controversy. To achieve this, one weighs up strengths and weaknesses of various sides and takes a position. On the right are three controversies for each issue – you can engage in these by extending their arguments (adding examples, quotes or other details), weighing up their strengths and weaknesses, and coming to a conclusion.

Religious believers view logical positivism as too 'reductive', condemning too many sources of human knowledge as 'nonsense'. Defenders of logical positivism say that we need to 'boil away' superstitions which have held humanity back.

TRIGGER QUOTES

'God' is a key word, an irreducible posit, an ultimate of explanation of the kind of commitment he professes. **(I. Ramsay)**

[the believer] is obliged to use, for the expression of his beliefs, language governed by paradoxical rules. **(I. Crombie)**

There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical. **(L. Wittgenstein)**

Issue:

To what extent do the challenges to logical positivism provide convincing arguments to non-religious believers?

Three evaluative controversies!

- **Controversy 1:** *Logical positivism can never be convincing?*
  Logical positivism clearly defines which statements can be meaningful: those that are **analytic or synthetic**. Any challenge that comes from a statement outside of this scope would have to be seen as either illogical or, literally, '**non-sense**'. This position has been built on Hume's empiricism and has won wide support because it can be seen as the foundation of scientific progress. However, this approach rules out the possibility of knowledge from the fields of music, ethics and aesthetics – not to mention religion. Thus, logical positivism is too **reductive**.

- **Controversy 2:** *Analogical approaches make more sense than logical positivism?*
  One can appreciate logical positivism especially in relation to **simplistic, literalistic** religious statements such as, 'God created the world in seven 24-hour days'. However, an analogical approach is appealing because it gives religious statements a cognitive status as an observation on the world without having to take these statements as literally true. This means that religious language is a point of contact with a larger **mystery**. However, if there is no way to verify the supposed similarity between any metaphysical claim in relation to the observable world, then the analogical approach **yields no meaning**.

- **Controversy 3:** *Wittgenstein's journey challenges logical positivism?*
  Early in his career, Wittgenstein met with the Vienna Circle and advanced views which aligned with their convictions. For instance, Wittgenstein only considered language to be meaningful insofar as it provided an **accurate picture** of reality as known by the senses. However, he came to the view that language should be viewed as a meaningful activity according to the roles it plays in the lives of its speakers. Thus, we need to know what it means to those using it (**meaning is found in use**). However, the danger of this view is that it can lead to a **'relativistic swamp'** in which any statement could be said to be 'true'.

Sp⚬tlight: Evaluative judgements

This section contains a special insight that you can use to form a judgement.

A recent way to try to prove the meaningfulness of religious views as cognitive claims has been to use the 'proof' of near-death experiences (NDEs). Those reporting NDEs claim to have out of body experiences with similar features (floating, going down a tunnel, seeing a bright light, etc.). This is said to affirm religious doctrines on life after death as analogical language. However, there are naturalistic explanations for these experiences (i.e. when blood stops circulating to the brain, one experiences a 'floating' sensation).

Issue:

Whether non-cognitive interpretations are valid responses to the challenges to the meaning of religious language

▢ Controversy 1: *Communication that's non-cognitive works!*

The point of language is to support communication between human beings so that they can work together with **shared meaning**. One way to achieve this is through cognitive language based on verifiable or falsifiable experiences. Yet, the fact that so many religious believers can **communicate meaningfully** with one another using analogy and non-verifiable concepts such as 'soul', 'God', 'paradise', etc., shows that non-cognitive communication works. Of course, this **ignores** a significant segment of the population for which this language is meaningless and who require cognitive statements that can be verified.

▢ Controversy 2: *Viewing religious language as non-cognitive doesn't work for religious believers!*

In his reaction to Hare's 'blik' approach, Anthony Flew noted that **religious believers** view their assertions as cognitive. Furthermore, John Hick has noted that the **founders** of the world religions would have never accepted that their insights on the Divine were non-cognitive. However, it could be argued that religious believers are **confused** in that they think they are speaking cognitively, when in fact they are using non-cognitive language (or, 'memes') that they have gained through their family, communities and culture. This language is a creation of the contexts in which they have been raised and does not correspond to verifiable experience.

▢ Controversy 3: *A compromise can be reached!*

Hare's approach has identified that we often have an **overall perspective** or attitude toward life which determines how we view the '**data**'. One way to interpret his insight is to say that religious believers make cognitive statements and conclusions from a non-cognitive standpoint. In other words, their insights and observations use cognitive language but emerge from a non-cognitive perspective or blik. However, if this is true, then one could **test** or verify the observations and come to a conclusion of the truth-value of the supposed non-cognitive perspective – meaning that it was never a non-cognitive perspective in the first place.

Sp•tlight: Evaluative judgements

This section contains a special insight that you can use to form a judgement.

Flew said that statements should be viewed as meaningless if there is nothing that could count against them. However, people find meaning in many statements which cannot be proved or disproved in sense experience. One example of this are the many interfaith dialogue events that occur between religions. The fact that agreement is sometimes reached on metaphysical beliefs which cross religion, culture and creed shows the power of religious statements to communicate meaning. Of course, the fact that agreement is not often reached could be seen to support Flew's point of view!

TIP

If you decide to use a Trigger quote in an exam response, always take time to briefly explain what the quote means and how it fits into your argument.

Quick Revision

Create a debate in a dialogue form between a religious believer who accepts that their beliefs express an attitude for which there is no final proof and a religious believer who believes that their beliefs are founded on objective reality. Have your characters refer to scholars from this theme. This will help you with an exam evaluation question in this area.

⟨ TRIGGER QUOTES ⟩

Our whole commerce with the world depends on our blik about the world ...
(R. Hare)

I am against religion because it teaches us to be satisfied with not understanding the world. **(R. Dawkins)**

If Hare's religion really is a blik, involving no cosmological assertions ... then surely he is not a Christian at all? **(A. Flew)**

AO1 Trigger revision activity

A

ZIP

Aquinas and analogy

unknowable, univocal, Aquinas rejects, equivocal, no correspondence, relationship

analogy, proportion, image, our experience, attribution, not independently

1 Here is your zip file of portable Triggers.

2 Practise 'downloading' your zip file of Triggers from memory. See how many you can recall on first attempt.

3 When you are confident enough, order the Triggers into a list as you may do in an examination situation.

5 Now read through your descriptions and think about ways in which you could develop these using your Trigger quotes.

4 Attempt to write one clear sentence to define each Trigger.

Why Trigger?
Remember, your Triggers are to help you transfer your knowledge and understanding in a manageable, efficient and portable manner.

TIP

B

ZIP

Ramsay and Agreements and disagreements

Ramsay	Agreements and disagreements
shepherd, disclosure, differently, qualifier, observable world, mystery, meaningful, God includes	verifiable, understand, Hume, relate, express, analogy fails, avoid literalism, permission

1 Fix the zip file! There are four Triggers missing from this zip file – find them and add them in.

2 There's another problem: the Triggers are out of order! Put them in the same order as they appear in the AO1 section above.

3 Practise 'downloading' your zip file of Triggers from memory. See how many you can recall on first attempt.

6 Now read through your definitions and think about ways in which you could develop these using your Trigger quotes.

5 Attempt to write one clear sentence to define each Trigger.

4 When you are confident enough, order the Triggers into a list as you may do in an examination situation.

AO2 Trigger revision activity

A ZIP

Are challenges to logical positivism convincing?

can never be convincing, analytic or synthetic, non-sense, reductive	**analogical approaches, simplistic literalistic, mystery, yields no meaning**	**Wittgenstein's journey, accurate picture, meaning is found in use, relativistic swamp**

1 Here is your zip file of portable Triggers.

2 Practise 'downloading' your zip file of Triggers from memory. See how many you can recall on first attempt.

3 When you are confident enough, order the Triggers into a list as you may do in an examination situation.

5 Now read through all your sentences and think about ways in which you could develop these using your Trigger quotes, further examples, and noting strengths and weaknesses.

4 'Double-click' each Trigger in your memory – what can you say about an evaluative point of view in a clear sentence? Write this down. Do this for each Trigger in turn.

TIP

When you use a Trigger Quote in an exam response, make sure that you include an explanation on how it is relevant to the question.

B ZIP

The validity of non-cognitive approaches to religious language

non-cognitive doesn't work, founders, confused	**compromise, overall perspective, data**	**non-cognitive works, communicate meaningfully, ignores**

1 Fix the zip file! There are three Triggers missing from this zip file – find them and add them in.

2 There's another problem: the Triggers are out of order! Put them in the same order as they appear in the AO2 section above.

3 Practise 'downloading' your zip file of Triggers from memory. See how many you can recall on first attempt.

6 Now read through all your sentences and think about ways in which you could develop these using your Trigger quotes, further examples, and noting strengths and weaknesses.

5 Attempt to write one clear sentence to define each Trigger.

4 When you are confident enough, order the Triggers into a list as you may do in an examination situation.