A level Religious Studies

Philosophy of Religion Eduqas A level Knowledge Organiser:
Theme 4C – Religious Language – Religious language as non-cognitive and analogical:
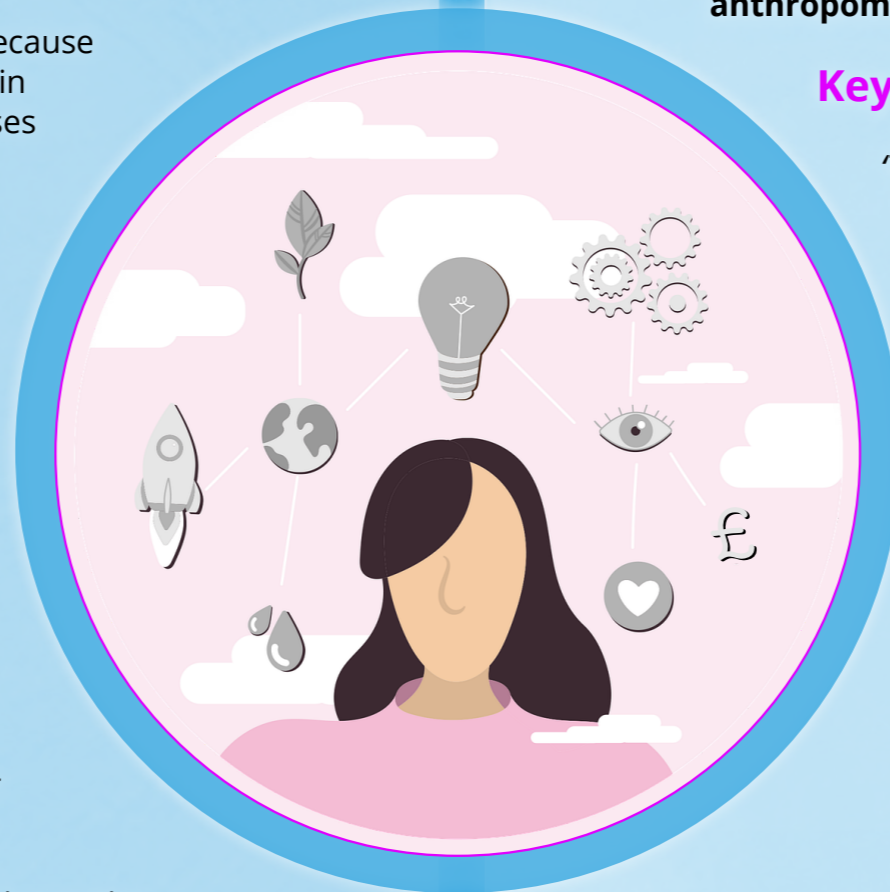
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Key concepts

- Aquinas recognised three ways that language can be used:
  - **univocal** – language with one meaning e.g. 'humans consist of flesh and bones.' The words 'flesh' and 'bones' always mean the same thing (unsuitable for religious language since God is different from the world).
  - **equivocal** – language with many meanings e.g. 'I am cold' could be understood to mean temperature or demeanour (unsuitable for religious language since we could never know what was being said of God).
  - **analogical** – language based on worldly experience, but compared to God, e.g. 'God is good' is meaningful, because goodness in the world is caused by God. All religious language is analogical.
- There are two ways to understand analogy according to Aquinas:
  - **analogy of attribution:** worldly things are compared with God because He is their **efficient cause,** e.g. 'God is good'. We know goodness in the world as God caused it. Food is described as healthy as it causes health in a person.
  - **analogy of proportion:** worldly things are compared with God, but must be understood according to scale e.g. God's goodness is in proportion with His greatness, whilst our goodness is lesser in proportion with us.
- Logical positivists view analogical language as non-cognitive since it makes no claims that can be known to be objectively true.
- Aquinas would have argued that analogical language is cognitive since it states propositions about God that are accurate if not comprehensive.

- Ian Ramsey claimed religious language allows **disclosure** of what has been **discerned** about God, resulting in commitment.
- He divided analogical language into two areas:
  - **models –** familiar qualities seen in the world that are compared with God, e.g. 'good' is a model. Alone, models are insufficient for speaking of God.
  - **qualifiers –** an adaption of the model, e.g. 'God is infinitely good', 'infinitely' is the qualifier that aids understanding of the model and provides disclosure.
- For example, Judge Justice Brown, dressed in impersonal robes, whilst presiding over a court, hears the defendant use his schoolboy name 'Sammy'. He recognises his old friend, and the context is changed and personal.
- Qualifiers bring understanding of the model. The light dawns, the penny drops, and deeper understanding and disclosure of God is gained.

Challenges:

- Analogy rests on the assumption that God exists and created us in his image which is not **verifiable** or **falsifiable**.
- We have no way of knowing that the analogy being used is a suitable one.
- God is too different from humanity to be able to make any comparison. We cannot know if the comparisons are reasonable or correct.

- There are too many ways in which analogies can be understood for an analogy to be considered to impart any truth.

Use of analogy:

- Analogy gives believers clear points of reference that allowing context in which to understand God.
- It allows for the possibility that we can know facts about God, but allows for limitations in human understanding.
- It allows religious language is not to be taken literally, e.g. God resting after creating, God walking in the garden of Eden.
- It gives believers the ability to interpret analogy so that God is not reduced to an **anthropomorphic personification**.

Key quotes

'There is a certain mode of likeness of things to God. It remains, then, that names are not said of God in a purely equivocal way.' (Aquinas)

'Let us always be cautious of talking about God in straighthood language. Let us never talk as if we had privileged access to the diaries of God's private life...so that we may say quite cheerfully why God did what, when, and where.' (Ramsey)

Key words

univocal	equivocal	analogical
analogy of attribution	efficient cause	analogy of proportion
disclosure	discerned	models
qualifiers	verifiable	falsifiable
anthropomorphic personification		

Issues for analysis and evaluation

Key arguments/debates
Analogical language is inadequate. It is based on assumptions about God's existence and nature.
Analogy allows statements about God not to be understood literally.
It is still difficult to agree on what religious language is supposed to be claiming.

Key questions
Is analogical language persuasive as an account of religious language?
To what extent does analogy make cognitive claims about God?
Is it reasonable to say that non-cognitive claims are meaningful?