

Key concepts

- Myths are considered by many to be the source of moral and spiritual truths about the meaning or purpose of human existence.
- They are **non-cognitive** because they do not convey any facts about the empirical world and cannot be subject to verification or falsification.
- Mythological language is not intended to be interpreted literally. Meaning is conveyed using complex pictures and symbols.
- It may be necessary to consider the authors **'sitz im leben'** (situation in life) to understand the ultimate concern of the author and interpret the myth.
- Myths speak about:
 - the meaning of human existence in a confusing or mysterious world
 - the significance or meaning of empirical events or recurring problems
 - the nature of God and the human relationship with Him
 - the ultimate destiny of humanity.

Supporting Evidence:

- Myths occur across religion and culture and contain common themes, e.g.

Creation myths – speaking of a time before historical records / human experience

- ex nihilo – signifies chaos, the unknown and the creative power of the divine
- water – represents mystery, life sustaining and destructive power
- land – represents order, stability, and control
- human life – represents purpose, uniqueness, and relationship to the divine.

Myths of good and evil – relate to human experience of the seasons e.g.

- good – represented by light, order, warmth, and food
- evil – represented by darkness, chaos, cold, and starvation.

Heroic myths – link to myths of good and evil and take a clear pattern. i.e.

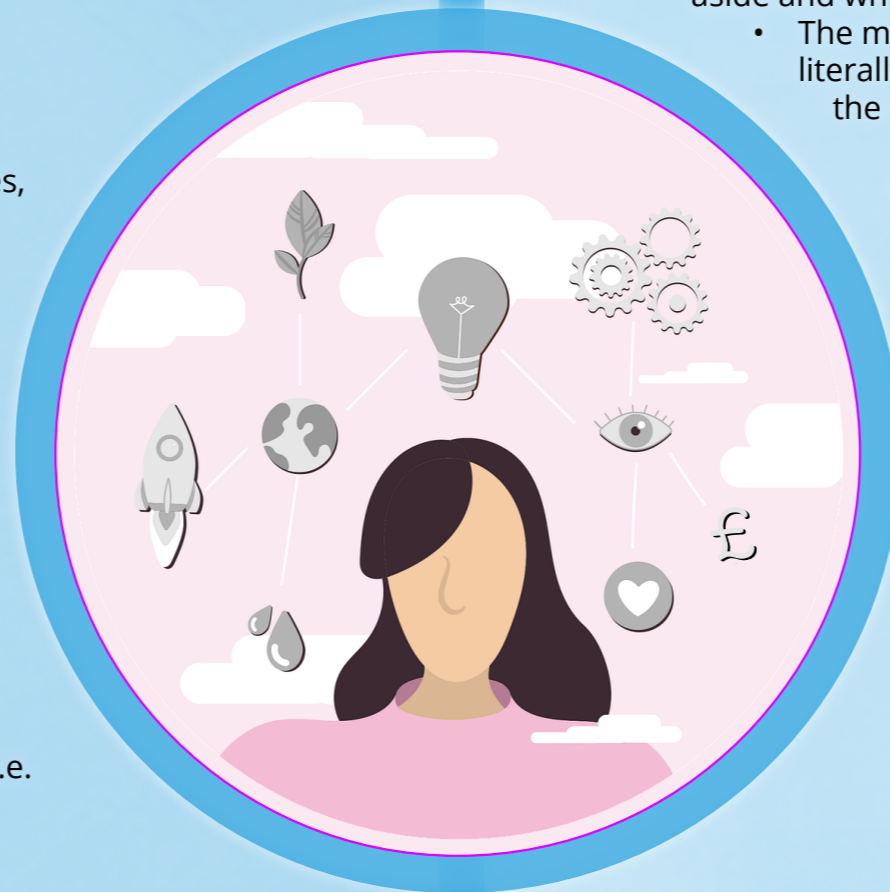
1. Characters suffer adversity
2. The hero takes a risk
3. There is triumph and resolution.

Many heroic myths have a link with the sun (**solar heroes**) where an agent of order is destroyed by agents of chaos yet resurrects in victory against enemies.

- Myths may stem from the **collective unconscious** and be **archetypal**.
- They are a response to fear of the unknown or of things outside our control.
- They are a response to fear of the unknown or of things outside our control.
- They do not challenge science but bring spiritual or emotional insight to help us understand our place in the universe.
- Myths should be understood not as true or false, but living or dead. A living myth may help bind communities together, shape human social or ethical behaviour or provide a sense of purpose in life.

Challenges:

- Myths from different cultures or faiths may offer contrasting ideas about the meaning of life. There is no way of knowing which is true or false e.g.
 - Genesis 1 – humans are created purposely through divine will
 - Japanese Ainu creation myth – humans evolved from a polar bear god.
- As a 'sitz im leben' changes, the meaning of myths change. It becomes unclear what the basis of faith is e.g. John 21:1-14 (the miraculous catch of fish) is it:
 - a) A call to Christians to evangelise?
 - b) A message of Jesus' humanity and understanding of the human struggle?
- The modern mind finds mythological stories a barrier to faith. Bultmann was concerned with **demythologising** scripture to find the true message, but it is unclear which parts are to be set aside and which should remain.
 - The meaning of a myth may conflict with science, even if it is not understood literally, e.g. creation myths may convey God's creative power, but conflict with the idea that life came about through chance and adaption.



Key quotes

'In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep.' (Genesis 1:1)

'If one studies the common themes in the different mythologies of the world, one can find the basic rhythms by which all human beings live.' (Momen)

Key words

non-cognitive	sitz im leben	creation myths	myths of good and evil
heroic myths	solar heroes	collective unconscious	archetypal
demythologising			

Issues for analysis and evaluation

Key arguments/debates

Some argue that mythological language is no longer needed in the 21st century now that we have a better understanding of science and the natural world.

Others, like Jung, would argue that myth is essential for good mental health as it enables us to individuate successfully and make sense of a confusing world.

Some point out that it is difficult to clearly know what 'truth' a myth could be trying to convey, and they are easy to misinterpret.

Key questions

Does it matter if we all interpret myths in different ways?

Do myths communicate anything important that scientific language cannot?

Is myth an adequate account of religious language for believers?