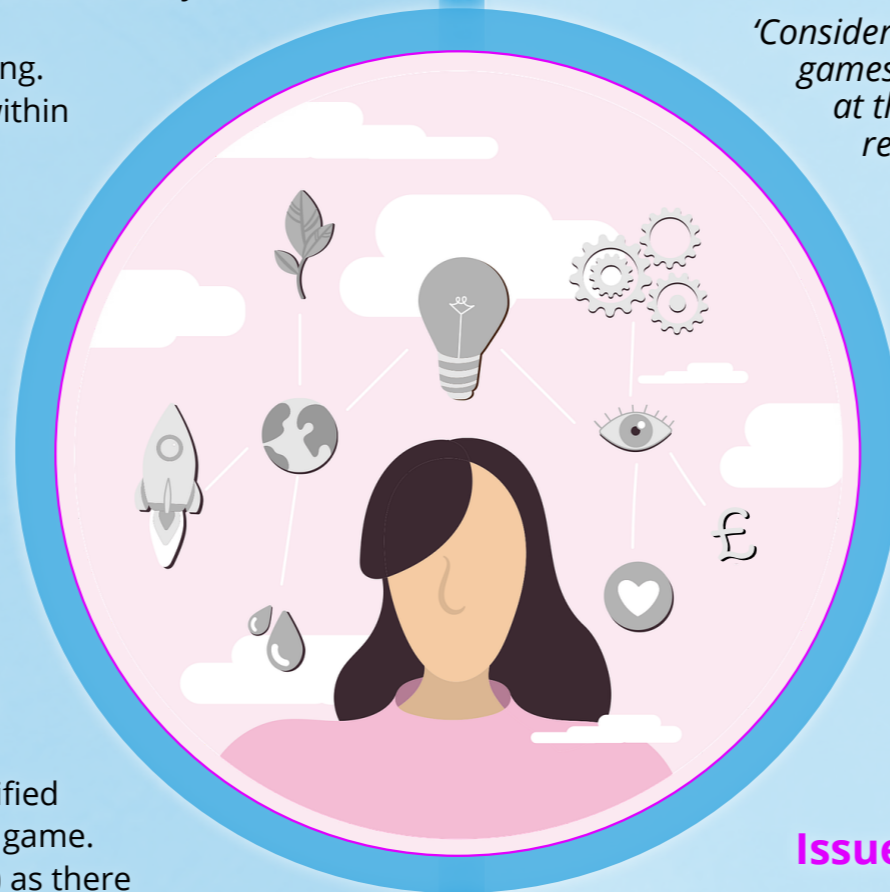


Key concepts

- Ludwig Wittgenstein's early work had argued that the purpose of language was to **picture the world**. Words represented objects that could be found.
- However, he became disillusioned with this idea as too narrow, meaning that any language that cannot be verified or falsified is meaningless.
- Wittgenstein's later work proposed that the meaning of a word can be found in its **function** in the language.
- Language can be used for a variety of different purposes including to thank, curse, greet, command, joke and exclaim. None of these purposes can be verified, yet all are meaningful if we understand their function.
- Like a full toolbox, the function of words is as varied as the function of tools. They all do different things.
- We must **'look and see'** how a word is used to understand its meaning.
- Each function of language is a different **language game** or activity within a **form of life**.
- Forms of life are **contingent** upon culture and context.
- 'Builders language' is a primitive game of labelling items such as 'pillars', 'risers', or 'beams; that builder A calls for and builder B brings out. The meaning of these words is specific to the form of life of a builder.
- All humans are **immersed** in different forms of life. When immersed in a form of life, you will understand its rules, and the language will be meaningful.
- A painting is a patchwork of colour on canvas, the arrangement of colours and shapes and image gives them meaning; the same is true of sounds. They mean something because we have learned to understand their use in context.
- Language games are a group activity, the rules must be learned and understood by others.
- Some language games may be **non-cognitive** so they cannot be verified or falsified. They still have meaning provided there are others in the game.
- Language games show a **'familienahnlichkeit'** (family resemblance) as there are features that they have in common and an overlapping relationship, but they are not identical.
- Just as a chess game cannot be challenged with the rules of tennis, it is not legitimate to challenge the rules of religious language with the language of science or logical positivism.
- Religious language is meaningful according to the **coherence theory** of truth. This is an **anti-realist** position. It is meaningful because it fits with religious people's understanding of the world and helps them make sense of it.



- Wittgenstein argues that you must be part of the game to understand the language. This means that no one can ever communicate with someone outside of their game. This would make religious philosophy and evangelism impossible.
- This theory makes it impossible to come to an accurate understand about what God means because no claim needs to be factually correct to be meaningful.

Key quotes

'The speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life.' (Wittgenstein)

'Consider... the proceedings that we call 'games'. I mean board games, card-games, Olympic games and so on. What is common to them all? ...If you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships and a whole series of them at that.' (Wittgenstein)

Key words

picture the world	function	look and see	language game
form of life	contingent	immersed	non-cognitive
familienahnlichkeit	coherence theory	anti-realist	cognitive

Issues for analysis and evaluation

Key arguments/debates

Some suggest that language games make it impossible for people to ever challenge or reject the claims of a religious person or community.

Others point out that any God-talk is rich, emotional and experiential so language game theory allows more to be expressed than simple cognitive claims.

However, potentially language games trivialises religious language by making any claim at all meaningful if communicated between two or more people.

Key questions

- Is religious language just like a complicated game?
- Does language game theory allow any philosophical debate to take place?
- Can an atheist understand a religious language game?

Challenges:

- No one can ever make a **cognitive** claim about God within this theory as it can never be checked. Most religious people would argue that they are making cognitive claims e.g. God exists or God is good.