

Aj ayer essay

[Religion](#), [God](#)



AJ Ayer Essay Paragraph E For we are often told that the nature of God is a mystery which transcends human understanding..... then he must also admit that he is bound to talk nonsense when he describes it

A) Clarify the argument and/or interpretation of the passage (30marks) B) Do you agree with the ideas expressed? Justify your point of view and discuss the implications for understanding religion and human experience (20marks)

AJ Ayer was a member of the Vienna Circle, a group of logical positivist philosophers who were influenced by the writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein. They developed a theory based on the Verification Principles. Anthony Flew claimed that religious statements are meaningless because there is nothing that can count against them, using the Falsification Principle he maintained that the claim 'there is a God' is meaningless because religious people making this claim will not accept any kind of evidence that could count against this. He uses the analogy of a gardener to affirm that believers are often so convinced of their 'truth' that they refuse consider any evidence that God doesn't exist. Which is why it is said that religious language 'dies a death of a thousand qualifications'. Ayer claims in his work that there is general understanding amongst philosophers that the existence of a transcendent being who we attribute as 'God' can not be proven or that there is even any way to prove his existence to be probable. To state the regularity in world points to a God is, according to Ayer, the same as saying that there is requisite regularity in the world. A religious person would argue that God is a transcendent being who makes himself known through certain empirical manifestations. This implies the God is a metaphysical term and since metaphysical term is neither true nor false, the sentence has no literal

significance. The majority of Ayers argument is that inevitably, talk of God is meaningless. This is supported by the passage as it focuses on ' what is unintelligible'. The paragraph, in a basic form is that, theists often cant and don't believe that they can describe God, which suggests that the concept of God is meaningless. ' God' transcends nature and is mysterious to us humans. But according to Ayer, transcending human understanding amounts to being unintelligible as no description can meaningfully be given. Some may argue that God can be known through faith without a necessary reason. This means that we cannot fully define God or even fully understand the idea of him, which Ayer says many theists may agree with. Ayer states that if the mystic cannot communicate their experience, then ' he is bound to talk nonsense'. However just because something is not understood doesn't mean that is nonsensical, for example just because a child, or even an adult, doesn't understand a complex mathematical or scientific theory, doesn't mean that it loses all meaning, therefore becoming meaningless. It just means that not all humans are inclined to understand said matters. The theory of language games that was proposed by Ludwig Wittgenstein can counter argue Ayers claims that all religious talk is meaningless. The rules of Wittgenstein game state that one community, so for instance Ayer would be in a scientific community, cannot judge the significance of the religious community because ' one form of life cannot judge another'. Players who aren't involved in the same game/ community don't fully understand other communities. So to Ayer, the talk about God means nothing to him therefore he disregards it as completely meaningless for everyone, but for those who are involved in the religious games and communities, it has a lot of

significance. The situation is the same when reversed. For instance a believer in the Christian faith may see a glass of red wine as a symbol of Christ's Blood where as the scientific communities would just see is as just a glass of wine. Ayer, in this passage, refers to God as an ' object of purely mystical intuition', as a way of knowing his existence. But the feeling of mystical intuition is often subjective to the individual. A person who asserts that God does exist often can't describe why, they just know he does, the feeling is other worldly. Ayer doesn't deem this feeling of intuition to be ' intelligible' and therefore dismisses it as means of gaining knowledge as it is not empirically verifiable. This is a similar approach to how Donovan may conclude Mystical Intuition. He says that it is never a sufficient to claim to just know something. Donovan says that ' if you really experience God you don't have to argue you know he is real'. Donovan doesn't completely reject mystical experience as Ayer does but he says that it is slightly pointless to try to argue that you have experience God as many people won't listen, and in your heart you know you're right, so why bother? But he does not regard it as meaningless. Bertrand Russell uses an example regarding love. We can love someone who claims to completely know you and who we think we truly know, yet they could still surprise you, despite your absolute certainty of truly knowing them. If a mystic is unable to fully describe their experience, then Ayer deems that they are talking nonsense as it is not available for testing. He also claims that religious intuition has no credibility due to this. In this passage Ayer refers to how we trust God, which is the concept of faith. Ayer maintains that it isn't right to rely on faith and trust because as concepts, they are just as meaningless as religious statements. Ayer thinks

that the idea of Gods existence is an object of faith rather than an idea down to reason; it is simply an excuse to avoid the fact that his existence is not able to be empirically verified. To Ayer, ' faith' ' trust in god' and ' mystical intuition' are all nonsensical as non can be tested or explained with any intelligible meaning. Ultimately in this passage Ayer shows how any statements with any kind of religious attribute are utterly nonsense because they unable to be empirically verified. He maintains that a theist may agree with him, in the sense that they are not fully able to understand or explain what God is. Ayer expresses that mystical intuition, like religious language and the concepts of faith and trust in God are meaningless. Ayer even goes as far to say that calling yourself an Atheist is nonsensical and meaningless, because it is attributing to God, which means there is no longer meaning in their sentence. Ayer shows how if a sentence has the word ' God' in it, it automatically becomes meaningless and there is no point discussing him as there is no way to prove his existence. B- I disagree with Ayer as I feel that religious language and experiences can, and do, have meaning. Ayer fails to use any references to any other scholars to back up his points. This implicates his argument because it doesn't allow for any real, further arguments on the matter. Ayer claims that any talk of religion and their claims are meaningless. This has impactions for both religion and human experience. There are six major world religions which are followed by billions of people. These people have trust and faith in their God and their place of worship. To Ayer, this is meaningless and has no ' intelligent' value, but to these billions of people, it does. Many people live their lives strictly by what their religion teaches, so it could be considered that Ayer may view their

lifestyle to be meaningless, which some may see as degrading. Also, Ayer's views may cause some conflicts for theists because it may give them doubts in their faith if they have never had any form of empirically verifiable situations, such as a religious experience. Peter Donovan however would say that a religious believer bases their faith on human intuition and subjectively decided whether they want to continue with their beliefs. A modern philosopher who would agree with Ayer is Richard Dawkins who describes religion as a 'virus'. Dawkins passionately hates religion to the extent that he thinks that it has no place in our rational, scientific modern society. However, calling religion a virus shows just how strong a force it is. It demonstrates just how much meaning there is in religion, even to the extent that some people are willing to die for their faith and deity. So even if religious claims are meaningless to Ayer, does not mean that they are meaningless to others. In fact some religious claims have so much significance to some people that they have changed their lives on their basis. The case study of Nicky Cruz demonstrates this. He was a gang leader in New York who had a Mystical Experience and had first hand experience of the significance of religious statements that he became a dedicated Christian preacher. So for Ayer to say that religious statements have no meaning could offend many believers and be degrading, therefore causing human implications. Ludwig Wittgenstein's language game theory shows how it is unfair for Ayer to make these claims. Ayer belongs to a scientific community, so therefore he possesses knowledge regarding scientific concepts and theories. He is not however part of the religious community who possess knowledge regarding faith and intuition, God and religion. Ayer therefore

does not have the same understanding as believers do on the concepts of religion. Just like many believers don't possess the same scientific knowledge that Ayer has. They contrast on matter such as the creation of the universe; some believers take a creationism approach whereas scientists like Ayer apply Dawkins theory of evolution to the origins of the universe. So for Ayer to say that religious claims are nonsensical is incoherent. Just because religion doesn't have scientific or even rational significance does not mean that it is unintelligible, just that it is not relevant to the scientific community. Ayer claims that all religious language is unintelligible, but is it possible to use our limited language to talk of a perfect transcendent being? St Thomas Aquinas addressed this by saying that the only language we can use to speak of God effectively is analogical language, by collecting information through other statements in order to avoid anthropomorphism. Therefore, if the religious language we use is separate to other forms of language, then it cannot be judged in the same sense, therefore it cannot be labelled as meaningless, unintelligible or nonsensical. The concepts of faith and intuition play a major role in religion. Faith is an extremely powerful tool and without it, there would be no religion. Ayer dismisses faith as it isn't a form of empirical truth/evidence. But faith was never intended to be empirical. Ayer claims it is meaningless for everyone, but is not. Despite not being empirically definable, many find religious language to be meaningful. Although Donavon and Ayer may be right in saying that 'to just know' something through intuition isn't a valuable form of evidence, doesn't mean that intuition is meaningless. Intuition and mystical experience are really only valuable and meaningful to the individual. So for Ayer to claim that

religious statements/intuition are void of any meaning could have impacts on those individuals, causing implications for human experience. For Ayer to say that religion has no meaning voids any contemplation of the afterlife and effectively declares life to be meaningless as there is no ultimate purpose. This could have social implications as people might see not point in living morally as there is nothing to strive towards to be a better person. Ayer stresses the importance of science and how he feels that humans should follow the laws of science. But science is always changing. So therefore if we were to accept these current rules and laws of science as fact and dismiss religion, as Ayer wishes we would, this could have implications for both religion and humans. Religion, unlike science is pretty consistent in its beliefs and so if we were to dismiss it and religiously follow science, which turned out to be false, we would have abandoned religion for no reason. I don't agree with Ayer's view because I do feel that religious statements do hold meaning. Ayer may be correct in saying that religious claims hold no meaning to him, but they do to numerous amounts of other people. Religious claims hold meaning to me.