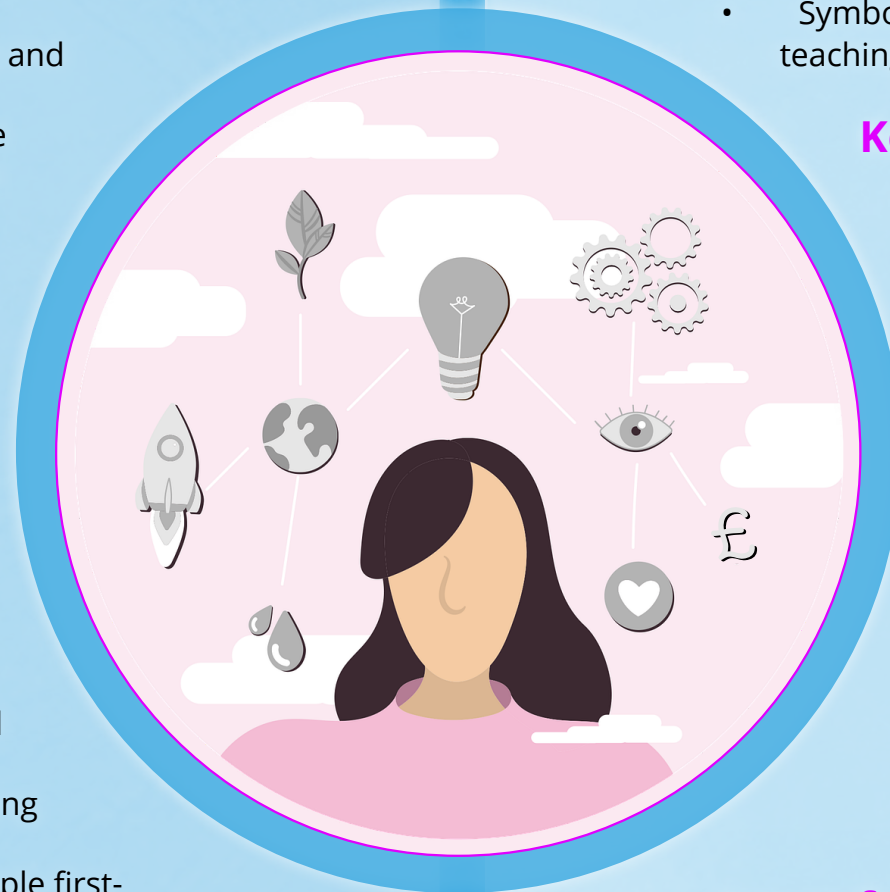


Key concepts

- John Randall saw religious language as **non-cognitive** symbols that represent themselves and provoke a unique, emotional response in the user or hearer.
- Language has different **functions** so should be treated differently:
 - scientific language has the function of describing facts about the world
 - religious language has the function of representing mythological, religious belief that gives insight into the meaning and purpose of life and experience.
- Randall held an **anti-realist / coherence theory** of truth – the truth of a proposition is in relation to its consistency with other held beliefs.
- Therefore, religious symbols do not need to be verifiable to be meaningful.
- There are four functions of symbols:
 - **motivation** – to arouse emotion, stirring people to act
 - **social** – bringing communities together, providing shared identity and values
 - **communication** – expressing emotional aspects of an experience
 - **clarification and disclosure** – reveal insight and clarification into the divine.
- Paul Tillich argued that humans are interested in more than just physical concerns like food and shelter. They also have spiritual concerns.
- The concerns of humanity lead to their **ultimate concern** (God, the sacred, for which all else is sacrificed) that can only be expressed symbolically.
- Logical positivism treats all words as signs. Symbols are not signs; they are bound to what they signify and elicit an emotional and behavioural response.
- Tillich identified six characteristics of symbols:
 - They *point beyond themselves*, eliciting emotional engagement and becoming inextricably linked with the thing to which it points.
 - They *participate in that to which they point*, being part of the meaning but not replacing it.
 - They *open up levels of reality* that are otherwise hidden, giving people first-hand experience of the subject of their faith.
 - They *unlock dimensions of our soul* that correspond to these levels of reality, providing inspiration and deeper, emotional engagement and understanding.
 - They *cannot be manufactured* arbitrarily, they emanate from the **collective unconscious** and meet the needs and concerns of the group
 - They can *grow and die* if they cease to function effectively to meet the needs of society. New symbols arise out of a changed relationship with the holy.



- They allow nothing literal to be said about God, so nothing can be known about him.
- The meaning of symbols is subjective and transient so it is impossible to know if they have been understood correctly and no insight can be gained.

Use of symbols:

- Symbols demonstrate the rich variety of uses of language instead of limiting and reducing it.
- Symbols give a criterion of meaning to religious language so that the purpose or use of it can be understood.
- They reflect that complexity and depth of human experience in a similar, but more spiritual way to art, poetry, and music.
 - Symbolic language gives guidance regarding how to interpret scripture and teachings to uncover humanity's ultimate concern.

Key quotes

“The cultural functions of religion and of science are so different that it is difficult to see how... they can seriously compete. Both functions are clearly indispensable.” (Randall)

‘Man’s ultimate concern must be expressed symbolically, because symbolic language alone is able to express the ultimate. (Tillich)

Key words

non-cognitive	functions	coherence theory	antirealism
motivation	social	communication	clarification
disclosure	ultimate concern	collective unconscious	

Issues for analysis and evaluation

Key arguments/debates

Some suggest that religious language is not just about making factual, ‘truth’ claims, but has numerous functions that verification and falsification neglect.

Other argue that religious believers do try to make cognitive claims about God and so must be subject to the same scrutiny as any other language.

Key questions

Does religious language mean anything?

Does logical positivism offer a persuasive criterion for meaningful language?

Do religious believers really allow nothing to count against their claims?

Challenges:

- Tillich uses religious language to explain religious language which does not help to clarify meaning.
- Symbols cannot be verified or falsified, so there is no way to know if symbols are appropriate or adequate.