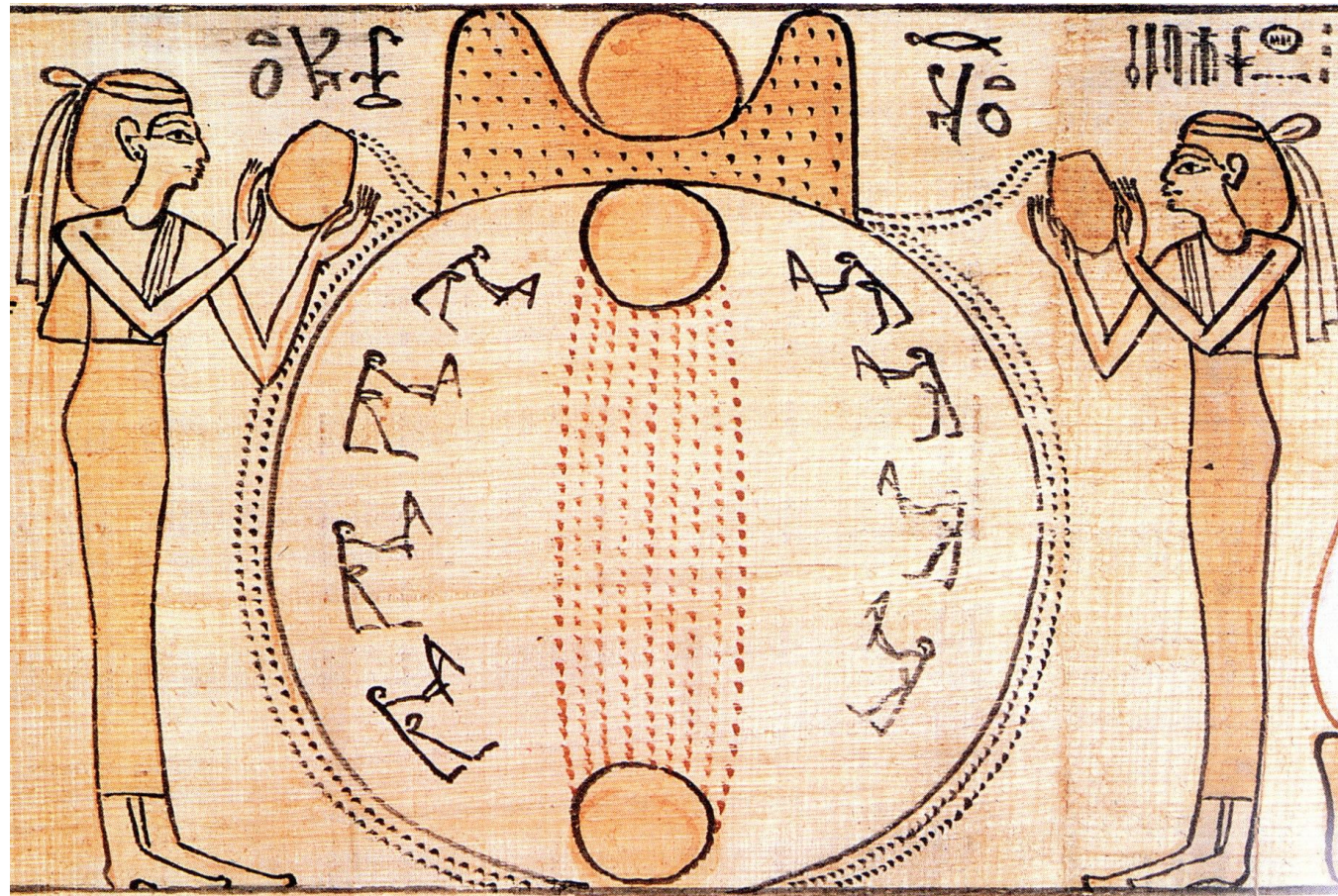# Theme 4 Letter E: Religious Language as Non-Cognitive and Mythical

# Spec Check

| AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding | AO2 – Analysis and Evaluation |
|---|---|
| **E: Religious language as non-cognitive and mythical:** <br> • Complex form of mythical language that communicates values and insights into purpose of existence. <br> • Supportive evidence – different forms of myths to convey meaning: creation myths; myths of good against evil; heroic myths. Myths help to overcome fears of the unknown; myths effective way of transmitting religious, social and ethical values. <br><br> • Challenges: problem of competing myths; meanings of myths change over time as they reflect the values of society as societal constructs; demythologisation of myths results in varying interpretations, myths often incompatible with scientific understanding of the world. | • The effectiveness of the terms non-cognitive, analogical and mythical as solutions to the problems of religious language |

# Re-Cap of Symbol

- 1. Define non-cognitive
- 2. Give me a summary of Randall's views on Symbol
- 3. Give me a summary of Tillich's views on Symbol
- 4. How are Randall and Tillich distinct from each other on their views about symbolic language?
- 5. Do you think that religious language can be meaningful if it is all seen as symbolic?

Quick Recap

# Mythical Language

- What do you think a myth is?
- What examples of myths can you think of?

- **Myth** in a religious context = Accounts which **contain truths** which are **communicated** in the form of picture imagery and **symbolic text**. They are not 'falsehoods' or 'fairytales' and can not be deconstructed on empirical grounds

- Ninian Smart defines a myth as "**a moving picture of the sacred**."

- Egyptian Creation Myth
- Christian Creation Myth

- Do you think that these myths have any meaning when people recite them?

# Complex form of Mythical Language

- Many people in the contemporary west will not think that the creation myths have any meaning, because they are empirically preposterous

- 20th Century German Theologian **Herman Gunkell** suggested that religious myths **have to be understood in context of the author's 'Sitz im Leben'** (Situation in Life)

- We must read myths through the author's **Sitz im Leben** and not our own

- This means that myths need to be **carefully interpreted**. They can teach us about society and cultures of the time

- Myths are **metaphorical, symbolic and analogical** where the meanings are 'hidden' behind the text. This also makes them **non-cognitive**

- Myths hold deep and lasting truths. They explore what it means to be human and what our relationship is with the powers that created us

# Complex for of Mythical Language

- Scholars such as **Gunkell and Tillich** argue that **Myth within a religion is integral**

- Many aspects of religion (creation / governance / judgement) can't be proven or related to in empirical terms – to do so would undermine and devalue the religious truths

- Therefore, **meaningful discussion regarding myth** needs to take into account the highly specific way in which myths employ language to **reveal truths about the world**

# Supportive Evidence – Creation Myths

- Creation myths **reveal information** about the world and the role of human beings in it. **Philip Freund** noticed that most creation myths have similar elements to them

- **TASK:** Read the creation myths of Christianity, Egypt and Japan and complete this table

| Creation Myth | Portrayal of water/oceans (Fear of the unknown) | Portrayal of a Deity (Religious values) | The primacy of humans (Societal values) | Man's relationship with the world (Ethical Values) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Judeao-Christian** | | | | |
| **Egyptian** | | | | |
| **Japanese** | | | | |

# Supportive Evidence – Heroic Myths and Myths of Good against Evil

- **Secular heroes** are often found in comics and films. As **G. Morrison** states *'Superman possess the qualities of the very best we can imagine…in that sense he's Divine. Batman is representative of our dark subconscious, who nevertheless works for the good of humanity'*

- In religion, **heroes play a prominent role in myths**. They often relate to themes of good triumphing evil, light vs dark, fertility and resurrection

- The role of heroes can be related to **Jung's archetypes**, or, as **Mojeen Moomen** puts it; in myths the reader can *'find the basic rhythms by which all human beings live'*

- **TASK:** Watch this Hindu Story about the hero named 'Rama' who killed Ravana. Make notes as you go about any references to good / evil / fertility / powers / resurrection / fighting

# Challenges to Mythical Language

- There are 4 main challenges against seeing religious language as a myth

- **1. The problem of competing myths**

- **2. The meaning of myth changes over time**

- **3. Demythologisation can result in misinterpretations**

- **4. Myths are incompatible with a scientific world**

- **TASK:** Read pages 140-141 of your EDUQAS textbook and make brief notes under each of these headings. You can use your own knowledge to help you. Can you find any another challenges in the text?

# Other Challenges to Mythical Language

- Many religious people do not think that their stories about creation / good and evil / resurrection are myth – **they think they are fact**

- Other philosophers such as **Bultmann** and **Hick** argued that, in order to find out the truth about God, religious scriptures should be **demythologised**

It is impossible to use electric light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries and, at the same time, to believe in the New Testament world of demons or spirits.
(Rudolf Bultmann)

# AO1 Consolidation

- Complete lean learning sheet 'E' in your workbooks

- Speak out the following bullet points with your partner:
- **Definition of myth**
- **Myth as non-cognitive**
- **Function of myth**
- **Genesis 1**
- **Egyptian creation myths**
- **Rama kills Ravana**
- **Bultmann on myth**
- **Myth in an empirical world**

# AO2 – The effectiveness of the terms non-cognitive and mythical as solutions to the problem of religious language

| ARE EFFECTIVE | AREN'T EFFECTIVE |
|---|---|
| * Words used by religious people to refer to their everyday practices are meaningful to them and their devotion | * Myth isn't useful for non-religious people. The stories and words appear abstract and confusing. There is no physical tangible object which they can relate the information to |
| * Not all language is cognitive. Even outside of religion non-cognitive language is expected to express meaning i.e. language about love | * Myth can't be empirically verified and does not meet the requirements of the logical positivists |
| * Myths can help express emotions, attitudes and feelings. Cognitive language isn't capable of expressing such feelings with any real depth | * Regarding some religious stories as 'non-cognitivie' and 'mythical' undermines some religious believers beliefs. They may believe that the stories are factually true |
| * Myths have a positive impact on human behaviour and award value to the reader | * Myths can be demythologised which results in their true meanings becoming unclear |

# AO2 Skills – Paragraph Practise

- **<u>'Non-Cognitive and mythical language is an effective response to the problems of religious language'. Discuss this view (30)'</u>**

- **<u>TASK:</u>** Individually spend construct a paragraph which covers one point for and one point against the question. Think about your sentence starters for evaluative language (see handout).

- **<u>TASK:</u>** Use the level descriptors to gauge what level your paragraph is

- **<u>TASK:</u>** Read the 3 exemplar paragraphs in front of you and grade them

- **<u>TASK:</u>** Add to your paragraph what is missing from the top grade exemplar paragraph

# AO2 Skills – Paragraph Practise

- Myth **does work** for religious people because as a solution because it is meaningful to them. **Even though** other people might think that the language is non-scientific and not true, this doesn't matter because to them it is true and this means that it has meaning.

- Myth **isn't good** because it is too confusing. There is nothing that you can relate what is in the story to in real life. **This is a strong point** because it makes logical sense that there is nothing that we can compare it to in real life.

- Content is accurate for the question
- There is no consistent line of argument
- The language is not academic enough – there is no evidence that the student has a wide vocabulary
- The language sounds as if it is spoken and colloquial
- There is no use of clear semantic starters

# AO2 Skills – Paragraph Practise

- **Some would argue that** myth as a non-cognitive form of language is effective because they accept that the stories still have meaning for the individual, even if these can't be proven in the real world. **Whilst** many at first glance may think that myths seem preposterous in a scientific sense, they still can teach religious people about some of the key truths in life that we can't deduce from science. **Having said this**, it could be argued that myth only works for people who are in a religion already. They don't work for people who aren't religious because they are too un-scientific. **Therefore**, even though myths may be effective for religious people, they aren't effective for everyone.

- Good use of semantic starters to show the examiner your line of argument
- It isn't explained in any kind of depth – it is quite basic
- There is no reference to scholars or examples

# AO2 Skills – Paragraph Practise

**In some ways**, myth is an effective form of language essentially because it is non-cognitive. **As Randall and other proponents of non-cognitive language accept**, there are different realms of knowledge; truths of the natural sciences and truths of the natural theologians. **In this sense**, myth is an effective way of teaching humans about the questions that can't be answered through empirical testing. **Understandably**, many may view elements of the Egyptian creation story as preposterous, particularly the idea of the God Atum coughing up and vomiting out his son (Shu) and daughter (Tefnut) respectively and them creating order in a chaotic world. **However**, if the stories are analysed in light of their 'Sitz im Leben' (situation in life) then arguable there are key messages that these myths can teach humans about the unknown such as why is there order not chaos and what should our relationship with the world be. **This argument still wouldn't suffice for empiricists** who will still refuse to find meaning in narratives which aren't scientific. For logical positivists such as Ayer, the language can't be related to anything synthetic or tangible in the real world and must remain meaningless because of this. For Ayer, the myth is nonsense, confusing and meaningless. **However,** it could still be retorted that it is Ayer who needs to appreciate that not all meaningful language must be empirical, **moreover** the language of religion *can't* be empirical because it asks us to engage with a world that we can't as humans ever understand. **In this sense**, myth can be meaningful if it is interpreted carefully.

- A clear line of argument throughout where semantic starters hep make this clear
- Constant reference to scholars to ground the answer in academic thought
- Good and unique use of examples