Question 1. How do religious thinkers respond to the challenges raised by verification and falsification principles with regard to religious language? Explain.

Ans: Religious thinkers and philosophers tried to defend their position against verification and falsification principles. It is not that verifiability principle is an error proof principle. Though, I do not want to go to the intricacies of the argument, it is suffice to say that Ayer’s verification principle faced serious objections. One rudimentary refutation is that the statement of the principle of verification itself cannot be verified according to the principle of verification. Moreover, Ayer’s position with respect to genuine factual proposition, that is, the principle of verification for a statement, which was articulated in both his first and more sophisticated version in the second edition of his book Language, Truth and Logic has been questioned and rejected.

With the rejection of the verification principle, how can one understand the religious language? The rejection of verification principle also suggests that one need not take religious utterances as purely meaningless. The meaningfulness of religious language is only on the basis of verification principle and if the verification principle itself is refuted, then it indirectly suggests at least the possibility of religious utterances being meaningful.

So, how can the religious utterances be meaningful? There are different strands of thought in relation to the aspect of finding the meaningfulness of religious language as against the verification and falsification criteria. Paul Tillich (1886-1965), understands the meaning of religious language with a difference he made between signs and symbols. Let us take the case of a bottle written on top that it contains ‘sugar’. This is a sign for Tillich because it merely signifies what is contained in the bottle. The meaning of the sign is derived from what is contained in the bottle, whereas, a symbol, like ‘Aum’ or ‘Cross’ do not only signify the divinity, but also participates in it.

Remember Ludwig Wittgenstein, who made a significant contribution to Logical Positivists thought. The same philosopher, in his later phase had come up with another work Philosophical Investigations, which takes a different turn with respect to the nature of language and functions. While, Wittgenstein in his earlier stage maintained that language has sole function to perform that of picturing the reality and those language utterances which cannot perform such function is relegated as meaningless and non-sensical.

R.D. Braithwaite (1900-1990) believed that religious statements are moral in content and can therefore be verified as they can result in change of behaviour. While Wittgenstein gave the room for understanding religious utterances from a different standpoint away from the Logical Positivist traditions, by making the meaningfulness of the language on the basis of its use, Braithwaite extended this argument further by maintaining that the use of religious language lies in its moral content. In the similar vein to Wittgenstein, Braithwaite argued that religious assertions are based upon a commitment to live life in a particular way.

Similarly, for Flew’s falsification principle as well, there are a good number of responses from the theological and philosophical community. One of the answers to the problem of Flew’s falsification problem was given by R M Hare (1919 – 2002) an English moral philosopher. Hare suggested that instead of looking at religious statements to be capable of falsified or not, we have to see them as the point of reference from where the explanations, verifiability, falsifiability makes sense.

B G Mitchell (1917) was trying to respond to Flew’s position from a slightly different angle. He comes up with the parable of stranger and tries to show that religious utterances do have cognitive meaning, but the truthfulness or falsity will be known only at the end. John Hick (1922) also tries to make a similar position when he says that all the matters of faith will be verified at the end of time. His theory thus suggests that religious statements are verifiable, but not in the present situation, but at the end of time, those beliefs can be verified. His theory is called as Eschatological Verification. John Hick in his work Faith and Knowledge uses the allegory of the Quest for Celestial City. Thus, one can see a growth of literature in the philosophical reflection of religious language as possible answers and solutions keep sprouting from very many sources regarding the meaningfulness nature of religious language. In the attempt to defend and support the meaningfulness of religious language against the strict scientific criteria of verifiability and falsifiability, thinkers come out with novel and fresh way of looking at the whole issue. The way Wittgenstein showed with respect to the use of religious language takes us beyond the narrow confinements of issues related merely to the cogitability of religious utterances. It in fact, leads to further discussions above and beyond the cogitability of religious assertions that include understanding the multiple uses of religious utterances. The discourse pertaining to religious language thus gets enriched by these different contributors and one can take the finer aspect of philosophical speculations and sophisticated arguments in their works that shall generate a great amount of interest for any student of philosophy.

Question 2. Discuss various types of theism based on the philosophical concepts about God.

Ans:

Types of theism

Monotheism

Monotheism (from Greek μονός) is the belief in theology that only one deity exists. Some modern day monotheistic religions include Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Baha’i Faith, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, Eckankar and some forms of Hinduism. There have been many proofs of Monotheism postulated by a multitude of philosophers and academics throughout history. However, many of these proofs are either unknown or have been misinterpreted.

Polytheism