Chapter Summaries: *Language and Theology* by Clark, Chapter 1

In chapter 1, Clark reviews the scope and importance of this book and this section on secular philosophies of language. Many religious writers, he states, deny the adequacy of language to express religious thoughts and propositions. Such religious theories are usually adaptations of secular theories that had previously disposed of all theology and metaphysics as utter nonsense. Therefore, to understand religious theories of language, one much know a little about secular theories.

Chapter Summaries: *Language and Theology* by Clark, Chapter 2

Chapter Two is a brief skeletal examination of the history of language study and philosophy. G.E. Moore is considered the initiator of language philosophy, and he influenced Bertrand Russell. They were initially followers of Hegel, but later turned away from Hegel and began to think about language. Following Russell was the Vienna Circle of logical positivism. These people were interested in the philosophy of science, and applied their interest to language. Rudolf Carnap and Herbert Feigl were loosely associated with this group. The Vienna Group dissolved with the rise in power of Hitler, and soon others began to take on the name of logical positivist, and the scope of that movement extended somewhat. A.J. Ayer and Gilbert Ryle were both associated with the larger movement of language philosophy and logical positivism. Some language philosophers, like Wilbur Marshall Urban, while not completely orthodox, did not easily dismiss language related to metaphysics.
Chapter Summaries: *Language and Theology* by Clark, Chapter 3

Chapter three is a very brief overview of the philosophy of Bertrand Russell. Clark finds it difficult to summarize Russell for several reasons, one being that his contributions are voluminous and very detailed, and secondly, he changed his opinions all too frequently. The third reason is that he often, even by his own admission, failed to say what he meant. I guess that is a weakness of the inadequacy of language!

Russell’s theme discussed in this review is that of the need for a new language. Russell finds ordinary language so confused and confusing that its effects on philosophy have been disastrous, and therefore a new language is necessary. He asserts the need for a new, artificial, and ideal language. Clark states that everyone recognizes that language and expression are beset with ambiguities and misunderstandings, and that this is an everyday occurrence, but it does not follow that every such instance is the key to some metaphysical blunder. Clark shows several difficulties with some of Russell’s statements and the laws of logic.

Later on in his discussion of Russell, Clark notes that Russell admits that ordinary language is indispensible, and that no artificial language can be constructed without it. Symbolic language, like math and algebra, is a useful technique, but this does not mean that ordinary language can be discarded. Clark notes that ordinary language not only is indispensible for the construction of symbolisms, but symbolisms can always be translated back into ordinary language. He shows this by the use of mathematical equations. Artificial languages have some utility, but ordinary language is necessary.
Chapter Summaries: *Language and Theology* by Clark, Chapter 4

Chapter 4 is an examination of Ludwig Wittgenstein. He was closely associated with the Vienna Circle, and held that the role of philosophy is precisely the clarification of language. Apparently it was from Wittgenstein that they adopted the tautological view of mathematics and logic. Wittgenstein’s writings seem to limit philosophy to the study of language, and also limit knowledge to the physical sciences. However, Wittgenstein has some metaphysical language in his writings, as Clark points out, including universal propositions that cannot be established by finite observations.

Clark discusses Wittgenstein’s dependence upon a theory of images, and this pictorial view is inherent in all empiricism. Important as this theme is in philosophy, there is nothing more important for religious theories of language and knowledge. The object of knowledge, in this theory, seems to be a representation and not the reality itself. This leads to all sorts of problems. Clark also shows that Wittgenstein’s use of induction proves the falsity of the empirical principle. Clark also shows how logical symbolism affects one’s views on ethics and theology. In this sense Wittgenstein is most inconsistent, and Wittgenstein states that it was impossible for there to be propositions on ethics; ethics cannot be put into words.
Chapter Summaries: *Language and Theology* by Clark, Chapter 5

Chapter 5 is a short chapter on Rudolf Carnap, one of the more closely allied philosophers to the Vienna Circle. Carnap believed that modern logic provided a devastating refutation of metaphysics because it gives positive results in science and shows negatively that metaphysics is not so much false, uncertain, or sterile, as meaningless. The reason that some words can be meaningless, in spite of the fact that all words have been introduced into a language for the purpose of expressing something, is that words change their meanings in the course of history. Carnap states that a word is significant only if the sentence is or may be reduced to a protocol sentence, the definition of word in which one is pointing to an object one can sense. This is the argument that logical positivists use to show that theology and metaphysics are meaningless. There can also be meaningless sentences. Therefore, grammatical syntax must be supplemented by logical syntax.

The basic flaw that renders all metaphysics nonsense is the notion that there is a kind of knowledge inaccessible to empirical science. Since on this view only positive science produces truth, the role of philosophy is that of logical analysis. It eliminates nonsense, and further analyzes and clarifies concepts. Logical positivism is an empirical philosophy. Truth can only be obtained through sensory verification.
Chapter Summaries: Language and Theology by Clark, Chapter 6

Chapter 6 is a summary of the position of A.J. Ayer and the verification principle. Ayer is associated with the logical positivists, but he himself does not claim to be one. His basic disagreement with the logical positivists is that Ayer adopts a modified verification principle. He requires of an empirical hypothesis not that it should be conclusively verifiable, but that some possible sense-experience should be relevant to the determination of its truth or falsehood. One objection to this would be that this definition would even allow a dream to be relevant to the truth of God’s existence, or some other metaphysical proposition that is equally obnoxious to Ayer. Ayer insists that there is no sensory observation that can be relevant to the existence of God and that theological propositions are devoid of meaning. His rejection of metaphysics and theology depends on a combination of basic empiricism and a definition of symbols.

Ayer makes it clear in his writings that empiricism has no place for any *a priori*, and therefore no place for any universal or necessary proposition. Additionally, Ayer insists that present logic is a convention that may well be replaced in the future. However, Clark notes that if one believed now that next year, or next century, inconsistency and self-contradiction would be rational, it would have a tremendous destructive bearing on my belief that these laws are rational now. Clark also discusses Ayer’s views on ethics and ethical propositions. However, Ayer also uses the term “ought,” so he betrays that at least somewhere there is a universal proposition.
Chapter Summaries: *Language and Theology* by Clark, Chapter 7

Chapter 7 is a discussion of Herbert Feigl, a thorough-going logical positivist who recognized the ineradicable cleavage between his own view and that which accommodates ethics, religion, and life after death. Philosophy concerns itself with consistency, testability, adequacy, precision, and objectivity. This concern has already rid the world of magical, animistic, and mythological explanations, and now it remains to do the same for metaphysics and theology.

Feigl states that a sentence is factually meaningful only if we are in principle capable of recognizing such states of affairs as would either validate or invalidate the sentence. If we cannot possibly conceive of what would have been to be the case in order to confirm or disconfirm an assertion we would not be able to distinguish between its truth and falsity. There must be a difference capable of observational testing. Deductive, rationalistic metaphysics is devoid of factual meaning, he states. Intuitive metaphysics confuses having an experience with knowing something about it. Transcendental metaphysics, an attempt to uncover the basic categories of reality, or speculations about the absolute generally contain an ample measure of absolutely untestable pseudo-propositions.

Clark notes that it is possible to oversimplify the observational criterion of truth. Very few statements can be validated by direct observation. Most of knowledge is very indirect. Clark also is critical of Feigl on his views of tautology and logic.
Chapter Summaries: *Language and Theology* by Clark, Chapter 8

Chapter 8 is a section Wittgenstein’s later writings. Clark says that these late writings often give the impression of triviality. Wittgenstein states that every word in a language names an object; every word has meaning. The meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands. Wittgenstein now imagines a primitive language suitable to a builder and his assistant, where objects only have words. However, even a primitive language would have verbs and other imperatives, Clark states. Too often Wittgenstein proceeds on a premise that the reader cannot accept. Words don’t always identify objects such as the builder’s slab. Clark asks could anyone imagine human beings restricting their conversations to orders and reports in battle without words for rainy and sunny weather, agriculture, music, love, elementary politics and economics? No human group can exist without these, however primitive the language.

Wittgenstein altered his views considerably between 1920 and 1950, so there is a problem of consistency. He rejects the substitution of an artificial language for ordinary language, which is devastating to earlier positivism. Wittgenstein apparently rejected somewhat the picture theory of language. He also changes from emphasis on the formal structures of logic to the study of idioms of ordinary language. The thrust of the new theory that replaces the picture theory is one of language games. Clark examines this theory and shows that it has numerous faults, even though this new theory is totally destructive of logical positivism. The conclusion of Clark’s critique is that although Wittgenstein has made many very interesting remarks and has proposed many intriguing
puzzles, he has done nothing to solve metaphysical and theological problems with language.

**Chapter Summaries: Language and Theology by Clark, Chapter 9**

Chapter 9 begins a new section of the book on religious theories of language, starting with Wilbur Marshall Urban. He begins with the basic empiricism of John Locke. Urban asks four questions in his main body of work: 1) How is language a bearer of meaning? 2) How is communication possible? 3) What is the relation of logic to language? And 4) How can language refer to things? His material is divided into two parts: one is his refutations of logical positivism, John Dewey, and others, and a second is his own constructive efforts.

Urban suggests that sounds become words by bearing meaning by their similarity to the things they designate, sort of in an onomatopoeic sense. There are onomatopoeic words, but not all words are this way. Some are metaphors, as Urban suggests. All words, he states, have a physical origin and a physical reference. However, Clark examines his theories and refutes them as implausible and self-contradictory. Why would anyone invent a word, other than a nonsense syllable, if he had nothing to express. The meaning must come first, states Clark, and then the symbol.

Clark examines Urban’s constructive theory as it relates to religious language and theology. Urban is a defender of religious language against logical positivism’s assertion that religion is meaningless, but it has its difficulties. Religion and poetry are closely related. While the poet gets something of reality that the scientist has missed, so the
religious person gets something that the poet has missed. Religious language
communicates something other language cannot. However, Clark shows that while
Urban tries to salvage religious language from the nonsense of logical positivism, he
empties it of all intelligible meaning and the result is no better.

Chapter Summaries: *Language and Theology* by Clark, Chapter 10

Chapter 10 is a short assessment of the work of E.L. Mascall. He begins with a
long critique of Ayer’s verification principle. However, he defends mystical experience.
But as much as Mascall opposes the verification principle, and the restriction of
meaningfulness to tautologies and sensorily verifiable statements, he insists on
empiricism. Experience is the sole source of knowledge, he states, but it is not always
sensory. Clark, in refuting Mascall’s mystical experience and language, states that the
content of knowledge is always propositional.

Mascall concludes his work by noting that the Bible uses images. However,
Clark is clear that Mascall’s language theory even in support of religious language is
meaningless nonsense.
Chapter Summaries: *Language and Theology* by Clark, Chapter 11

Chapter 11 is a short three-page examination of Horace Bushnell. He is well-known for his “moral influence theory” of the atonement, but not so much for his philosophy of language. Language, for Bushnell, begins when some primitive man attached sounds to physical objects. It was essentially a language of nouns. Verbs began as nouns denoting actions. All words originate in physical images. Intellectual terms later came into use, and physical objects furnished the ground for the symbolism of intellectual discourse. He explains that logic, not the choice of symbols, developed from grammar and grammar came from physical relations in nature. Clark also explains that this is the basic flaw in all empiricism. The reason is that the laws of logic are universal. Experience is never universal.

Bushnell concludes that language can apply to truth only in an analogical sense. One needs poetic insight, Bushnell says. One comes closer to truth only when it is offered paradoxically. Inconsistency is a positive good, for truth resides in feeling. This is irrationalism.

Chapter Summaries: *Language and Theology* by Clark, Chapter 12

Chapter 12 is an examination of Langdon Gilkey, who begins his work by branding the first early chapters of Genesis as fables and myths, reflecting the prescientific speculation of the Babylonian and Canaanite cultures. To find religious value in Genesis, Gilkey empties it and most of the OT of intelligible thought. He constructs a theory on paradoxical anthropomorphisms. He states that all language about
God is analogical. Because it is inescapably analogical in character, theological language points to a meaning that transcends any clear and precise language. Of course, Clark asks, if all religious language is analogical, what good is any of it? Gilkey constantly emphasizes the unintelligibility of religion. Clark examines Gilkey’s paradoxes and simultaneous denials and affirmations and concludes that his theory is useless as well. Mythical language and irrational religion is not Christianity nor can this language theory describe the God of the Bible.

Chapter Summaries: Language and Theology by Clark, Chapter 13

Chapter 13 is called “Interlude,” and it is a brief discussion of other unnamed language philosophers. Clark states that there are other authors whose theory of language is worked out in somewhat greater detail than Gilkey’s. Many of these authors mention the first eleven chapters of Genesis, and in particular the first three. Again, like Gilkey, they mythologize it and claim that it has no meaning. However, Clark states that the mere fact that Genesis does not state the exact speed of light does not impugn the statement that “he made the stars also.” Another instance of these theories is the poor logic with relation o the narrative of Cain, the account of the flood, and numerous other narratives they claim as inconsistencies. However, Clark again states that inconsistencies will never prove that the language is mythological. Those who call the early chapters of Genesis mythological, Clark states, do so because they do not believe what Genesis says about God and his actions. To say a religious book is myth means that I don’t believe it.
These authors differ among themselves in several details, relating to the division of myth and literal narrative in the Bible.

Chapter Summaries: Language and Theology by Clark, Chapter 14

Chapter 14 is a discussion of William Hordern. Clark states that Hordern is more successful at refuting anti-religious views than in establishing a solid base for Christian truth. Hordern notes that there is a contemporary stress on communications, but there is also such a debasement of language that words have become so elastic that no one understands anyone else. The question is, how can we use words to speak about God? Hordern’s key to the solution is his concept of conviction as opposed to emotion. Conviction describes the state of mind of a religious person better than emotion does. Conviction presupposes a convictor, an irresistible power outside of oneself. Convictional language points to a reality as much as empirical language does. Even in science there is a conviction about objectivity. This convictional theory leaves the logical positivists speechless. Hordern also builds his theory of language within a community. Theology cannot be understood if its church background is ignored. The convictor is known to be a mystery.

Clark refutes Hordern’s theory. By removing God’s secrets from the sphere of knowledge, Hordern produces a religion with which the logical positivists can agree. For Christianity a mystery is indeed a secret, but when God tells us the secret, we know it. Hordern believes he is refuting his opponents, but in fact is saying much the same thing.
as they are. The theologian must say the unsayable. Language is conditioned by space and time, and words fail because they are finite. We must use analogies and then erode them. Clark states that some of Hordern’s remarks are valuable, but his matrix is a language game that has no rules, and no one would want to play that game!

Chapter Summaries: *Language and Theology* by Clark, Chapter 15

Chapter 15 is a discussion of Kenneth Hamilton, whose work Clark explains is not so detailed as Hordern’s nor as blatantly irrational as Gilkey’s. His basic view of language, even religious language, is that it grows out of mythic thinking and still bears the marks of its origin. However, Clark notes that if Hamilton calls religion mythical, he probably means that it is false. Hamilton also notes that man’s chief characteristic is the ability to construct symbols. The invention of verbal symbols provides the possibility of having knowledge. However, Clark notes that this seems backwards. It takes intelligence to construct symbols, and only because man is distinguished from other animals can it be done so. Before a man constructs a symbol, he must have something in mind to symbolize.

Hamilton eschews plain, literal, intelligible language in religion. Parables are supposed to solve this problem. But Hamilton confuses the subject matter and style which results in a decision to reject literal truth. Hamilton is interested in preparing the ground to reject plenary and verbal inspiration. Hamilton does not accept the Bible as the word of God. Clark, however, notes that if God cannot use symbols to express his truth,
he is indeed bound and limited. A God who cannot speak is not omnipotent. In fact, such a God would be more limited than man, since man can speak.

Hamilton’s theory of language is destructive of Christian truth. Surely language, as God’s gift to Adam, has as its purpose communication both among men and between God and man. The Bible does not support a theory of language that originates language in pagan mythology with the result that divine truth is unintelligible.

Chapter Summaries: Language and Theology by Clark, Chapter 16

After critiquing numerous secular and religious theories of language, Clark in this chapter proposes his own. First, he clears the ground of empiricism. Sensation and perception are untrustworthy, and this difficulty occurs with every sense. Clark shows how empiricism cannot be the basis for the formation of concepts. Christianity must have “abstract” concepts. Clark also makes the point that when Christians use such terms as justification, he is using a name to designate a series of propositions. Propositions, not concepts, are the objects of knowledge because only propositions can be true. Theological propositions are usually universal propositions, and for that reason cannot be empirical.

Clark the explains the first element in the formulation of a Christian theory of language, and the first criterion for judging the adequacy of Biblical revelation, is the doctrine of the image of God in man. God is a rational, thinking being, whose thought exhibits the structure of logic. Man was created in the image of God. One should not speak of the image of God in man, but rather man is the image. This does not refer to
man’s body, but to his rationality. The conclusive consideration throughout the whole Bible is the rational God gives man an intelligible message.

Language did not develop from, nor was its purpose restricted to, the physical needs of earthly life. God gave Adam a mind to understand the divine law, and he gave him language to enable him to speak to God. From the beginning, language was intended for worship. Man’s mind was not initially blank; it was structured. The Christian view of God and language does not fit into any empirical philosophy. It is rather a type of *a priori* rationalism. No universal and necessary propositions can be deduced from sensory observation. Universality and necessity can only be *a priori*. Christianity is based on revelation, not experience. Since God is both rational and omnipotent, he faced no problem in adequately expressing his truth in words. Because man is also rational, he faces no inherent problem in understanding God’s words. Since the fall, man may misunderstand them, or he may understand them and refuse to believe them. But neither is the result of any inherent flaw in language.

Clark sums up his theory using the four questions of Urban: 1) How is language a bearer of meaning? 2) How is communication possible? 3) What is the relation of logic to language? And 4) How can language refer to things? First, language is the bearer of meaning because words are arbitrary signs the mind uses to tag thoughts. Second, communication is possible because all minds have at least some thoughts in common. This is so because God created man a rational spirit, a mind capable of thinking, worshipping, and talking to God. Third, language is logical because it expresses logical thoughts. The fourth question has the same answer as the first.