Religious Education in a Post-Secular Age

Case Studies from Europe

Edited by
Olof Franck · Peder Thalén

palgrave
macmillan

Religious Education in a Post-Secular Age

Olof Franck • Peder Thalén
Editors

Religious Education in a Post-Secular Age

Case Studies from Europe

palgrave
macmillan

Editors
Olof Franck
University of Gothenburg
Gothenburg, Sweden

Peder Thalén
University of Gävle
Gävle, Sweden

ISBN 978-3-030-47502-4 ISBN 978-3-030-47503-1 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47503-1

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Preface

The concept of non-confessional and diverse religious education that was realized in the Swedish schools during the 1960s was shaped in an intellectual space of a distinctively modern kind. Discussions about late modernity or post-modernism had not yet begun and the thought of post-secularism had barely made any sense. The idea of neutrality which permeated the new model for religious education was characterized by a belief in the possibility of conveying knowledge of religion entirely unaffected by the views of the teacher and the surrounding society: knowledge *about* religion. Similar views can be found in England and Wales, where phenomenology of religion played an important role as a platform for the shaping of Religious Education (RE).

The rise of the new religious education in Sweden also needs to be understood against the background of a cultural situation in which the state church of that time had recently possessed the power in society to define how people should relate to life, through both its language and content. Against this background, the reformed religious education of the 1960s appears as part of a larger secular liberation process in society from the inherited religion—a process during which the law of religious freedom, passed in Sweden in 1951, was an important milestone. After the introduction of this law, it became unsustainable to conduct a school education partial to the state church. The impossibility was later strengthened by a beginning pluralism in society.

As we look back and reflect upon what has taken place during the past 50 years, a few things become immediately apparent. Continental as well as analytical philosophy has undermined the intellectual fundament of non-confessional religious education. The idea of any kind of absolute neutrality can no longer be sustained. Also, the concept of religion itself has been questioned from many directions. The image of what religion is, which was taken for granted in the 1960s, was distinctively Western (and also Lutheran) to its character and reflected the thoughts of the Enlightenment. In a post-secular state, it has also become increasingly difficult to make sharp distinctions between what is religious and non-religious, confessional and non-confessional, teaching about religion and learning in (from) religion. Such polarized ideas built on binary opposites also make dialogue difficult.

Important parts of the intellectual fundament have also collapsed, due to the development in society, and at the same time, the need for a meeting point in schools where different outlooks are allowed to clash has increased—a place where populism and fundamentalism may also be met. The subject of religion, based on diversity, has never been more relevant. This is why it is important to thoroughly, at the core, think through and find a new foundation for the model for religious education which was created in Sweden in the 1960s, but also has equivalents in several other European countries, even though the background histories may vary.

In this anthology a number of European researchers approach the challenges and possibilities of religious education in a post-secular age from various angles and perspectives. Nigel Fancourt initiates the line of contributions by highlighting post-secular perspectives on religious education with regard to current neoliberal governance of education. Fancourt begins his presentation by looking at Habermas' arguments for religion in the public sphere and then discusses the implications of this for religious education. The analytical perspective is widened by a critical examination of the effects of neoliberalism on education in general as interpreted by Milton Friedman. The focus is then turned towards an analysis of the relation between Habermas' and Friedman's theories. Fancourt finally presents some hypotheses regarding the presence and place of

confessional forms of religious education in a post-secular, neoliberal culture of governance.

In the next chapter Geir Skeie explores the historical relation between religion and education by starting from the assumption that "the place and role of religion in education tells something important about the role of religion in society". Skeie focuses on historical and present-day perspectives on religious education in a Scandinavian context, particularly in Sweden, Norway and Denmark. The transformation of absolute Lutheran states into modern, secular welfare states is observed as an arena for development of a system of education for all, and Skeie examines the aim of qualifying and socializing future citizens with regard to religious education, for example, as it is presented in the Swedish, Norwegian and Danish curricula. The issue of how to describe "post-secular" religious education is exemplified by the Norwegian case. Skeie ends the chapter with a discussion about how the term "post-secular", with its porosity, could contribute to investigations of the changing forms of religious education.

In Chap. 3, Kerstin von Brömssen and Graeme Nixon present an analysis of three religious education curriculum constructions. The presentation is based on a discursive reading of the religious education curricula for state-maintained primary and lower-secondary schools in Denmark, Scotland and Sweden. After having explored some of the theoretical curriculum perspectives with regard to the question "why study a school subject?", the authors turn to an analysis of the curricula in these three countries. This analysis includes a general contextualization of the subject with regard to the general school system. Some comparative dimensions are also discussed, for example, regarding the meaning of "denominational religious education". In the final section of the chapter, von Brömssen and Nixon bring conclusions from the analysis into a discussion about religious education in the light of a discourse on post-secularity.

The next chapter is written by Gunnar Gunnarsson, who highlights religious education as part of the Social Studies National Curriculum Guide in Iceland. Gunnarsson examines how religious education is related to the six "fundamental pillars" representing the educational policies in Iceland. The changed role of religious education, which is made

visible by being included in the document in question, is presented as exemplifying the post-secular era. In the Curriculum Guide, "transformative education"—that is, education that aims to strengthen students' democratic competences and critical thinking—is prescribed. Gunnarsson discusses whether such an aim is possible with regard to religious education and, if so, what this might mean.

In their contribution, Martin Ubani, Saila Poulter and Inkeri Rissanen examine some of the current challenges facing religious education in a Finnish school context. By presenting an overview of how the subject has developed between the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries—a development that includes a shift in responsibility for religious education from the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church to the state—the authors create a platform for a critical analysis of how questions of diversification, secularization and post-secularism have come into focus in the discussion about religious education. They discuss whether religion and world view can be used as parallel concepts and can be approached using a common pedagogical framework. The main issue here is whether "world view education" indicates a move away from theology as the disciplinary basis of religious education—a move that Ubani, Poulter and Rissanen criticize with regard to the main arguments developed in the chapter.

In Chap. 6, Julian Stern opens up a general discussion about present-day religious education. What are its aims and what is its contribution to post-secular education? Stern develops his approach to these questions with regard to "two stubborn particulars of religious education": uncertainty and mortality. Critical perspectives are presented on conceptions of education, according to which a striving for certainty and justified truths are the main concerns. If creative uncertainty is nurtured by teachers and students alike, this will stimulate a process of exploration of values and beliefs. This holds true for the theme of death and mortality in religious education. Examining what he describes as "the certainty of mortality and our uncertain knowledge of death", Stern considers how care drives religion's encounter with mortality and how post-secular religious education could contribute to reflection and discussion which, in areas of disagreement, might lead to the recognition of the value of uncertainty.

In Chap. 7, Denise Cush, in a historical overview, explores the development of the subject of religious education in the United Kingdom over the last five decades. The starting point in this exposé is the "game-changing moment" in 1971, when the Schools Council Working Paper 36 was published and where Ninian Smart is ascribed a crucial role. A range of important and influential steps and dimensions are touched on, like globalization, philosophical challenges to modernist ideas of "objectivity" and "neutrality", critical analyses of the concepts of religion, religious and secular and a discussion about the concept of post-secularism. Cush dedicates the final part of her chapter to the Commission on Religious Education that was set up in 2016, and its report, CoRE 2018, which is described as a possibly "new game-changing move" in English religious education.

In the next chapter, Peder Thalén critically examines some of the proposals—CoRE 2018 and a plan for revision put forward by the Dutch scholar Siebren Miedema—to reform non-confessional religious education in state-funded schools by replacing, in whole or part, the concept of religion with the concept of world view. The chapter gives an overview of and analyses the main difficulties with the world view concept—the most central being a tendency to reinforce relativism and establish absolute boundaries. Some of the internal problems with the concept of religion, in particular an over-emphasis of the cognitive dimension, appear even stronger when switching to that of world view. According to Thalén, it is doubtful whether the proposed conceptual innovation constitutes any real progress, which means that religious education may have to try another route for renewal.

Tim Jensen, in his contribution, vigorously defends a "scientifically based" approach to religious education—"Study-of-Religion(s)"—in state-funded schools that is similar to the scientific study of religion at universities by providing a second-order analytical-critical discourse on religion. According to Jensen, this concept of religious education is still valid and has not been undermined by post-modernism or post-secularism. It is still feasible to draw a clear line between a scientific and non-scientific approach to the study of religion. Jensen also rejects a description of Denmark as secular, despite this being common amongst researchers and the Danish population. It therefore does not make sense

to talk about Denmark as post-secular. At the end of the chapter Jensen discusses the resistance to this approach to religious education amongst academics and the public.

In Chap. 10, Leni Franken discusses the various dimensions of a shift from "confessional, theology-based and denominational religious education" to "non-confessional, religious studies based on non-denominational RE". She highlights the arguments against a neutral or impartial religious education and its possible consequences in terms of "reductionism" and "relativism". Franken criticizes such arguments for being based on a misunderstanding of how a justification of non-confessional religious education can be conceived. The scope in her presentation is education and religious education in liberal democracies, and she distinguishes and elaborates on various possible dimensions of a non-confessional and integrative religious education in a post-secular context. She contends that such an education is one that, in line with a Rawlsian "genuine reasonable option", enables students with diverse religious backgrounds to learn about different religions.

In the book's final chapter, Olof Franck examines how what can be described as "post-secular religious education" may open up for religious ethical claims without giving them an exclusive position in which they can escape criticism. In order to sharpen the argument, the focus is on claims that seem to challenge democratic values conceived as guidelines for both religious education and education in general. It is argued that religious claims, regardless of whether the context is described as "post-secular" or not, can inspire critical reflection and argumentation by questioning present democratic moral and epistemological beliefs, norms and ideals. According to Franck, the treatment of such claims requires ethical and epistemological work on the part of their advocates and critics.

Gothenburg, Sweden — Olof Franck
Gävle, Sweden — Peder Thalén

Contents

Notes on Contributors

Denise Cush is Emeritus Professor of Religion and Education at Bath Spa University. She was a member of the Commission on Religious Education 2017–2018, and Deputy Editor of *British Journal of Religious Education* from 2011–2018. Publications include *Buddhism*, a still much-used textbook (1994), the Routledge Encyclopedia of Hinduism (2009), *Celebrating Planet Earth, a Pagan/Christian Conversation* (2015) and many others on religious education. In 2016 she was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Uppsala, Sweden.

Nigel Fancourt is Associate Professor of Teaching, Learning and Values in the Department of Education, University of Oxford, and a co-convenor of the Religion, Philosophy and Education Research Group. He has studied theology, social anthropology, law and education, and worked as a lawyer and teacher before becoming an academic. He completed his doctorate at Warwick in 2008, on self-assessment in religious education. His current research is on legal and pedagogical challenges for religious education (including a more detailed study of neoliberalism), and on professional epistemologies and ethics.

Olof Franck is Professor in Subject Matter Education, specialising in Social Studies, and Associate Professor in Philosophy of religion at the Department of Pedagogical, Curricular and Professional Studies, University of Gothenburg. His publications focus on issues in ethics, reli-

gious education and philosophy. He is presently engaged in research on conceptions of ethical competence in Religious Education, and on fiction-based approaches to Ethics Education. He has been engaged as a subject expert by the Swedish National Agency for Education, for example, in the work with reforms for compulsory and secondary school.

Leni Franken studied philosophy (University of Antwerp/KULeuven) and religious sciences (KULeuven). She obtained her PhD in political philosophy at the University of Antwerp, where she currently works as a teaching assistant and senior researcher. Her research focuses on autonomy-based liberalism, church-state relations, neutrality, faith-based schools, and religious and citizenship education. She authored two monographs and numerous national and international journal articles and book chapters, among others, on state support for religion, Religious Education (RE) in Belgium, comparative studies in RE, freedom of religion and education, 'neutrality' in RE, and Islamic RE.

Gunnar J. Gunnarsson is Professor of Religious Education at the University of Iceland, School of Education. He graduated as a teacher from the Teacher Training Collage of Iceland in 1971 and in theology from the University of Iceland in 1978. He completed a PhD degree in education from Stockholm University in 2011. In his research, the main focus has been on religious education and diversity, and children's and young people's life view, life interpretation and values in a multicultural society.

Tim Jensen is a senior lecturer, Director of Teaching at the Study of Religions, University of Southern Denmark; honorary professor, Institut für Religionswissenschaft, Leibniz Universität, Hannover; and a senior research fellow, Ural Federal University, Ekaterinburg.
He was President of the IAHR, the International Association for the History of Religions (2015–2020). Though specialized in ancient Greek religion, he has done research and written widely on study-of-religion-related methodology; religion, law and human rights; applied religious ethics; religious environmental activism; public discourses and notions on religion; and public religious education from a study-of-religion perspective.

Graeme Nixon is a leading figure in the ongoing development of RE curricula in Scotland. He has contributed publications, guidance and advice to bodies who oversee the provision of Scottish education. These include Learning and Teaching Scotland, Education Scotland and the Scottish Qualifications Authority. Nixon is a senior lecturer within the School of Education at the University of Aberdeen. Nixon has written and presented research on Religious Education for peer-reviewed journals and international conferences. This includes research on the 'philosophication' of Religious Education; management in schools; the effects of secularization on Religious Education; and mindfulness in schools. His current research is on conscientious withdrawal from Religious Education, which includes a review of international and European perspectives on the rights of the child and parents in the context of Religious Education.

Saila Poulter (PhD, Docent) is University Lecturer in Religious Education at the Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Helsinki. Her research interest concerns religious and worldview education, teacher training, and intercultural and citizenship education. Currently she is doing research on values and worldviews in early childhood education, and she is Project Leader in the research project "Creating Spaces for Diversity of Worldviews in Early Childhood Education".

Inkeri Rissanen, PhD is University Lecturer in Multicultural Education at the Faculty of Education and Culture, Tampere University. Her research interests include multicultural education, religions and worldviews in education and Islamic religious education. Much of her research has focused on the inclusion of Muslims in public education. Currently she is the principal investigator of "Implicit theories of malleability as the core of teachers intercultural competence" (CORE) (2019–2022).

Geir Skeie is Professor of Religious Education, UNESCO Chair and Science Ombud at the University of Stavanger, Norway. He is a guest professor at NTNU, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway, and affiliated to Stockholm University. His research includes both empirical and theoretical contributions with a particular interest in questions about religion in education in a diverse socio-cultural context. He has had a leading role in several national and international research projects.

Julian Stern is Professor of Education and Religion at York St John University, UK, General Secretary of ISREV: the International Seminar on Religious Education and Values (@ISREV1978 #ISREV), and Editor of *British Journal of Religious Education*. He was a schoolteacher for 14 years, and has worked in universities for 28 years. Stern is widely written, with 16 books (plus 5 second or third editions), contributions to 21 other books, and over 30 peer-reviewed articles.

Peder Thalén holds a PhD in Philosophy of Religion from Uppsala University and is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Gävle, Sweden. His research fields are the Atheism movement in Sweden, didactics of religion, the role of science and religion in post-secular societies, methodological questions in Religious Studies, in particular sociology of religion. His most recent publications are *Interkulturell religionsdidaktik: Utmaningar och möjligheter* (Intercultural Didactics of Religion: Challenges and Possibilities, co-edited with Olof Franck, 2018) and *Kunskap, motstånd, möjlighet: Humanistisk forskning i dag* (Knowledge, Resistance, Possibility: Humanistic Research Today, co-edited with Ulrika Serrander, 2017).

Martin Ubani, PhD, MTheol is Professor of Religious Education at the School of Theology and the School of Educational Applied Science and Teacher Education, University of Eastern Finland. His research interests include religion, multiculturalism and education, RE teacher education and didactics of RE. He holds several academic positions of trust. Since 2017 he has been a library fellow at the Van Leer Institute, Jerusalem.

Kerstin von Brömssen is Professor of Educational Science, University West, Sweden. Von Brömssen's research is primarily aimed at three different areas within the field of educational science. The first area focuses on children, youth, migration, learning and teaching from a broad educational sociological perspective. The second area of research consists of studies in religious studies didactics, that is, on teaching, learning and critical investigations on religion as a phenomenon at the intersection of categories such as gender, ethnicity, age and nationality. The third area concerns internationalization, especially in teacher education, where von Brömssen has experiences from student and teacher exchange with

England and South Africa. Her latest publication is von Brömssen, K. (2018). Young Students' Memories and Reflections on the July 22, 2011 Terror Attacks in Norway. In W. David, J. A. Lankshear, & J. F. Leslie, (Ed.), *Values, Human Rights and Religious Education: Contested Grounds* (pp. 217–234). Peter Lang Publishing Group.

1

Introduction: Religious Education and the Notion of the Post-secular

Olof Franck and Peder Thalén

In the preface, we write that the non-confessional religious education that was introduced in Swedish schools during the 1960s was shaped in a distinctly modern intellectual space. The concept of the post-secular is a useful tool for describing how this intellectual space has undergone major changes and for drawing attention to some of the challenges facing religious education today. In this introductory chapter, we try to answer the question: What is the post-secular context of religious education?

Although there is no consensus as to how the term "post-secular" should be understood, it is still possible to distinguish some of the recurring themes. We outline the major themes in this chapter. The concept of post-secular is also somewhat ambiguous. This is partly because the "secular" content is unclear, and partly because the meaning of the

O. Franck
University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden
e-mail: Olof.Franck@gu.se

P. Thalén (✉)
University of Gävle, Gävle, Sweden
e-mail: ptn@hig.se

O. Franck, P. Thalén (eds.), *Religious Education in a Post-Secular Age*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47503-1_1

concept of the secular has changed with time. However, it is possible to grasp the main points in the discussion about the post-secular without first discussing the different interpretations of "the secular". Indirectly, issues relating to "the secular" will be touched on in this introduction.

Post-secularity as a Slow Cultural Change

The first meaning of post-secular refers to the disintegration at a cultural level of the ideology that was inherited from the Enlightenment, which assumed that religion would more or less disappear as society became more enlightened. From a global perspective, this assumption was false. In fact, opposite tendencies are visible across much of the world (Berger 1999), although what will happen in the West is difficult to judge.

Well-known nineteenth-century proponents of this ideology are Marx and Comte. Their visions of a "religion-less" society can, despite mutual differences, be interpreted as particular instances of this wider belief in the disappearance of religion. Also, the so-called secularization thesis that dominated sociology for more than half of the twentieth century was heavily influenced by this general outlook (Warner 2010).

According to José Casanova, the belief in an inevitable disappearance of religion has not been restricted to an intellectual elite, and he contends that Western society as a whole is still permeated by a "stadial consciousness" (Casanova 2015, 31–32). This influence on society can probably be explained in part by the success of some of the ideologies from the nineteenth century. However, despite the various explanations, what is important is that post-secularity in this broad cultural sense not only affects academic thinking, but also concerns the whole of society. It is about a changed consciousness, a loosening of the grip of stadial consciousness that in turn leads to that the secular lifestyle no longer appears as a natural consequence of modernization (Casanova 2015).

A common criticism of the traditional secularization thesis by sociologists is that it is based on a simplified picture of the relationship between religion and modernity: "In places where … stadial consciousness is absent or less dominant, as in the United States or in most non-Western

postcolonial societies, processes of modernization are unlikely to be accompanied by processes of religious decline" (Casanova 2015, 32). In other words, there is no correlation between modernization and secularization (religious decline). Instead, we have "multiple modernities". Another criticism of the traditional secularization thesis is that it is too sweeping and needs to be broken down into various components. The differentiation thesis is still relevant but none of the other components (Casanova 1994).

From a philosophical point of view, the general belief that religion is an outmoded way of living and thinking that will soon disappear is similar to a so-called grand narrative and is equipped with all the intellectual difficulties characterizing such metanarratives (a penchant for binary opposites, lack of discernment/nuances, absolutizing, an ahistorical mode of thinking, etc.). This philosophical critique reveals that the first meaning of post-secular is closely related to the concepts of postmodernity or late modernity. According to this philosophical outlook, what has lost power in our society is not only the belief that religion will disappear, but also a whole package of beliefs, such as the belief in science as a superior authority and a belief in development as a steady, ongoing process (the latter became impossible already after World War 1). Some thinkers would even argue that "secular reason" has been undermined in the historical process (Milbank 2006).

Taking this first notion of post-secularity seriously means that there is no longer any point in discussing the future of religion itself (whatever that would mean today). At least in the area of Religious Studies, the academic discussion has already gravitated towards a very different yet related question: the validity of the concept of religion influenced by Western thinking and, in particular, the ideas of the Enlightenment (Thurfjell 2016). To be more precise, what is questioned today is not religion itself, but a cultural construction of it that has profoundly affected popular culture, academic studies and the self-understanding of religious traditions. The eventual disappearance of this construction could lead to a "religion-less" society, although in a very different sense than that imagined by the early proponents of such a society in the nineteenth century.

Post-secularity as a New Form of Cultural Relativism

One aspect of late modernity—and one of the biggest challenges for religious education—is a new form of cultural relativism. In the modern period, a secular view characterized by a strong belief in reason/science and technological progress, often mixed with an atheist conviction, functioned as an unquestioned framework for the interpretation of reality. As a result of a growing awareness of the limitations of the Enlightenment heritage, this secular view has become a target for critical analysis in the same way that religion was previously targeted. A well-known example of this new intellectual orientation is the work of Charles Taylor. In his book *A Secular Age* (2007), he describes secularity as a "new context of understanding":

> … the change I want to define and trace is one which takes us from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one of human possibility among others. (Taylor 2007, 3)

Taking this argument about one "possibility among others" one step further, it follows that *all* today's life stances, including atheism and its correlations, are relative. Absolute claims no longer appear credible. This relativistic turn is visible at many levels of society. Apart from postmodern intellectual trends and a deepened historical awareness, it is related to and reinforced by social factors such as globalization and the increased presence of multicultural life forms in the West. At the same time, and taking the complexity of the situation into account, unbelief is still dominant in modern civilization and has achieved hegemony in, for example, academic spheres (Taylor 2007).

A prominent feature of this relativistic attitude is that individuals now have much more room to formulate their interpretations of life, even if it is not clear whether or how young people perceive such activity as meaningful or if it is comprehensible to everyone. What was an external authority in the modern period—science as an institution and a

normative ideal for gaining knowledge—has now lost a lot of its power in society as a whole, which is visible in, for example, climate scepticism and medical self-treatment. Trying to decide for others what should be regarded as true or reasonable is perceived as patronizing. Such considerations are now regarded as private matters and expressions of individuals' freedom of choice.

The second meaning of post-secularity denotes a particular, relativistic aspect of the slow cultural change already dealt with above. What is happening now is not only a disintegration of "stadial consciousness". In the wake of this disintegration, and also taking the weakened cultural position of science into consideration, what is left of secular reason can no longer function as a protective wall against "the religious"—what was deemed by many as "irrationality"—at a societal level. The distinction between high and low has now more or less been eroded. The influx of magic and occultism in popular culture, what Christopher Partridge (2005) calls "occulture", is a clear sign of this.

A recurring aspect in the discussion about post-secularity is whether this phenomenon is to be understood as a change in our way of reflecting on social and historical reality, or whether the change reflects a transformation of society, dawn of a new era. This section shows that both things are involved. The reorientation of critical thinking, exemplified by Taylor, where reason has begun to question its own secular foundation, marks a change in our thinking. The rampant relativism and the erosion of intellectual standards point to an actual change. However, how deep the latter change goes is still an open question. Some layers of society seem to be affected, whereas others are not. In the basic activities of everyday life, truth still matters.

Post-secularity as a Rediscovery of a Continuity With the Past

A dominant feature of modernity has been the will to completely detach from the past, to break radically with tradition and to build a new society based on science and reason. The great role model here is Descartes and

his attempt to rebuild all knowledge from scratch. At the same time, this feature has been a utopian endeavour. The power of tradition and the way it always reappears, not least through language, were underestimated. The ties to the past were never cut but were suppressed and made invisible. A dominant feature of post-secularity is the willingness to make these ties visible, trace the genealogy of modernity and recapture the continuity with the past.

Many researchers have highlighted how political ideologies, such as communism and liberalism, convey a religious heritage, albeit in a transformed and sometimes distorted form. In a similar way, secular life views and teachings are often viewed as translations of religious doctrines and messages. One remarkable example from 1959 is the German philosopher Eric Voegelin's argument that Marxism had taken over central themes from antique Gnosticism, which could consequently be apprehended as a new, or modern, Gnostic movement (Voegelin 2005). Another example is the writings of the Jewish thinker Hans Jonas. In the epilogue of the paperback edition of his classic *The Gnostic Religion* (1963), Jonas exposed structural similarities between existentialism (modern nihilism) and antique Gnosticism. As early as 1922, Carl Schmitt, in his controversial book *Political Theology* (2005 [1985]), tried to demonstrate how concepts in political science were secularized theological concepts (cf. Sigurdson 2009).

However, the appreciation of the significance of the past is not merely an academic matter. The political arenas of our time show a range of cases in which politicians and debaters make reference to traditional religious teaching in order to emphasize a dependence, or at least an inspiration, which, with its long history, could make their arguments look sound. The past is no longer a problem that we have to overcome, but a resource.

A recent example in a Swedish political context is the Christian Democrat leader Ebba Busch Thor, who on various occasions has formulated her vision for meeting the challenges of a multicultural society by referring to a Christian platform. In an article entitled *The suburbs would also benefit from Christianity*, published in April 2019, Busch Thor claimed that "Becoming a Christian Democrat is perhaps a way of saying that one has seen what makes a society successful and understood what gives the inhabitants the greatest possible freedom. Upholding Jewish

Christian ethics and Western humanism is not a method of sneaking in morning prayer and Sunday school to create a religious Sweden, but a guarantee of the opportunity to have a liberal lifestyle"[1] (*Expressen* April 20, 2019).

What happens here is that Jewish Christian teaching is used to make a political statement in a new and different historical context from that in which this teaching is rooted and that seems to promote some kind of universal claim. The teaching in question is presented by Busch Thor as providing a solid and significant foundation for what is taken to be a successful liberal method for dealing with the challenges facing Sweden's multicultural suburbs in the twentieth century. This example also shows a blurring of the borders between what is apprehended as "secular" and "religious" (see the next section).

Close to the political arena is the school context, which is our final example in this section. In 2009, the Swedish National Agency for Education was commissioned by the government to develop a new religious education syllabus. Christianity had been given a special position in the Agency's proposal, which mainly reflected its historical significance for Swedish society. The government chose to reinforce this special position in a number of points by adding "values and culture" to underline the historical significance, and it was emphasized more clearly that Christianity has a special role in relation to the other world religions. This revision reflected an increased emphasis on Christianity as a cultural heritage, which could in fact be regarded as a post-secular turn in Swedish society (Thalén 2019).

Post-secularity as the Resolution of the Sharp Boundary Between "the Religious" and "the Secular" or "Non-religious"

The previous section leads into the theme that could be very significant in terms of how religious education is designed in the future. The sharp distinction between what is and what is not religious is currently being dissolved in society, and categories and conceptual boundaries are

becoming blurred. The book *Post-Secular Society* (Nynäs, Lassander and Utriainen 2015), edited by members of a Finnish research team, contains plenty of empirical examples from different areas of society of how contemporary religiosity is in a state of change that is marked by "individualization, democratization, fluidity, hybridity, relocation, and the transgression of boundaries" (Utriainen et al. 2015, 189).

The social mechanisms behind this blurring are manifold. In contemporary society the ideological dimension of religion is increasingly losing its importance. The differences between religions become less important for individuals, which also tend to dissolve the boundaries between the religious and the secular. A change from dogma to subjective experience and a shift from the collective to the personal occur when the authority of religious institutions is dissolved (Frisk and Nynäs 2015; Warner 2010). The empowerment of the individual has given rise to eclecticism, where secular and religious views are blended together, facilitated by globalization. Moberg and Granholm stress the role of the media and popular culture in this transformation:

> … if the increasingly sustained focus on the visibility of religion in the public sphere … were to be coupled with an equally sustained focus on the impact of the media (in the forms of both technologies and institutions), popular culture, and consumer culture, then scholars might well arrive at drastically different interpretations of the actual composition and general character of the religious landscape of the West …. (Moberg and Granholm 2015, 114–115)

Further, according to Moberg and Granholm, the impact of the media, popular culture and consumer culture re-shapes "what 'counts' as religion, what the function of religion is, what the various arenas and locations of religion are," (Moberg and Granholm 2015, 115).

The fact that popular spirituality expresses itself in both a religious context (e.g. sacred dance and meditation) and secular culture (diverse practices of well-being such as yoga and mindfulness) means that there are no longer any "sharp borders between the religious and the secular, between holy and profane" (Frisk and Nynäs 2015, 56). Several examples of this phenomenon—Utriainen, Hovi and Broo use the expression

in-between-spaces—are found in hospitals, health care and palliative care (2015, 93). Religion can today be seen as something that is multi-located and people do not need to see themselves as either religious or non-religious. The same conclusion, based on other premises, is reached by the Finnish theologian Tage Kurtén: "At the beginning of the 2010s, we must understand human life beyond the secular—religious distinction"[2] (Kurtén 2014, 259).

There are also cultural mechanisms or large-scale historical processes behind the blurring of categories. The category religious–secular/non-religious has been developed within the framework of the Enlightenment's way of thinking, which is characterized by general (ahistorical and timeless) divisions that disregard linguistic and historical differences. The breakdown of the category religious–secular/non-religious at a societal level reflects and interacts with the breaking up of the Enlightenment paradigm at a historical level.

The cultural aspect of blurring the categories appears most clearly in those academic contexts in which the concept of religion is critically discussed (cf. Thurfjell 2016). The "secular" is usually seen as the opposite of "the religious". But if the Western concept of religion is deconstructed, or is shown to be a mixed product of Western Christianity and Enlightenment patterns of thought, "the secular" category will be undermined and exposed as a cultural construction. In the future there may not be any non-religious people in the West. Not because of a religious revival that achieves total hegemony—that is pure fantasy—but because the modern division between "the religious" and "the secular" may no longer be meaningful or understandable. We need to go no further than the Reformation era to find such a cultural reality.

Post-secularity as the Return of Religion in Society

The fifth meaning of the concept of post-secular is the most common and, at the same time, the most controversial, namely the idea of the return of religion in society. A lot can be said about the use of the term

"return" in this context, but a common denominator is that it often refers to at least partly measurable phenomena (even though it is difficult to estimate or measure non-organized religion) that are not only of interest to sociologists of religion. This empirical trait makes this interpretation of post-secularity different from the cultural and philosophical approaches mentioned earlier. A fully possible position is to affirm post-secularity in the cultural/philosophical senses and at the same time deny that there is any visible sign of increased religious/spiritual activity in the West, indicating some kind of significant trend shift or even reversal of the so-called process of secularization.

The question of the "return of religion" has been widely discussed amongst sociologists of religion. A well-known study in Great Britain from 2001 to 2003, conducted in the small market town of Kendal by Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead (2005), concluded that there was evidence of the beginning of a spiritual revolution in terms of religion giving way to spirituality. This conclusion has been contested by Steve Bruce (2017) and other defenders of the "orthodox" secularization thesis. In their opinion, the number of people practising "alternative" or "holistic spirituality" is far too low and cannot fill the gap of the general decline of traditional, organized religion. Inspired by the Kendal study, a group of Swedish sociologists of religion investigated the spread of religion and spirituality in Enköping, a small Swedish town similar to Kendal in important aspects. However, in contrast to the Kendal study, no clear signs of a "spiritual revolution" could be detected (Ahlstrand and Gunner 2008).

In recent sociological research in a Nordic context, attempts have been made to try to bridge the conflicting views between those who defend the secularization thesis and those who regard it as more or less obsolete by introducing the concept of religious complexity (Furseth 2018). Using this concept as a theoretical framework makes it possible to discover and discuss simultaneous aspects of the growth, decline and changes in religion in different spheres and at the micro-, meso- and macro-levels of society. Advocates of post-secularity are thus regarded as too one-sided "and fail to account for multiple religious trends that appear at the same time" (Furseth 2018, 15). Characteristic of this example of current research is that the research team (wisely) refrains from making any

long-term predictions about the future of religion and instead adopts a perspective of non-linearity: "Changes are often nonlinear and unpredictable" (Furseth 2018, 18).

What complicates this sometimes polarized discussion of a "return of religion" in society is that the standard sociological question of "return of religion" in empirical surveys seems to be framed in a particular matrix of scientific thinking in which a sharp distinction between "the religious" and "the secular"/"non-religion" is assigned an axiomatic role (even if not regarded as unproblematic) when presenting the results. Challenging this presupposition implies that the question of return needs to be reframed. The future might be neither religious nor secular, but something that we cannot imagine or foresee at this moment in time. Introducing a theory of complexity does not deal with or solve this methodological difficulty.

Even if "return" is mostly about increased religious activity, or a growing interest in the various spiritual practices of a population, or at a certain level of society, it sometimes also refers to a more limited phenomenon: the new visibility of religion in the public sphere, not least in the media. Talking about "the return of religion" in this sense does not imply a basic change in the role of religion in society, or a return in a literal sense, but that it is still an open question (a growing opinion against religion is also an example of visibility). This new visibility mirrors the new ethnic diversity of former homogenous (and secular) countries, caused by immigration and a heightened awareness of the religious dimensions of the political conflicts on the global scene (Furseth 2018). However, it is also plausible that this new visibility is connected to post-secularity as a cultural change in terms of a weakening of the inherited barriers from the Enlightenment that impeded talking about religion in the public sphere. Another connection, suggested by Habermas and mentioned already in this chapter, is the emergence of a new self-reflexive stance to the Enlightenment heritage that questions a secularist understanding of modernity.

A third meaning of the "return of religion" is the deprivatization of religion. Whereas "visibility" primarily refers to a new awareness of the presence of religion in society, deprivatization implies a factual and quantitative increase of religion in the public sphere. But this increase does not refer to phenomena such as "New Age" spirituality, which is central to

the Kendal study, but to the revitalization of those traditional religions that had been ruled out by social scientists as "marginal and irrelevant in the modern world" (Casanova 1994, 5). Deprivatization in this sense poses a real challenge to the part of the traditional secularization thesis that predicts a general decline in religion. Religious traditions throughout the world are, according to Casanova, "refusing to accept the marginal and privatized role which theories of modernity as well as theories of secularization had reserved for them" (ibid., 5). In his ground-breaking book *Public Religions in the Modern World* (1994), Casanova analyses examples from three different continents (Spain, Poland, Brazil and the United States) to substantiate his thesis.

If we make a threefold distinction between "return" in a strong sense and in a moderate and weak sense, deprivatization would belong to the moderate category. The re-emergence of the Orthodox Church in Russia would be an example of return in a strong sense: a substantial change at a macro-level that affects a whole country. The new visibility and different expressions of "New Age" spirituality in secular countries such as Sweden would indicate "return" in a weak sense, which is open to interpretation and does not necessarily contradict established theories of secularization. This attempt to determine the extent to which we can talk about a return of religion in society is imperfect in several senses and should be viewed as provisional. The new visibility sometimes also contains aspects of a factual increase in religion in, for example, the media. If this visibility is viewed as a symptom of a deeper shift in culture, a new awareness related to the revaluation of the Enlightenment heritage, the visibility itself, no matter what it is, would indicate the return of religion.

Post-secularity as a New Public Role for Religion

A sixth interpretive approach to the concept of post-secularity is the social philosophical one presented by Jürgen Habermas. He raises the idea that religious voices must be heard in a democratic society, but that when speaking from constitutionally influential positions, they need to adapt to the language use of secular society (Habermas 2006).

The Swedish sociologist of religion Anders Bäckström has argued that one can ask whether Habermas really believes that religious voices have an intrinsic value (Bäckström 2012). In the work mentioned, Habermas discusses John Rawls' concept of an impartial position with reference to which disagreement should be analysed and assessed, and whether this position is a secularly defined position. Habermas emphasizes that religious people's voices have something to add to the social dialogue about values, but at the same time argues that a religiously defined basis for constitutionally anchoring democratic values is not possible, because it would reduce the diversity of voices entitled to be heard in the public conversation.

At the end of his "Notes on Post-Secular Society", Habermas claims that:

> [T]he state's neutrality does not preclude the permissibility of religious utterances within the political public sphere, as long as the institutionalized decision-making process at the parliamentary, court, governmental and administrative levels remains clearly separated from the informal flows of political communication and opinion formation among the broader public of citizens. (Habermas 2008, 28)

This means that religious voices are welcome to take part in the "informal flows" mentioned, even when using religious language. However, according to Habermas, this constitutes a challenge to secularists in the form of an "expectation that secular citizens in civil society and the political public sphere must be able to meet their religious fellow citizens as equals" (ibid., 29). He also claims that "Secular citizens are expected not to exclude *a fortiori* that they may discover, even in religious utterances, semantic contents and covert personal intuitions that can be translated and introduced into a secular discourse" (ibid., 29).

Consequently, and at least in principle, this approach opens up for a dynamic process in discussions in which secular and religious voices meet in a common context of a mutual exchange of arguments, ideas and viewpoints. There are, according to this approach, democratically anchored borders to be respected in arenas for institutional decision-making processes, while at the same time informal societal and political dialogue helps to bridge gaps and unite.

Some Further Interpretations of the Concept of Post-secularity

The exposition of interpretations and different meanings of the concept of the post-secular presented in this introductory chapter are not exhaustive. Here we have only touched on central aspects of a large subject area. Two additional meanings, which are more peripheral but could be relevant for religious education, are also worth mentioning.

The post-secular could represent a trend in academic theology, sometimes with traditionalist or conservative elements, where in the talk about the "postmodern" and in the relativization of a secular perspective on human life as something historically contingent, some theologians see an opportunity to upgrade parts of an older theological tradition. If this trend continues, it could affect the content of religious education.

Finally, in Religious Studies—and especially in the sociology of religion—the concept of the post-secular could signify the development of a new concept formation for carrying out empirical studies of religious change in contemporary society. This is the approach recommended in the book *Post-Secular Society* (Frisk and Nynäs 2015). The elaboration of this conceptual formation does not mean that an a priori decision has been made as to whether society actually demonstrates post-secular traits or not, but rather enables an empirical investigation of such eventual traits in society. In this sense, the concept formation intends to be neutral, even if its use at the same time is a critical marker against previously too general and simplifying hypotheses—the so-called secularization thesis in its various guises—of an ongoing secularization of society.[3]

Notes

1. Authors' translation.
2. Authors' translation.
3. A much shorter version of the typology of different meanings and interpretations of the concept of the post-secular presented in this chapter can be found in the introduction to the book *The post-secular classroom* (Carlsson and Thalén 2015).

References

Ahlstrand, K., & Gunner, G. (Eds.). (2008). *Guds närmaste stad?: en studie om religionernas betydelse i ett svenskt samhälle i början av 2000-talet* [*God's Closest City?: A Study of the Significance of Religion in a Swedish Community at the Beginning of the 21st Century*]. Stockholm: Verbum.

Bäckström, A. (2012, November 2). Att leva i en postsekulär tid—vad menas med det? [Living in a Post-Secular Age—What Does This Mean?]. *Svensk kyrkotidning, 108*(23), 433–437.

Berger, P. L. (Ed.). (1999). *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Bruce, S. (2017). *Secular Beats Spiritual: The Westernization of the Easternization of the West*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Busch Thor, E. (2019, April 20). The Suburbs Would also Benefit from Christianity. *Expressen*. Retrieved August 25, 2019, from https://www.expressen.se/debatt/aven-fororten-skulle-ma-bra-av-en-kristen-grund/

Carlsson, D., & Thalén, P. (Eds.). (2015). *Det postsekulära klassrummet. Mot ett vidgat religionskunskapsbegrepp* [*The Postsecular Classroom. Towards an Expanded Concept of Religious Education*]. Uppsala, Sweden: Swedish Science Press.

Casanova, J. (1994). *Public Religions in the Modern World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Casanova, J. (2015). Are We Still Secular? Exploration on the Secular and the Post-secular. In P. Nynäs, M. Lassander, & T. Utriainen (Eds.), *Post-secular Society* (2nd ed., pp. 27–46). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Frisk, L., & Nynäs, P. (2015). Characteristics of Contemporary Religious Change: Globalization, Neoliberalism and Interpretative Tendencies. In P. Nynäs, M. Lassander, & T. Utriainen (Eds.), *Post-secular Society* (2nd ed., pp. 47–70). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Furseth, I. (Ed.). (2018). *Religious Complexity in the Public Sphere: Comparing Nordic Countries*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Habermas, J. (2006). Religion in the Public Sphere. *European Journal of Philosophy, 14*(1), 1–25. Retrieved August 25, 2019, from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1468-0378.2006.00241.x.

Habermas, J. (2008). Notes on Post-secular Society. *New Perspective Quarterly, 25*(4), 17–29, Wiley Online Library. Retrieved August 25, 2019, from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1540-5842.2008.01017.x.

Heelas, P., & Woodhead, L. (2005). *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Jonas, H. (1963). *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (2nd rev. ed.). Boston: Beacon Press.

Kurtén, T. (2014). *På väg mot det postsekulära: tankar under femton år* [*Towards the Post-secular: Thoughts in the Last Fifteen Years*]. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis.

Milbank, J. (2006). *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (2nd ed.). Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd..

Moberg, M., & Granholm, K. (2015). The Concept of the Post-secular and the Contemporary Nexus of Religion, Media, Popular Culture, and Consumer Culture. In P. Nynäs, M. Lassander, & T. Utriainen (Eds.), *Post-secular Society* (2nd ed., pp. 95–128). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Nynäs, P., Lassander, M., & Utriainen, T. (Eds.). (2015). *Post-secular Society* (2nd ed.). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Partridge, C. H. (2005). *The Re-enchantment of the West: Understanding Popular Culture*. London: T & T Clark International.

Schmitt, C. (2005 [1985]). *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (University of Chicago Press ed.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Sigurdson, O. (2009). *Det postsekulära tillståndet: religion, modernitet, politik* [*The Post-Secular Condition: Religion, Modernity, Politics*]. Göteborg: Glänta produktion.

Taylor, C. (2007). *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Thalén, P. (2019). En särställning för vad? Tolkningar av kristendomen i skolornas religionskunskapsundervisning [A Special Position for What? Interpretations of Christianity in Non-confessional Religious Education]. In O. Franck, E. hall, & B. Liljefors Persson (Eds.), *Religionskunskapsämnet i fokus: utmaningar och möjligheter* [*RE in Focus: Challenges and Opportunities*] (Vol. 50, pp. 66–81). Malmö: Föreningen lärare i religionskunskap jubileumsbok årgång.

Thurfjell, D. (Ed.). (2016). *Varför finns religion?* [*Why does Religion Exist?*]. Stockholm: Molin & Sorgenfrei.

Utriainen, T., Hovi, T., & Broo, M. (2015). Combining Choice and Destiny: Identity and Agency Within Post-secular Well-being Practices. In P. Nynäs, M. Lassander, & T. Utriainen (Eds.), *Post-secular Society* (2nd ed., pp. 187–216). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Voegelin, E. (2005). *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*. ISI Books, Intercollegiate Studies Institute.

Warner, R. (2010). *Secularization and Its Discontents*. London: Continuum.

2

Religious Education, Post-secularity and Neoliberalism

Nigel Fancourt

Introduction

Current arguments about the place of religious education in schooling often appeal to the notion of the post-secular. This notion evidently alludes to the idea that contemporary society is somehow beyond a previous 'secular' condition, and these current arguments for recognising a post-secular turn take two forms: one is descriptive, in suggesting that there has been an empirical shift in governance and policy away from the secular; the other is normative, in prescriptively arguing for such a shift. The salient aspects of the post-secular are a critique of both the notion of a neutral secularity in the education sphere, in that education should take religion(s) seriously since education will be inextricably bound up with religion in some way, and the notion that religions can be presented neutrally. Post-secularity therefore is about recognition of an inevitable

N. Fancourt (✉)
University of Oxford, Oxford, UK
e-mail: nigel.fancourt@education.ox.ac.uk

O. Franck, P. Thalén (eds.), *Religious Education in a Post-Secular Age*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47503-1_2

positionality, and this has challenges for those countries which have adopted a non-confessional model of religious education.

However, an understanding of the place of religious education in a post-secular age is likely to be played out within neoliberal governance (Hill and Kumar 2009), especially in seeing the transactional market as the basic preferred model of economic and social organisation. This perspective has come to dominate educational policy around the world; similarly, it has a descriptive or analytical strand, identifying where and how it operates, as well as a normative strand, in arguing for its benefits.

This chapter first outlines the post-secular, describing its emergence across the globe, then exploring one set of arguments for its explicit adoption, from Jürgen Habermas, and also considering the implications for religious education. Then, neoliberalism is treated similarly, specifically outlining the effects of neoliberalism on education—and specifically religious education—in England, before considering the ideas of one neoliberal thinker: Milton Friedman. Finally, the interrelationship between these two ideas is considered, hypothesising that confessional forms of religious education are likely to thrive in a post-secular, neoliberal culture of governance, but the pluralistic models may struggle to articulate their value.

The Emergence of the Post-secular

The salient aspect of the post-secular turn is new recognition of the place of religions within the public sphere (Habermas 2008). This is partly empirical, in recognising that the secularisation thesis does not give a full account of the diversity of religiosity and spirituality, and that the traditional polarisation of religion and the secular is simplistic, with nuances of both religion and non-religion within the public sphere (e.g. Berger 1999; Casanova 1994). First, the diversity of different religious beliefs both around the world and within Western societies, including new forms of global Islam or complex patterns of migration from Christian countries outside Europe, as well as the emergence of different forms of non-religion, such as New Atheism or Humanism, has caused many to question increasingly the claim that religion is on the decline.

The Western pattern of secularisation over much of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries was not—as many imagined—a modernising pattern for all societies, but rather a geographically specific occurrence: Enlightenment rationality was not the inevitable future of all humanity, towards which all human thought would develop, but rather the limited manifestation of one continent—the exception not the rule (Davie 2002).

Moreover, sociologists have long recognised that there was a difference between public and private secularisation (e.g. Casanova 1994). The former was based on separating religion, and specifically the church, from involvement in what became to be seen as the functions of the state—law, politics, administration, medicine and education. The latter is found in the loss of faith and weakening of observance by individuals. The United States is perhaps the most obvious example of a state with an ostensibly secular constitution and no established religious affiliation, but which is marked by strong manifestations of private religiosity. Even in France, the development of secularity and 'laïcité' during the later nineteenth century was in tandem with new patterns of religiosity: the building of Montmartre in Paris, and establishment of Lourdes and Lisieux as sites of pilgrimage (e.g. Raynaud 2019); most recently the public outpouring for the fire at Notre-Dame in Paris shows its ongoing significance in the French national imaginary (e.g. Tesson 2019). Sociologists have also increasingly recognised that there are various categories of non-religious perspectives (Lee 2015). A further facet of this reappraisal of the place of religions was marked by recognition of new forms of religious vitality that cut through state secularity or non-religion; Christian missionary activity in China or Korea, renewed religious nationalism in India, Turkey or Myanmar, and resurgent forms of violent militant Islam in Iraq or Syria could not be ignored in making sense of global events.

Habermas: Religion and the Public Sphere

This empirical turn is matched by more normative discussions, since if the sociological assumption that religion has little place in contemporary society is naïve and untenable, then its legitimate place must be identified and determined, and this in turn raises questions about

the nature of the secular, secularity and secularism (Habermas 2006; Habermas 2008). These discussions grow out of existing discussions within many Western democracies between broadly multiculturalist arguments for acceptance and incorporation of different religious positions into the public sphere, and more rigid 'secularist' arguments for the neutrality of the public sphere and the denuding of religiosity at the public threshold. The former are represented by attempts to create an impartial public space but runs the risk of creating an anodyne undifferentiated multifaith stew, and which can therefore lead to the impulse to then distinguish between multi-culturalism and inter-culturalism. The latter attempt to ensure that the public space is devoid of religious claims and arguments, but runs the risk of adopting either an imperialising rationalism or else being crypto-Christian, in that European traditions of thought and indeed definitions of 'religion' are inevitably infused by a post-Christian lens.

Any proposed solutions to the post-secular dilemma need to convince other theorists both that there is a *new* dilemma, and that their new solution is reasonable. There are differences of opinion in how to address these issues, for instance between Taylor (2011) and Habermas (2006, 2008, 2011, see also Spohn 2015). Here we focus on Habermas's recent argument, which is that religion has a place within the public sphere because 'enlightened reason unavoidably loses its grip on the images, preserved in religion, of the moral whole…as collectively binding ideals' which help sustain communal life (Habermas 2011, 19), but that in coming to this sphere, religion 'must open itself up to the normatively grounded expectation that it should recognise for reasons of its own the neutrality of the state towards worldviews, the equal freedom of all religious communities, and the independence of institutionalised sciences' (21). If this plea has been largely welcomed by some religious voices (e.g. Schmidt 2011), other commentators have questioned whether this right of entry is rather too determined by secular criteria (Brieskorn 2011; Singh 2012): in coming to the table too much has to be left at the door. Nevertheless, the broad argument is tenable.

Post-secularity and Religious Education

The implications of both the post-secular condition and a post-secular perspective have been keenly debated with the world of religious education. They are welcomed because they support the importance of religious education within the public sphere (Bowie et al. 2012; Hannam 2018), but they also raise some questions about the aims and pedagogy of the subject (Carr 2012; Castelli 2012). Countries that had previously eschewed any form of religious education in public schooling have come to adopt it, in one form or another; the example of France is instructive, in the introduction of the 'teaching of religious facts'[1] (Debray 2002) as a cross-curricular theme. This was developed both to address a perceived religious illiteracy, in that pupils could not understand much of French history or literature without an understanding of religious terms or beliefs, and to respond to the increasing numbers of religious minorities, notably Muslims and Buddhists. Here, a previously secular curriculum became post-secular, in accepting some discussion of religions—even if a contradictory policy banned *hijab* in schools. By contrast, in countries that had previously introduced some form of pluralistic, impartial religious education, it has led to arguments for the inclusion of non-religious worldviews. Thus, in England, there are moves to relabel it as 'religions and worldviews', so that all pupils are better equipped to present their own views in the public sphere (RE Commission 2018).

For faith schools and confessional religious education, the implications are more complex. To welcome religion to the public sphere at least implicitly suggests that they might have a part to play in this. Indeed, Habermas's model of 'religious citizens' who are able to articulate their beliefs in the public space is—perhaps unsurprisingly—compatible with the current Post-Westphalian German model of denominational religious education (Knauth 2007). German parents select the type of religious education (or simply ethics) they would prefer for their child, who then attends those classes in their state school, with Lutherans, Catholics, Muslims and non-religious pupils being taught separately. Habermas simply demands that this existing learning could contribute to and be recognised in the public sphere. The only caveat is that if religious citizens

are to be enabled to present their values and beliefs in the public sphere, then they should be able to articulate their own tradition in an outwardly presentable form, but they also need to be ready to respond to others' articulations of their own beliefs. As a result of these parallel demands, Boeve (2012) shows how Catholic education in Belgium was paradoxically criticised for being both too Catholic in not preparing pupils for diversity, and not Catholic enough in not preparing them properly within their own tradition.

The Rise of Neoliberalism in Education

This debate about the post-secular is important, and the consequences of reshaping religious education and schooling in the light of these ideas need much development, but the argument adopted here is that this needs to be seen alongside other changes in the political and cultural economy of schooling, notably the rise of neoliberalism. Indeed, an understanding of neoliberal influences on religious education gives an insight not only into one aspect of neoliberalism in education, but also into an understanding of neoliberal governance of religions, which is increasingly of academic interest (e.g. Gauthier and Martikainen 2013; Martikainen and Gauthier 2013).

This process can be approached descriptively, in showing how policy has changed, as well as normatively, in considering more theoretical arguments. Neoliberalism is recognised as the key policy driver of contemporary education policy in many countries, marked typically by marketisation in and of schooling, a focus on employability as the defining aim of education, and high stakes testing within and between states (Hill and Kumar 2009). Stephen Ball (1990; Bowe and Ball 1992; Ball 2006; Ball and Junemann 2012) has charted its history and effects in education policy in England, from Thatcherism to the present day. He suggests that until 1980s, debates in education were between two broad political voices. First, there was a long-standing neoconservative view of education, which valued traditional models of schooling, including the famous elite independent schools and the existing selective three-tier structure of secondary education, and a respect for established disciplines of knowledge

in the curriculum. In contrast to this essentially nostalgic perspective, there was also a futuristic progressive view, which was largely leftist and envisioned education as having a vital role in creating a new and fairer future, associated with New Deal policies and Keynesian welfare economics (Kavanagh 1987). In England, this manifested itself educationally in such policies as an attack on the elitism of independent schools, the development of comprehensives in place of selection, the expansion of higher education and a more child-centred approach to learning.

Religious education occupied an ambivalent position. For the traditionalists, religious education was positioned as an important part of English heritage and culture, so that, without being strongly confessional, it had a place in sustaining the English constitutional arrangement of religion and state. The existing church schools could flourish, and state schools could promote an easy comprise of inter-denominational church teaching. Religious education was envisioned as an ethical and spiritual formation within the English context, kept uncontroversial by the prohibition on confessional teaching in state schools, but simultaneously the provision of church schools.

For progressives, its place was more complex. On the one hand, the broadly Leftist policies underpinning progressive views were critical of religion and religious institutions, and even if theirs was not Marxist atheism, they often held a degree of agnosticism or suspicion; on this view, church schools and religious education were at least unnecessary. On the other hand, the arrival of waves of colonial and post-colonial immigrants from South Asia and Africa in 1960s and 1970s presented a new multicultural challenge. It was some decades before a faith school that was not Christian could be established—excluding the incorporation of the Jews' Free School into London in 1958 (Black 1998)—but religious education in state schools changed rapidly in response to the different communities' religions, notably in Birmingham in 1975.

Into this long running policy debate, neoliberalism erupted under Margaret Thatcher, challenging the consensus between capital and labour (Kavanagh 1987). At policy level, many of the shared assumptions about employment, welfare, public ownership and relations with unions were abandoned. Across education, Thatcherite policies led to several major structural changes. These included the marketisation of schools, in that

while they did not become private, parents were given more freedom to choose between different schools:

> Our Parents' Charter will place a clear duty on government and local authorities to take account of parents' wishes when allocating children to schools. (Conservative Party 1979, in Gillard 2018)

Indeed, there were also vouchers to enable parents to send their pupils to independent schools—the Assisted Places Scheme. The introduction of systematic testing with published results at the end of three stages of education meant that parents had information to depend on for school selection, as well as inspection reports. Further, schools could opt out of local government control. The introduction of a national curriculum also enabled more comparability in the tests and enabled the government to challenge what it saw as the problem of child-based learning.

However, a striking feature of neoliberalism is that, in the United Kingdom at least, it always occurred with one of the other two policy voices. Under Thatcher, it was allied to neoconservatism, as the New Right. This could mean that some policies were contradictory (see Coulby and Bash 1991), such as both the promotion of a traditional curriculum, with strong academic disciplinary structures, alongside the promotion of a more neoliberal vocational education, with more flexible work-focused qualifications. This was followed by Blair's centrist combination of progressive and neoliberal policies, under 'New Labour' (British Labour Party 1996). For instance, school choice was further encouraged with the development of academies, outside the usual local structures, as was the promotion of church and other faith schools (Blair 2008). Under the Conservative/Liberal-Democrat Coalition, Gove's policies were essentially a return to the previous Conservative traditionalist-neoliberal compromise (Wright 2012), with further neoliberal marketisation through the academies and free schools programme, but a traditionalist return to a disciplinary curriculum. However, schools' autonomy could prove problematic when issues of national security arose (Arthur 2015), and students' religious identities (typically Muslim) could become perceived as problematic if they rejected those neoliberal outcomes of success and employability in favour of a more religious aspiration (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood 2017).

This trajectory of neoliberalism would have important implications for religious education, and the subject was shaped and framed in complex and often contradictory ways under both the New Right, New Labour and the Coalition. Under Thatcher's government, the key policy voices were either neoconservative, envisioning it as its traditional role, or neoliberal, sceptical of its value per se, but both were keen to stamp out more progressive child-centred versions (Fancourt 2015). A key policy advisor, Baroness Cox believed that 'teaching about Christianity has either been diluted to a multifaith relativism or has become little more than a secularised discussion of social and political issues' (Cox 1988, 4), and this view influenced the wording of various iterations of curriculum guidance on religious education. Because the subject retained its long-standing local governance model, it was outside of the direct neoliberalisation of much of schooling (Smalley 2019); however, the focus on examinations and testing also shaped the formulation of the subject in policy, with explicit assessment criteria out as a key feature (Kay 2002; Fancourt 2015). Under New Labour, religious education was shaped by a combination of progressive and neoliberal voices. Some of the traditionalist focus on disciplines and the emphasis in Christianity were reduced, replaced by a progressive focus on social or community cohesion—given new weight by the events of 9/11—notably through its links to the new subject of Citizenship, though this was not unproblematic (see Moulin 2012). However, the principles of parental choice and accountability through examinations remained, so that church or faith school provision expanded (Walford 2008), including Muslim state-funded schools (Breen 2018). Under the Coalition, there was a burgeoning of schools with a religious affiliation, whether as academies or as Free Schools. However, religious education was demoted within the curriculum by being excluded from the 'English Baccalaureate' (Farrell 2014); schools were obliged to show their examination performance in a group of eight more valued subjects, and religious education was neither included within the list as a subject nor as an option—despite remaining compulsory.

Two points emerge from this brief account of the effects of neoliberalism on religious education policy in England. First, neoliberalism's effects through its compromises with other policy voices should be recognised. The account here focuses on one country, though these effects can

arguably be seen across Europe (Fancourt 2013), and specifically in Sweden (Fancourt 2017). Second, any account of changes to religious education needs to consider not only wider structural shifts towards a post-secular approach but also the effects of wider educational policy. Thus, the suggestion that members of religious traditions should articulate their points of view in the public space would support faith schools and teaching about discrete traditions within pluralistic religious education, but such schooling or curriculum would also be subject to wider policy forces.

Milton Friedman: Transactional Freedom

In order to take the analysis of neoliberalism further, and especially to consider the inter-relationship between normative voices of neoliberalism and post-secularism, it is helpful to focus on one key neoliberal thinker, the economist Milton Friedman, because of his influence on policy internationally. The key features of neoliberalism are at first sight somewhat removed from discussion of the post-secular, so his wider argument needs some exposition.

Friedman's clarion call, for what he simply termed 'liberalism', was his 1962 collection of lectures 'Capitalism and Freedom' (Friedman 2002); the title identifies the two principles that he considers inextricably linked. He later expanded on these ideas in 'Free to Choose', co-authored with his wife (Friedman and Friedman 1980). His starting premise was that to ensure freedom, 'the scope of government must be limited' (Friedman 2002, 2), and he supported this claim with examples of government interventions that were, in his view, unsuccessful, oppressive or coercive. His reputation is largely based on his views on economic policy, and especially the advocacy of a 'monetarist' position, arguing that governments failed when they attempted to regulate value or prices, for example through a commodity standard (e.g. gold) or discretionary authorities; they should simply ensure that a 'free private enterprise exchange economy' (Friedman 2002, 13) is in place. His views represented a contrast to the prevailing Keynesian approach, which presumed the role of government in monetary policies (Keynes 1936). His second claim is that

voluntary exchange, which would be self-regulating through the pricing mechanism, should be the preferred model for all economic and social interaction. The individual should be free to enter into contracts for whatever products or services they can offer and want, across any aspect of their life, rather than government deciding for them.

Friedman did not reject the need for government, considering that it had three broad roles. First, it should be the democratic forum for determining the rules of the market, and then to uphold and enforce these rules. His ideas were developed in the context of 1950s and 1960s, when the example of totalitarian rule in the USSR loomed large, so he wanted 'to nudge the change in opinion towards greater reliance on individual initiative and voluntary cooperation, rather than towards the other extreme of total collectivism' (Friedman and Friedman 1980, 7); these ideas echoed the other leading neoliberal thinker, Hayek (1944), who condemned any form—Left or Right—of centralised planning. Second, Friedman recognised that in some situations, a truly voluntary market would not operate, either through a technical monopoly, because realistically no-one could ever provide similar services, or through 'neighbourhood effects', when one individual's actions affect others without their consent or affect them so badly that reparation is impossible. The third role was in those situations when governments would have to act paternalistically, in protecting those who are considered not responsible: the insane and children. However, he felt that paternalistic reasoning could be over-used to justify a high degree of intervention in education.

The implications for education of this approach are striking, and indeed Friedman addresses education early in both works—immediately after discussing various economic policies. He distinguishes between a 'general education for citizenship', defined as 'a minimum degree of literacy and knowledge…and…some common values', and 'vocational education', defined as 'a form of investment in human capital' (Friedman 2002, 86). The difference is important, in that a child's general education accrues to everyone's welfare in building a democratic society, but vocational education—broadly meaning here higher education—does not. If general education is essential for all, he held that parents nevertheless have the right to choose whatever form they wish for their children, but this right has been usurped by the state:

> For schooling, this sickness has taken the form of denying parents control over the kind of schooling their children receive… power has instead gravitated to professional educators. (Friedman and Friedman 1980, 151–152)

Not only was this a political 'sickness', but they also considered that the contemporaneous quality of teaching was low as a result. Thus, whilst the government should protect basic standards, schools should essentially be independent to adopt whatever ethos they choose, and which parents could then select for their child, through a voucher scheme. The law of supply and demand would thereby foster more effective schools since popular schools would be replicated and unpopular schools would close, and 'the development and improvement of all schools would be stimulated' (Friedman 2002, 93). To achieve this, parents would have to know the educational outcomes of the different schools, through league tables, necessitating public demonstration of results.

Religious Education and Neoliberal Theory

These principles have important consequences for the place of religions in education. Religious organisations would be free to run schools, and parents could choose according to their faith. Indeed, the argument for allowing faith schooling pre-empts some post-secular critiques of state schooling:

> Public schools teach religion, too—not a formal, theistic religion, but a set of beliefs and values that constitute a religion in all but name. The present arrangements abridge the religious freedom of parents who do not accept the religion taught by public schools yet are forced to pay to have their children indoctrinated with it, and to pay still more to have their children escape indoctrination. (Friedman and Friedman 1980, 164)

Here, the lack of neutrality in public education is set out, and the right therefore for parental choice of nurture into a religious tradition within publicly funded schooling. The argument here arises out of the US context, where religious schools are essentially private and there is no religious education in most state schools, but it had significant implications

in the English context, particularly in early 1980s, for supporting the dual system of faith and state schools, which had hitherto seemed outdated.

A neoliberal view of religious education is therefore marked by three features. The first is implicit in Friedman's approach to school ethos, in that it is almost entirely a matter for the school to decide what it might provide and for parents to decide to choose it; the only caveat is that the schools could not offer anything undemocratic or divisive. Second, as noted above, there was a suspicion that the school curriculum in many state schools was not neutral, echoed in the English context by Baroness Cox (1988) in terms of religious education. Third, attention to vocational and professional education as a twin aspect of schooling has implications for curriculum design, and the place and value of different subjects within it. Although Friedman does not spell out the detail of curriculum design, the close coupling of economic freedom with political freedom raises questions about the overall goals of education.

Post-secularity and Neoliberalism

The current arguments for a post-secular turn in religious education will if realised inevitably be played out within a neoliberal policy landscape, both for schools and increasingly for religions themselves. If these two perspectives are placed together, there are three broad implications. First, arguments for faith schooling find stronger support. From a post-secular perspective, if one cannot realistically choose between religious and non-religious positions, then there can be no fundamental objection to faith schooling. Further, if religious voices are to enter the public sphere in an articulate fashion, then pupils need a well-developed understanding of their own position. From a neoliberal perspective, within a marketised education system, there is even more justification for allowing different ethos-based schools to flourish, and it is no longer the role of the state to intervene beyond ensuring basic conformity. Indeed, this development parallels the neoliberalisation of the governance of religions, in that a spiritual 'marketplace' emerges, in which they compete for adherents, who behave as consumers (Gauthier and Martikainen 2013). Provision

of successful schooling might well form part of this process, in that popular schools might attract or at least retain existing members of a religion or denomination, and building a school also becomes a suitable project on which religious charities can spend their donations (see Chong 2013), though this (literally) comes at a cost, in that religious schooling and affiliation is now commodified.

Second, however, the place of non-confessional religious education in state schools is thrown into doubt because its impartiality is in question from both post-secular and neoliberal positions. Habermas's argument is that all pupils need to learn how to articulate their own perspectives, so that specifically religious views should not be preferred over other worldviews, and thus religious and therefore worldview education would be to both nurture pupils within their own tradition and give them the opportunity to develop a sense of debate within the public sphere. Moreover, broadly progressive multicultural arguments that have underpinned much pluralistic religious education are no longer explicitly valued from a neoliberal perspective—indeed Friedman was suspicious of them. While some schools might choose to offer pluralistic religious education, and some parents might choose those schools, it cannot be insisted upon across all schools, given acceptance of freedom of belief. There is a difficult balance between allowing a diversity of forms of religious education because parents have the right to choose, and insisting on one form of it that provides for the articulation of both one's own position and the competencies for debate in the public sphere.

Third, the increasingly important neoliberal outcomes of education are seen as being about performance in high-stakes testing, both for pupils and for schools. This is both a competition between countries, through international league tables (Meyer and Benavot 2013), as well as between schools. The success of faith schools is pragmatically to be as much about pupils' attainment as about religiosity (Andrews and Johnes 2016). Therefore, the issue both for traditional confessional religious education and for secular non-confessional education is the same, in that they do not automatically offer the examinable performativity required by a neoliberal regime. A post-secular perspective could argue for the importance of religious education within the public sphere, and therefore its inclusion in the examined curriculum, though this is to accept the logic of the neoliberal agenda about how subjects are to be valued.

Overall, there is an unresolved tension between different conceptions of socio-political interaction. Habermas focuses on the public sphere, as the space where the system of the state and the economy meets the life-world of the community, which is founded on solidarity and shared meaning; the market is one part of the administrative system, but has no place in communal life, whereas religion is a sustainer of the community (Habermas 1975). Friedman instead replaces this with a network of transactions. Society is a collection of individuals coming together in voluntary exchange when their interests require it; the market is the fundamental model of social relations, so that individuals or schools do not have to over-concern themselves with the common good as that is produced by the pricing mechanism, and religion is a private concern.

Conclusion

By drawing on two individual theories of the post-secular and neoliberalism, religious education is shown to be caught between multiple interacting forces within the cultural economy of school governance. Any new initiatives, such as responses to the recent report in England by the RE Commission (2018), will need to recognise both. On the one hand, a normative move towards a post-secular perspective potentially favours both more confessional religious education and an even wider religions and worldviews education; on the other hand, neoliberalism favours an agnostic marketplace of schools within which faith schools can flourish given parents' right to choose, but puts little store by any subject lacking in employability skills. The challenge for articulating a post-secular religious education is in responding to both the internal tensions of post-secularity, and to the external tensions caused by educational neoliberalism.

Note

1. *L'enseignement du fait religieux.*

References

Andrews, J., & Johnes, R. (2016). *Faith Schools, Pupil Performance and Social Selection*. London: Education Policy Institute.

Arthur, J. (2015). Extremism and Neo-liberal Education Policy: A Contextual Critique of the Trojan Horse Affair in Birmingham Schools. *British Journal of Educational Studies, 63*(3), 311–328.

Ball, S. (1990). *Politics and Policy Making in Education: Explorations in Policy Sociology*. London: Routledge.

Ball, S. (2006). *Education Policy and Social Class*. London: Routledge.

Ball, S., & Junemann, C. (2012). *Networks, New Governance and Education*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Berger, P. (Ed.). (1999). *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*. Grand Rapids: Ethics and Public Policy Centre.

Black, G. (1998). *J.F.S. The History of the Jews' Free School, London, since 1732*. London: Tymsder Publishing.

Blair, T. (2008), Faith in an Interdependent World. *New Perspectives Quarterly*, *25,* 30–32.

Boeve, L. (2012). Religious Education in a Post-secular and Post-Christian Context. *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, *33*(2), 143–156.

Bowe, R., & Ball, S. with Gold, A. (1992). *Reforming Education and Changing Schools*. London: Routledge.

Bowie, B., Peterson, A., & Revell, L. (2012). Post-secular Trends: Issues in Education and Faith. *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, *33*(2), 139–141.

Breen, D. (2018). Critical Race Theory, Policy Rhetoric and Outcomes: The Case of Muslim Schools in Britain. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *21*(1), 30–44.

Brieskorn, N. (2011). On the Attempt to Recall a Relationship. In J. Habermas et al. (Eds.), *An Awareness of What is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-secular Age* (pp. 24–35). Cambridge: Polity.

British Labour Party. (1996). *New Labour, New Life for Britain*. London: British Labour Party.

Carr, D. (2012). Post-secularism, Religious Knowledge and Religious Education. *Journal of Beliefs & Values, 33*(2), 157–168.

Casanova, J. (1994). *Public Religions and the Modern World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Castelli, M. (2012). Faith Dialogue as a Pedagogy for a Post Secular Religious Education. *Journal of Beliefs & Values, 33*(2), 207–216.

Chong, A. (2013). Neoliberalism and Counterterrorism Laws: Impact on Australian Muslim Community Organisations. In T. Martikainen, & F. Gauthier (Eds.), *Religion in a Neoliberal Age: Political Economy and Modes of Governance* (pp. 161–176). Abingdon: Routledge.

Coulby, D., & Bash, L. (Eds.). (1991). *Contradiction and Conflict: The 1988 Education Act in Action*. London: Cassell.

Cox, C. (1988). Foreword. In J. Burn and C. Hart (eds.) *The Crisis in Religious Education.* (pp. 1–3). London: The Educational Research Trust.

Davie, G. (2002). *Europe: The Exceptional Case. Parameters of Faith in the Modern World*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd.

Debray, R. (2002). *L'enseignement du fait religieux dans l'école laïque*. Paris: Odile Jacob.

Fancourt, N. (2013). Religious Education across Europe: Contexts in Policy Scholarship. In J. Everington, G. Skeie, I. ter Avest, & S. Miedema (Eds.), *Exploring Context in Religious Education Research* (pp. 193–211). Münster: Waxmann.

Fancourt, N. (2015). Re-defining 'Learning about Religion' and 'Learning from Religion': A Study of Policy Change. *British Journal of Religious Education*, *37*(2), 122–137.

Fancourt, N. (2017). Assessment in Ethics Education: Neoliberalism, Values and Alignment, In O. Franck (ed.) *Assessment in Ethics Education: A Case of National Tests in Religious Education*. (pp. 163–175) Cham: Springer.

Farrell, F. (2014). A Critical Investigation of the Relationship between Masculinity, Social Justice, Religious Education and the Neo-liberal Discourse. *Education & Training, 56*(7), 650–662.

Friedman, M. (2002). *Capitalism and Freedom* (3rd ed.). Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Friedman, M., & Friedman, R. (1980). *Free to Choose*. London: Martin Secker and Warburg.

Gauthier, F., & Martikainen, T. (Eds.). (2013). *Religion in Consumer Society: Brands, Consumers and Markets*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Gillard, D. (2018). Education in England: A History. Retrieved from www.educationengland.org.uk/history

Habermas, J. (1975). *Legitimation Crisis* [Legitimationsprobleme im Spätkapitalismus. T. McCarthy, trans.]. Boston: Beacon Press.

Habermas, J. (2006). Religion in the Public Sphere. *European Journal of Philosophy, 14*(1), 1–25.

Habermas, J. (2008). Notes on Post-secular Society. *New Perspectives Quarterly*, *25*, 17–29.

Habermas, J. (2011). An Awareness of What is Missing. In J. Habermas et al. (Eds.), *An Awareness of What is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-secular Age* (pp. 15–23). Cambridge: Polity.

Hannam, P. (2018). *Religious Education in the Public Sphere*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Hayek, F. (1944). *The Road to Serfdom*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Hill, D., & Kumar, R. (2009). *Global Neoliberalism and Education and Its Consequences*. London: Routledge.

Kavanagh, D. (1987). *Thatcherism and British Politics: The End of Consensus?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kay, W. (2002). Political Perspectives on Church Schools and Religious Education: A Discussion of the Period from Thatcher to Blair. *Educational Studies, 28*(1), 61–75.

Keynes, J. M. (1936). *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*. London: Harvest and Harcourt Brace.

Knauth, T. (2007) Religious Education in Germany: A Contribution to Dialogue or Sources of Conflict? Historical and Contextual Analysis of the Development since the 1960s. In R. Jackson, S. Miedema, W. Weisse and J.-P. Willaime (Eds.) *Religion and Education in Europe: Developments, Contexts and Debates*. (pp. 243–266) Münster: Waxmann.

Lee, L. (2015). *Recognizing the Non-religious: Reimagining the Secular*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mac an Ghaill, M., & Haywood, C. (Eds.). (2017). *Muslim Students, Education and Neoliberalism: Schooling a 'Suspect Community'*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Martikainen, T., & Gauthier, F. (Eds.). (2013). *Religion in a Neoliberal Age: Political Economy and Modes of Governance*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Meyer, H.-D., & Benavot, A. (Eds.). (2013). *PISA, Power and Policy—The Emergence of Global Educational Governance*. Southampton: Symposium Books.

Moulin, D. (2012). Religious Education in England after 9/11. *Religious Education, 107*(2), 158–169.

Raynaud, P. (2019). *La Laïcité: Histoire d'une Singularité Française*. Paris: Gallimard.

RE Commission. (2018). *Final Report. Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward. A National Plan for RE*. London: Religious Education Council.

Schmidt, J. (2011). A Dialogue in Which There can be Only Winners. In J. Habermas et al. (Eds.), *An Awareness of What is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-secular Age* (pp. 59–71). Cambridge: Polity.

Singh, A. (2012). Habermas' Wrapped Reichstag: Limits and Exclusions in the Discourse of Post-secularism. *European Review*, 20, 131–147.

Smalley, P. (2019). A Critical Policy Analysis of Local Religious Education in England. *British Journal of Religious Education*, *42*(3), 263–274.

Spohn, U. (2015). A Difference in Kind? Jürgen Habermas and Charles Taylor on Post-secularism, *The European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms*, *20*(2), 120–135.

Taylor, C. (2011). What Does Secularism Mean? In C. Taylor (Ed.), *Dilemmas and Connections: Selected Essays* (pp. 326–346). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Tesson, S. (2019). *Notre-Dame de Paris: Ô Reine de Douleurs*. Paris: Equateurs.

Walford, G. (2008). Faith-Based Schools in England after Ten Years of Tony Blair. *Oxford Review of Education, 34*(4), 689–699.

Wright, A. (2012). Fantasies of Empowerment: Mapping Neoliberal Discourse in the Coalition Government's Schools Policy. *Journal of Education Policy*, *27*(3), 279–294.

3

Dealing with Religion in Education in Post-religious and Post-secular Times

Geir Skeie

Introduction

In the broad picture, institutionalised education represents the memory of society as well as aspirations for the future. Through educational policy and curricula, certain values and a stock of knowledge are employed in socialisation of new generations of citizens. The aim is to instil in students the qualifications and competencies they need for maintaining and developing the same society in the future. With education being such a key institution, it seems appropriate to assume that the place and role of religion in education tells something important about the role of religion in society. Historically, education used to be a religious enterprise, and then it became secular. The question raised in the title is what the concept of a post-secular society may contribute to the understanding of religion in education.

G. Skeie (✉)
University of Stavanger, Stavanger, Norway
e-mail: geir.skeie@uis.no

O. Franck, P. Thalén (eds.), *Religious Education in a Post-Secular Age*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47503-1_3

As already suggested, education can be seen both as a social and institutional enterprise and as an idea about the future. We can assume that in former time education was more preoccupied with the transmission and preservation of tradition than trying to predict the needs of the future, since future was considered to be an extension of the past. Those times are gone, and today the aims of education attempt to anticipate and respond to present challenges and what is expected in years to come. This is, however, not without problems. The insecurity and risk related to the future from the perspective of adults sometimes lead them to imagine that young people are more competent in this: seeing them as pilots of the future (Skeie 2006).

In practice, we depend on the past and the present when we try to predict the future, and even research-based knowledge is completely dependent on data already collected, because there are no data on humans and on social life from the future, only from the past (Skeie 2020).[1] The idea that we live in post-secular times is therefore an attempt to use observations from the past and present in order to discuss opportunities and challenges of the future. Therefore, the discourse about the concept post-secular is both referring to empirical studies and normative debates.

The normative perspective can be seen in Habermas' discussion of the post-secular, where he clearly states that the possible learning coming out of new insights in the post-secular condition has to be accepted by social actors; it is not a result of evolution:

> From what perspective may we claim that the fragmentation of a political community, if it is caused by a collision of fundamentalist and secularist camps, can be traced back to 'learning deficits'? Let us bring to mind here the change in perspective which we have made when moving from a normative explanation of an ethics of citizenship to an epistemological investigation of the cognitive preconditions for the rational expectation that citizens are able to meet the corresponding obligations. A change in epistemic attitudes must occur for the religious consciousness to become reflective and the secularist consciousness to transcend its limitations. But it is only from the viewpoint of a specific, normatively charged self-understanding of Modernity that we can qualify these mentality changes as complementary 'learning processes'. (Habermas 2006, 18)

In the discussion following Habermas' 2006 publication, it has been discussed how fruitful the label 'post-secular' is, in terms of describing the situation in Europe, but also how realistic it is to expect the types of 'learning processes' he suggests. While the main point for Habermas is to limit certain types of 'secularism', it may be asked whether he is giving a fair account of 'religion' (Holst and Molander 2015). Even if Habermas is not referring to educational institutions with his term 'learning processes', the project he is arguing in political theory could be imagined as relevant for religious education (Watson 2012). My main point in the following is to show that issues raised as part of the discourse about the 'post-secular' should be seen as a possibility to address some issues of religion and education today, drawing on a historical perspective. I will do this partly by exploring some aspects of religion in education in Scandinavia, with a particular focus on the role of religious education.

Religion in Secular Education

Religion is among other things a social institution and the relationship between organised religion and today's secular states are both ambiguous and certainly complex (Martínez-Torrón and Durham 2012). Education, another social institution, is more deeply embedded in the apparatus of the nation state than religion in many European nations of today. It can be described as 'secular', meaning that education is for all, serving general purposes irrespective of the religion and beliefs of individual students. In some way or another, religion is usually part of education, and this can to some extent be traced by investigating how a distinct religious education subject is legitimated and legally anchored.[2] As I will return to towards the end, religion also comes in other forms and shapes.

The organisational setup for religious education varies a lot, and so do the attempts to capture this in academic terms or models (Schreiner 2014; Bråten 2014; Cush 2011; Alberts 2006). When national models are described in some more detail, the picture becomes even more complex (Rothgangel et al. 2014a, b; Rothgangel et al. 2016; Davis and Miroshnikova 2013). Bearing in mind the historically close relationship between Christian churches and the developing educational system in

Europe, the variations of the institutional setup of religious education today tell different stories about the relationship between state and religion. There are few school subjects with a similar variation in organisation, aims, content and teaching methods across national contexts. The first lesson from history and present situation is therefore that the relation between education and religion is complex, changing and heavily dependent on context in a way that cannot easily be described by referring to a post-secular situation.

Implicit in these remarks about the relationship between religion and education is that they suggest that religion have moved from a central to a more peripheral position, but that this general picture covers a range of variations. Education understood as an essentially 'secular' institution is perhaps most clear-cut in cases where religious education does not play a role in public education. This is the case in countries like France, United States and India, with no religious education, and an explicitly 'secular' public education system. One might conclude that religion is of little importance in these countries, which is hardly the case. Regarding the education system, it needs to be said that in these countries, like many others, there is a significant religiously based (private) school sector. While faith-based schools are subject to general educational policies, they do have greater freedom, particularly when it comes to religion in education. This testifies to the importance of religion to the population of these countries, but it also points towards the division between the public and the private when it comes to religious affiliation. A closer look reveals even other features, which display more subtle differences. In the case of France, the lack of a religious education subject reflects the policy of laicité, which is a special type of secularism, and a key to understand the role of religion in public life (Willaime 2014). In the USA, the lack of a religious education subject in public schools is mainly due to the interpretation of what freedom of religion means in the US context (Grelle 2006; Osmer and Schweitzer 2003; Nash 1999).

The similarity between these countries in terms of having no religious education subject does therefore not mean that religion play the same role in public life, neither in the everyday life of people in the two countries. The third example, India, has no religious education subject in public schools, based on the freedom of religion and belief and a key reason

behind this is the fear of sectarian developments (Sikka 2015). While rejecting to teach about religion in school, Indian schools are not worried about celebrating religious festivals in a school setting and religious images and symbols can be observed in schools, contrary to the situation in France, but also other countries (Niemi 2015, 2018). The three countries therefore differ a lot when it comes to how they deal with religion in school practice, which points towards the different roles that religion has in public life. This means that the three countries, in spite of their secular constitutions, are not necessarily 'secularised' in the same way or to the same degree from a sociology of religion perspective. This has to do with different national histories, different religious traditions that dominate the context and the presence and character of colonial relations. In conclusion, these examples show that the position of religion in education may be accommodated in a variety of ways even without religious education as such. I will continue to explore these complexities, but turn to countries where religious education has a long history in public schools.

Religion in Scandinavian Education

The Scandinavian countries are often mentioned as being among the ones most secularised, in terms of general attitudes among the population towards religion. In this sense, these countries can be called post-religious. The belief in God is relatively low and so is participation in religious practices. Still, there is a 'Nordic paradox' discussed among researchers, referring to certain difficulties that arise if this was presented as the whole picture. In Scandinavia, the Lutheran churches have been state religion until very recently, and some argue that this is still the case in many respects. Further, there is an apparent contradiction between attitudes to religious dogmas on the one hand and the high membership in Christian churches, public participation in life rituals and the presence of religion in public media (Sundback 2007; Lövheim and Lundby 2013; Furseth 2018). The 'Nordic paradox' can even be traced in the field of (religious) education. Both Denmark, Sweden and Norway have compulsory religious education for all, albeit with somewhat different rules about exemption (Husebø 2014). In Denmark, where the rules of

exemption are most liberal, the religious education subject is also most influenced by the Christian religion, both in name and content, reflecting a distinct combination of religion and national identity (Buchardt 2014; Iversen 2006). Sweden has the strictest exemption rules and also the longest tradition of a multi-faith, objective religious education subject, reflecting the most secularised national context, but is still linked to its Lutheran past (Osbeck and Skeie 2014; Berglund 2014). Norway can be placed somewhere between the two others, after having made significant changes in the former confessional subject since late 1990s, but still struggling with how to balance national heritage and religious diversity (Skeie and Bråten 2014).

Historically, religion and education in Scandinavia have been particularly closely interwoven since the Lutheran reformation, and this became more pronounced with the establishment of formal public education in the eighteenth century. In other countries, it was possible for Catholic, Protestant and other theological traditions to keep or establish their own educational institutions and to interact with secular education in different ways, but in Scandinavia, this was not the case. Here, the reformation 'secularised' the former Catholic ecclesiastical educational institutions within the authority of a Lutheran absolutist kingdom. During the nineteenth century, public education gradually became secularised, but now in the modern sense, meaning that the curriculum included a range of subjects giving more space for sciences, mathematics, history, reading of literature and writing. The school system changed from being a 'church-school' to becoming a 'public school'. It was still controlled by the (Lutheran) state, but the education system developed in direction of the needs of society, not the needs of the church. On the other hand, since the state was Lutheran, this 'secularisation' of education was not met by general opposition from the churches. Development of education was seen also as an integral part of the Lutheran doctrine, and the missionary organisations that were established at the time with great public support included educational initiatives as a high priority of their work abroad. The conflicts over religion and education in Norway in the nineteenth century had mainly to do with competition between different theological traditions. One example is the debate about different versions of the 'explanations' to the Lutheran Catechism in religious education and

another concerned the particular literature content chosen for the students' reading books in Norwegian language. Here, liberal and conservative attitudes towards the 'modern' clashed. From having been the framework of the entire school system, religious education became a 'small' and more marginalised subject and controversies arose mainly when its content was changed or lesson hours were reduced. Religious education became more of an 'ideological' issue than a question of literacy and educational theory

The history of education in Scandinavia is to a large extent a story about absolutist Lutheran states that changed into modern, secular welfare societies, strongly influenced by social democratic politics. The role of religion changed dramatically over the years, but it did not disappear. In a way it became less visible. The strong national welfare states secured an educational system for all, but the result was also that the faith-based school sector remained limited, particularly in Sweden and Norway, less in Denmark (Sporre 2013; Kühnle et al. 2018). The reason for the Danish exception is mainly the strong influence of the theologian Grundtvig and his particular version of Lutheranism, with its emphasis on popular agency and independence also in religious matters. To see religious education in public school as being mainly a help to individual parents in their religious nurture and therefore to accommodate for parallel religious education classes has hardly been practised in Scandinavia.[3] Instead, a more uniform and nation state model has dominated. This has perhaps made the 'paradigm shift' (Loobuyck 2015) from parent orientation to broad, comprehensive model easier for the public opinion to accept.

Reform pedagogy and other ideas emphasising the 'progressive' role of education has influenced the late modern societies in Scandinavia. Education went from a privilege of the wealthy and a possibility for the few 'gifted' of the lower classes to become a legal right and a resource in the planning of social and economic progress. In this sense, the educational enterprise became a secular one. It was not anti-religious, but driven by a rational, research-based ethos, based in ideas about the public interest. The role of education became to qualify and socialise future citizens so that they could take part in work-life and social life and take the responsibility for developing a democratic and affluent society. The main knowledge base for education understood in this way was science, not

religious belief. The same ethos can be traced today, in the ambitions for education formulated by supra-national bodies like OECD (OECD 2018a, b).[4] The question is what this means when it comes to religious education. Looking at today's curricula, the social and political justification for public religious education in Scandinavian countries is to secure the following types of aims:

- become acquainted with national cultural heritage
- develop knowledge about religions and worldviews
- contribute to democratic citizenship in a diverse society
- contribute to personal development through reflection on existential questions

The way these aims are formulated and how they are balanced against each other vary between the countries, as can be seen in some examples from the most recent syllabuses:[5]

Denmark:

> …make students capable to understand and relate to the significance of the religious dimension to individuals and their relationships with others.
>
> …knowledge about Christianity in history and present time (..) knowledge about other religions and life-orientations.
>
> …use their subject competencies to make personal choices, take responsibility and act in a democratic society. (Undervisningsministeriet 2019, 7)

Sweden:

> …develop knowledge of religions and other outlooks on life in their own society and in other parts of the world
>
> …knowledge about and understanding of how Christian traditions have affected Swedish society and its values
>
> …encourage pupils to reflect over various issues concerning life, their identity and their ethical attitudes
>
> …conditions for pupils to develop a personal attitude to life and an understanding of how they and others are thinking and living

…knowledge of how different religions and other outlooks on life view questions concerning gender, gender equality, sexuality and relationships. (Skolverket 2018, 218)

Norway:

…give students insight into Christian and Humanist heritage and tradition and how this has developed through history

…through the knowledge about religions and values, students can develop the ability to live and work in a diverse society

…get to know the values that society builds on and how these are anchored in religions and worldviews.

…explore religions and worldviews with different methods

…explore existential questions and answers

…develop own views and learn to take the perspectives of others. (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2020, 2–3)

The overall picture is that religious education, while being marginalised as part of the secularisation of education, has become a complex mixture of different aims and contents. These aims are reflecting the complex way in which religions and worldviews continue to be seen as relevant for Scandinavian societies. In order to explore this in some more detail, and to get closer to the question of a possible post-secular development, I will go a little deeper into the Norwegian case.

Norway: A Post-secular Religious Education?

While Sweden opted for an integrative, secular religious education subject for all already in the 1960s, this was not an option in Norway. At this time, religious education in Norwegian public schools was formally decoupled from any relation to Church catechesis. This opened the possibility for more differentiated religious education. In the 1970s, it was allowed to establish parallel religious education for those who were not members of the Church of Norway. In practice, this led to an alternative subject, called 'Life-stances' (or 'worldviews') which included knowledge

about different religions and worldviews and was taught many places across the country, but for a small minority of students. The driving force behind this subject was the secular Humanist Association, founded in the 1950s and gaining increasing influence since then. They had criticised the hegemony of Lutheran Christianity in society in general, targeting the state church, and in education, targeting the religious education subject. The debate over religious education in school was therefore dominated by the tension between secular Humanism and a Christian worldview. This had consequences for the discourse: meaning that 'non-religion' tended to be interpreted as secular Humanism or 'non-Christian', and that 'religion' was more or less associated with Christianity. What changed the situation during the 1970s and 1980s was the increasing immigration, bringing people with non-Christian religions to Norway. This started to complicate the discourse in different ways. Secular Humanists could have common interests with religious minorities in their critique of the state church. On the other hand, the Church of Norway discovered that the religious plurality needed to be taken into account when arguing in favour of a place for religion in the public sphere. Increasingly, therefore, the debate between religion and non-religious viewpoints was replaced on both sides with more emphasis on religious and worldview plurality. This made diversity a more prominent and visible feature of society than post-secularity.

The increased diversity of religions and beliefs helped to pave the way for a major change in religious education, when in 1997 a new school subject for all was launched. The process leading up to this, as well as the results in the years after, has been object of much research and debate (Alberts 2011; Andreassen 2013; Plesner 2013; Haakedal 2001; Lied 2009). Here, teaching about a range of religious and worldview traditions was introduced, and the subject was intended to include all students, irrespective of religious or worldview background. Perhaps the newly discovered religious plurality led some actors to believe that a 'return of religion' included a return of Christianity. When the curriculum text was presented, it contained a revitalised teaching about Christianity, which clearly dominated the content. Among the features were the introduction of teaching methods that fitted the teaching about Christianity, such as narrative approaches, and the recommendation to use these for teaching

about other religions and worldviews as well. The result was a strong opposition against the curriculum text, while supporting the general idea of a common subject for all. The government at the time did not take notice of the legal recommendations to give full exemption, which was 'not surprising; full exemption would undermine the fundamental idea of a *common* subject that should instil a *shared* identity and create a shared arena' (Iversen 2012, 104). After several cases in court, the European Human Rights Court voted against the state of Norway and the curriculum had to be changed in 2008. A key formulation in the adjusted curriculum and Education Act after this verdict was, inspired by Human Rights terminology, to recommend the teaching approach of religious education to be 'objective, critical and pluralistic'.

As can be seen from the account above, the place of religion in Norwegian education must be understood in light of both a longer historical perspective and a careful account of more recent developments. The secularisation process is probably not over yet, since the privileged place of Christianity in society and in the Education Act is still obvious and under critique. The slow but increasingly equal treatment of different religious and worldview communities legally should in this perspective be understood as part of a secularisation process. In religious education scholarship, we have seen a development in direction of approaches more inspired by religious studies than Christian theology, which also can be seen as a secularisation process.

While these processes of secularisation continue, there are often elements of the situation that may be better understood by referring to ideas about the post-secular. We certainly have observed an increased visibility of religion and worldviews in public discourse, art and literature. Secondly, the increasing religious diversity contributes in the same direction. Both these features have contributed to changes in Norwegian religious education. From a former public discourse about religions and worldviews that was almost completely dominated by the polarisation between Christian and secular Humanist positions, this dichotomy is today only one part of the discourse. The 'secular' positions have become more differentiated, which can be seen in the instrumental role that secular Humanists have played in the increasing dialogue activities between religions and worldviews. Also, the label 'Christian' is covering an

increasing range of positions, from being a descriptor of personal piety and certain types of religious practice, membership of certain religious organisations, to mainly underpinning 'Norwegian values'. Thirdly, to use the word 'religion' or 'religious' in the Norwegian context today, certainly does not connote only 'Christian', as it did some decades ago. It often refers to other traditions, particularly Islam, but also to variations of 'lived religion'.

Discussion

The title of this article contains the implicit question about what it means to live in 'post-secular times'. This of course depends a lot on what is understood by the term 'secular', which is by no means obvious. Stefan Fischer-Høyem finds five types of 'secularity' in his overview of the literature and argues that each of these has got their version of a 'post-secular' response, creating an inner dialectic (Fischer-Høyrem 2016). James Beckford has proposed a different typology by grouping the use of 'post-secular' into six clusters. While acknowledging many of the observations done by the researchers he is referencing, as well as pointing at the inner tensions between the clusters, his conclusion is quite critical. He finds that the term has not achieved as much as sometimes claimed by the proponents, and he points to the lack of explanatory power in the face of key developments, particularly in England:

> In short, the three new contextual factors of an increase in religious diversity, the application of equalities legislation to "religion or belief," and the promotion of social enterprise policies across government departments have extended the reach of long-standing arrangements between the British state and religions. These developments do not represent a shift to any version of postsecularity. They have nothing to do with reenchantment or the spiritualization of the public sphere. Nor do they have any direct implications for theories of secularization. (Beckford 2012, 16)

Similar critique has also come from other sociologists, like Gregor McLennan (2010). While these authors have little to say about the field

of education, I would argue that the examples referred to above regarding religion in education in different countries point in a similar direction. It is not easy to summon the developments under the conceptual umbrella 'post-secular', but what certainly is a commonality is the preoccupation with religious and worldview diversity as well as examples of the nation state using religion in education for purposes of national cohesion.

Another feature I have presented is the long-standing and close relationship between religious and educational institutions in Westerns countries, in other words between Christian churches and gradually more and more secular education. In many cases, this was featured by faith-based schools, even spreading globally as part of the missionary part of colonial dominance. The secularisation of education did not push Christian churches into an anti-education reaction. In the United States, both mass education and mass religion have coexisted and flourished, and it would be a gross misrepresentation of the situation to take, for example, the conflicts over evolution as an example of general anti-education sentiments in religious institutions and among their members. Instead, there is more academic work to be done when it comes to addressing the relationship between religion and education as institutions:

> Understandably, sociological research chiefly focuses on implications of the education revolution for social stratification, but this is at the cost of a broader perspective equal to the full impact of the education revolution. The effect of mass education on mass religion is a salient example of what awaits to be incorporated. The same is true for religion. The effect of religion on the rise of the university and mass education challenge an overly instrumental and functional (social differentiation) account of why education expands. The educated, post-secular world is a significant transformation that stems from deep intertwined cultural patterns of both institutions. (Baker 2019, 60)

Baker focuses on the institutional level, and he argues against the view that religious institutions have been antagonistic towards the development of modern education based on rationality, enlightenment, scholarly critique, empirical investigation and so on. His main arguments deal with the role of the Christian churches in relation to education as

institution. The same perspective can also be explored in relation to other religious and belief traditions, which may not have the same history in their relationship to secular education systems, but still may accommodate to this in practice. There are examples where 'spirituality' is put on the agenda even for secular state education (Natsis 2016).

In addition to this, the discourse about the post-secular has contributed to more preoccupation with elements of material or 'lived' religion, when they appear in education. This may refer to practical and material issues, like clothing, food restrictions and other issues. Sometimes these refer to subject-specific content or working methods that may be problematic for certain religious groups. Some schools find pragmatic solutions for this, and other times the issues may reach the focus of national interest or even legislation, like discussions about headscarves of Muslim girls. Another 'lived' dimension has to do with the school as a community and a society in miniature. In order to encourage social cohesion, good interpersonal relations and fellowship, schools sometimes arrange for collective celebrations or ritualisation (Skeie 2019b). These need some kind of symbolic content and here issues of inclusion and exclusion arise on the basis of religious and worldview diversity. The debate about collective worship in the United Kingdom is an illustrative example (Cumper and Mawhinney 2015; Cumper and Mawhinney 2018). Another can be found in Sweden, where public schools are not allowed to practice anything that could be interpreted as 'religious', but struggle with how to define the borders between 'religious' and 'secular'. When this is contrasted with the explicitly secular public education of India, interesting and puzzling contrasts can be observed (Niemi 2015, 2018). A third aspect of this is illustrated by examples of ritualisation in school with few obvious religious connotations, still they can be interpreted in light of conceptual perspectives like 'civil religion' (Warburg 2009, 2015).

Adding to these developments, I want to end by drawing attention to yet another feature of religion in education that may be easier to see, drawing on the concept 'post-secular'. I am referring to new forms of spirituality and self-declared non-religious activities blurring demarcation lines between religious and secular. This can be observed when schools want to improve students' mental health and well-being. A case in point is the increasing interest in mindfulness documented in many

countries, partly coming from insiders in education and partly from outside agencies, offering increasingly 'research based' services (Aldenmyr 2012; Hyland 2010; Hyland 2015). This can be interpreted in the light of J. Z. Smiths 'religion here, there and everywhere' (Smith 2004).[6] There are reasons to discuss these practices as aspects of religion in education, from an educational perspective, and to ask what view of religion and of education that they present (Ergas 2014, 2019).

In conclusion, it is a matter of discussion what the term 'post-secular' as such contributes to the understanding of such phenomena, but the discourse surrounding the term including its many meanings, certainly stimulates the investigation of changing forms of religion in education. These are certainly reflecting changes in society, but they can even be seen as negotiations about the conceptualisation of these changes and how we should respond to them.

Notes

1. I have developed this more in Skeie, G. 2020.
2. For more detailed information about legal aspects of this, even in various countries, see the report underlying Martínez-Torrón and Durham, 2012: http://www.iclrs.org/index.php?blurb_id=975&page_id=3 (Downloaded 15.01.2020).
3. Finland, another Nordic country is different in this respect, with a parallel system run by the state Ubani, M. & Tirri, K. 2014. Religious Education at Schools in Finland. In: Rothgangel, M., Skeie, G. & Jäggle, M. (eds.) Religous Education at Schools in Europe. Göttingen: V&R Unipress / Vienna University Press.
4. I have developed this in Skeie, G. 2019a. Moral Commitment and existential issues in religious and worldview education. In: Alma, H. & Avest, I. T. (eds.) Moral and Spiritual Leadership in an Age of Plural Moralities. London: Routledge.
5. Translation of the Danish and Norwegian curriculum texts are done by the present author.
6. I have developed this somewhat more together with Kirsten Grønlien Zetterqvist: Zetterqvist, K. G. & Skeie, G. 2014. Religion i skolen: her, der og hvor-somhelst? *Norsk Pedagogisk Tidsskrift, 98*, 304–315.

References

Alberts, W. (2006). European Models of Integrative Religious Education. In M. Pye, E. Franke, A. T. Wasim, & A. Ma'sud (Eds.), *Religious Harmony: Problems, Practice, and Education*. Berlin: Walther de Gruyter.

Alberts, W. (2011). Religous Education in Norway. In L. Franken & P. Loobuyck (Eds.), *Religious Education in a Plural, Secularised Society*. Münster: Waxmann.

Aldenmyr, S. I. (2012). Moral Aspects of Therapeutic Education: A Case Study of Life Competence Education in Swedish Education. *Journal of Moral Education, 41*, 23–37.

Andreassen, B.-O. (2013). Religion Education in Norway: Tension or Harmony between Human Rights and Christian Cultural Heritage? *Temenos, 49*, 137–164.

Baker, D. P. (2019). The Great Antagonism That Never Was: Unexpected Affinities between Religion and Education in Post-secular Society. *Theory and Society, 48*, 39–65.

Beckford, J. A. (2012). SSSR Presidential Address: Public Religions and the Postsecular: Critical Reflections. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 51*, 1–19.

Berglund, J. (2014). Swedish Religion Education: Objective but Marinated in Lutheran Protestantism? *Temenos, 49*, 165–184.

Bråten, O. M. H. (2014). New Social Patterns: Old Stuctures? How the Countries of Western Europe Deal with Religous Plurality in Education. In M. Rothgangel, R. Jackson, & M. Jäggle (Eds.), *Religious Education at Schoools in Europe*. Göttingen: V&R unipress.

Buchardt, M. (2014). Religious Education at Schools in Denmark. In M. Rothgangel, G. Skeie, & M. Jäggle (Eds.), *Religious Education at Schools in Europe. Part 3: Northern Europe*. Göttingen: V&R unipress and Vienna University Press.

Cumper, P., & Mawhinney, A. (2015). *Collective Worship and Religious Observance in Schools: An Evaluation of Law and Policy in the UK*. An Ahrc Network Report. Arts and Humanities Reserch Council.

Cumper, P., & Mawhinney, A. (Eds.). (2018). *Collective Worship and Religious Observance in Schools*. Oxford: Peter Lang.

Cush, D. (2011). Without Fear or Favour: Forty Years of Non-confessional and Multi-faith Religious Education in Scandinavia and the UK. In L. Franken & P. Loobuyck (Eds.), *Religious Education in a Plural, Secularised Society. A Paradigm Shift*. Münster: Waxmann.

Davis, D., & Miroshnikova, E. (Eds.). (2013). *The Routledge International Handbook of Religious Education*. London: Routledge.

Ergas, O. (2014). Mindfulness in Education at the Intersection of Science, Religion, and Healing. *Critical Studies in Education, 55*, 58–72.

Ergas, O. (2019). A Contemplative Turn in Education: Charting a Curricular-Pedagogical Countermovement. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society, 27*, 251–270.

Fischer-Høyrem, S. (2016). Sekulariteter og postsekulariteter. *Din: tidsskrift for religion og kultur, 2*, 48–78.

Furseth, I. (2018). *Religious Complexity in the Public Sphere: Comparing Nordic Countries*. Cham: Springer International Publishing: Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan.

Grelle, B. (2006). Defining and Promoting the Study of Religion in British and American Schools. In M. De Souza, G. Durka, K. Engebretson, R. Jackson, & A. Mcgrady (Eds.), *International Handbook of the Religious, Moral and Spiritual Dimensions in Education*. Dordrecht: Springer.

Haakedal, E. (2001). From Lutheran Catechism to World Religions and Humanism: Dilemmas and Middle Ways through the Story of Norwegian Religious Education. *British Journal of Religious Education, 23*, 88–97.

Habermas, J. (2006). Religion in the Public Sphere. *European Journal of Philosophy, 14*, 1–25.

Holst, C., & Molander, A. (2015). Jürgen Habermas on Public Reason and Religion: Do Religious Citizens Suffer an Asymmetrical Cognitive Burden, and Should They be Compensated? *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy, 18*, 547–563.

Husebø, D. (2014). Tros-og livssynsfag i Skandinavia—en sammenligning. *Norsk Pedagogisk Tidsskrift, 98*, 364–374.

Hyland, T. (2010). Mindfulness, Adult Learning and Therapeutic Education: Integrating the Cognitive and Affective Domains of Learning. *International Journal of Lifelong Education, 29*, 517–532.

Hyland, T. (2015). McMindfulness in the Workplace: Vocational Learning and the Commodification of the Present Moment. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training, 67*, 219–234.

Iversen, H. R. (2006). Secular Religion and Religious Secularism. *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society, 19*, 75–92.

Iversen, L. L. (2012). *Learning to be Norwegian. A Case Study of Identity Management in Religious Education in Norway*. Münster: Waxmann Verlag.

Kühnle, L., Schmidt, U., Jacobsen, B. A., & Pettersson, P. (2018). Religion and the State: Complexity and Change. In I. Furseth (Ed.), *Religious Complexity*

in the Public Sphere: Comparing Nordic Countries. Cham: Springer Nature and Palgrave Macmillan.

Lied, S. (2009). The Norwegian *Christianity, Religion and Philosophy* Subject KRL in Strasbourg. *British Journal of Religious Education, 31*, 263–276.

Loobuyck, P. (2015). Religious Education in Habermasian Post-secular Societies. In M. Rectenwald, R. Almeida, & G. Levine (Eds.), *Global Secularisms in a Post-secular Age*. Boston: Walter de Gruyter Inc..

Lövheim, M., & Lundby, K. (2013). Mediated Religion Across Time and Space. A Case Study of Norwegian Newspapers. *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society, 26*, 25–44.

Martínez-Torrón, J., & Durham, W. C. (2012). Religion and the Secular State. In K. B. Brown & D. V. Snyder (Eds.), *General Reports of the XVIIIth Congress of the International Academy of Comparative Law/Rapports Généraux du XVIIIème Congrès de l'Académie Internationale de Droit Comparé*. Dordrecht: Springer.

Mclennan, G. (2010). The Postsecular Turn. *Theory, Culture & Society, 27*, 3–20.

Nash, R. J. (1999). *Faith, Hype, and Clarity: Teaching about Religion in American Schools and Colleges*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Natsis, E. (2016). A New Discourse on Spirituality in Public Education. Confronting the Challenges in a Post-secular Society. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality, 21*, 66–77.

Niemi, K. (2015). Comparing Clementines and Satsumas: Looking at Religion in Indian Schools from a Nordic Perspective. *Religions of South Asia, 9*, 332–355.

Niemi, K. (2018). Drawing a Line between the Religious and the Secular: The Cases of Religious Education in Sweden and India. *Journal of Beliefs & Values, 39*, 182–194.

OECD. (2018a). *Education at a Glance 2018: Indicators*. Paris: OECD Publishers.

OECD. (2018b). *The Future of Education and Skills—Education 2030*. Paris: OECD.

Osbeck, C., & Skeie, G. (2014). Religious Education at Schools in Sweden. In M. Rothgangel, M. Jäggle, & G. Skeie (Eds.), *Religious Education at Schools in Europe. Part 3: Northern Europe*. Göttingen: V&R unipress and Vienna University Press.

Osmer, R. R., & Schweitzer, F. (2003). *Religious Education between Modernization and Globalization: New Perspectives on the United States and Germany*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Plesner, I. T. (2013). Religion and Education in Norway. In D. Davis & E. Miroshnikova (Eds.), *The Routledge International Handbook of Religious Education*. London: Routledge.

Rothgangel, M., Jackson, R., & Jäggle, M. (Eds.). (2014a). *Religious Education at Schools in Europe. Part 2: Western Europe*. Göttingen: V&R unipress and Vienna University Press.

Rothgangel, M., Jäggle, M., & Schlag, T. (Eds.). (2016). *Religious Education at Schools in Europe. Part 1: Central Europe*. Göttingen: V&R unipress and Vienna University Press.

Rothgangel, M., Skeie, G., & Jäggle, M. (Eds.). (2014b). *Religious Education at Schools in Europe. Part 3: Northern Europe*. Göttingen: V&R unipress and Vienna University Press.

Schreiner, P. (2014). Religious Education in Europe. In M. Rothgangel, T. Schlag, & F. Schweitzer (Eds.), *Basics of Religous Education*. Göttingen: V&R unipress.

Sikka, S. (2015). What is Indian 'Religion'? How Should It be Taught? In L. G. Beaman & L. V. Arragon (Eds.), *Issues in Religion and Education*. Leiden: Brill.

Skeie, G. (2006). Is There a Place for Youth in Religious Education? In D. Bates, G. Durka, & S. Friedrich (Eds.), *Education, Religion and Society. Essays in Honour of John M Hull*. London and New York: Routledge.

Skeie, G. (2019a). Moral Commitment and Existential Issues in Religious and Worldview Education. In H. Alma & I. T. Avest (Eds.), *Moral and Spiritual Leadership in an Age of Plural Moralities*. London: Routledge.

Skeie, G. (2019b). Organiserte fellesskapsorienterte aktiviteter i skolen. Et religionsdidaktisk perspektiv på ritualer og ritualisering. *Din: tidsskrift for religion og kultur, 2,* 18–48.

Skeie, G. 2020. Religious Education Research—Does it Prepare us for the Future? In I. Ter Avest, C. Bakker, J. Ipgrave, S. Leonhard & P. Schreiner (Eds.), *Facing the Unknown Future. Religious Education on the Move* (pp. 47–72). Münster: Waxmann.

Skeie, G., & Bråten, O. M. H. (2014). Religious Education at Schools in Norway. In M. Rothgangel, M. Jäggle, & G. Skeie (Eds.), *Religious Education at Schools in Europe. Part 3: Northern Europe*. Göttingen: V&R unipress and Vienna University Press.

Skolverket. (2018). *Curriculum for the Compulsory School, Preschool Class and the Leisure-Time Centre 2011* (Rev. 2018). Stockholm: Skolverket.

Smith, J. Z. (2004). *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Sporre, K. (2013). Value Conflicts and Faith Based Schools—In Contemporary Sweden. *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society, 26*, 175–191.
Sundback, S. (2007). Membership of Nordic 'National' Churches as a 'Civil Religious' Phenomenon. *Implicit Religion, 10*, 262–280.
Ubani, M., & Tirri, K. (2014). Religious Education at Schools in Finland. In M. Rothgangel, G. Skeie, & M. Jäggle (Eds.), *Religous Education at Schools in Europe*. Göttingen: V&R unipress and Vienna University Press.
Undervisningsministeriet, B.-O. (2019). *Kristendomskundskab—Faghæfte 2019*. København: Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet.
Utdanningsdirektoratet. (2020). *Læreplan i kristendom, religion, livssyn og etikk*. Oslo: Utdanningsdirektoratet.
Warburg, M. (2009). Graduation in Denmark: Secular Ritual and Civil Religion. *Journal of Ritual Studies, 23*, 31–42.
Warburg, M. (2015). Secular Rituals. In P. J. Stewart & A. J. Strathern (Eds.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Anthropology*. Farnham: Ashgate.
Watson, J. (2012). Religion, Spirituality and State-Funded Schooling. *Journal for the Study of Spirituality, 2*, 186–202.
Willaime, J.-P. (2014). Religious Education in French Schools. In M. Rothgangel, R. Jackson, & M. Jäggle (Eds.), *Religious Education at Schools in Europe. Part 2: Westerns Europe*. Göttingen: V&R unipress.
Zetterqvist, K. G., & Skeie, G. (2014). Religion i skolen: her, der og hvor-somhelst? *Norsk Pedagogisk Tidsskrift, 98*, 304–315.

4

Religious Education Curriculum Constructions in Northern and Western Europe: A Three-Country Analysis

Kerstin von Brömssen and Graeme Nixon

Religious education (RE) is currently being discussed in many parts of the world.[1] These discussions can be viewed from challenging social and cultural processes, such as secularization/re-sacralization, migration, and digitalization. These factors are often mentioned within a post-secular discourse, which has emerged together with several other concepts, such as post-modernism, post-structuralism, and post-colonialism, all of which have contested understandings and interpretations (see Carlsson and Thalén 2015; Lewin 2017, 15–35).[2] As Jensen and Kjeldsen argue, the debates on RE are "clearly part and parcel of ongoing culture wars" linked to societal and, in turn, educational challenges (2013, 186). The discussions concerning religion and RE are also linked to discussions on

K. von Brömssen (✉)
University West, Trollhättan, Sweden
e-mail: kerstin.von-bromssen@hv.se

G. Nixon
School of Education, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen, UK
e-mail: g.nixon@abdn.ac.uk

O. Franck, P. Thalén (eds.), *Religious Education in a Post-Secular Age*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47503-1_4

policies at a macro level. For example, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the United Nations are all active in promoting the view that education should foster social cohesion, tolerance, and human rights (Council of Europe 2002, 2008a, b; OSCE 2007; United Nation 2006). Educational policy actors in many states struggle with constructing RE, in which processes and complex relationships between global ideas and their dissemination and re-contextualization in local settings become a key task (e.g., Ball 2012; Rizvi and Lingard 2010; Verger et al. 2018; Wahlström 2015).

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse and discuss the subject of RE in Northern and Western Europe from a discursive reading of three different RE curricula for state-maintained primary and lower-secondary schools in Denmark, Scotland, and Sweden.[3] These curricula were selected because they represent three different societal contexts. However, these countries are situated rather close to each other, both in terms of geography, in northwestern Europe, and religious outlook (non-confessional, non-denominational, integrative RE). This chapter argues that even within a rather uniform description of the subject, there are still relatively large differences in the curricula that often get lost in the debate about RE in public schools (cf. Jensen and Kjeldsen 2013; Schreiner 2015).

This chapter has three parts. The first section frames the discussion on RE from both a curriculum theoretical perspective and the question: *Why study a school subject*. We also briefly explain our method for analyzing the three curricula. The second part analyzes the curricula, starting with a short description of the national context within which each RE subject is constructed. The last section draws conclusions from the analyses and brings these into a discussion concerning RE in light of the current discourse on post-secularity.

Curriculum Theoretical Perspectives and "Why Study a School Subject"

As a research field, curriculum studies are thought to trace back to 1918, with the seminal work *The Curriculum*, by Franklin Bobbitt. However, it grew substantially after WWII through critical work by Basil Bernstein, Michael F. D. Young, Henry Giroux, Michael Apple, and William Pinar.[4] In such a curriculum theoretical perspective, educational institutions are seen as agents of the dominant society and reflect its underlying cultural patterns. Such patterns are formulated in educational institutions' policies, such as curricula, or what is perceived to be "legitimate knowledge [that] we all must have" (Apple 1979, 63–64; Bernstein 1971; Lundgren 1983; cf. Wahlström 2015). Therefore, educational institutions confer cultural legitimacy on knowledge, so are caught up in a network of other political, economic, and cultural institutions that are basically unequal (Apple 1979, 63–64). Consequently, curriculum-making processes capture a wide-ranging set of activities and practices that emerge in webs of national and local understandings, beliefs, and practices embedded in power relations (Westbury 2008, 50). These other regional and local institutions affect the education organization, but the national level is often the most powerful. Pinar (2012, 493) explains curriculum construction as "an extraordinary complicated conversation." Furthermore:

> Through the curriculum and our experience of it, we choose what to remember about the past, what to believe about the present, what to hope for and fear about the future. (Pinar 2008, 493)

Gulson et al. (2015, 7) agree and state that policy formation is "an arena of contestation, struggle and negotiations between actors who may operate outside formal governmental structures." Therefore, issues regarding educational policy and the curriculum are always important, relevant, and often hotly debated.

The Concept of Curriculum

The curriculum generally focuses on the selection and organization of specific knowledge, skills, and manners to fit the particular needs of students and the unique operational structure of schools. However, there are many different definitions for the concept of *curriculum* (cf. Brubaker 2004, vii–viii). In this chapter, *curriculum* refers to the national course of study or the *curriculum-as-plan* as the aims, objectives, and outcomes (in other words, what is desirable for society, the child, and the knowledge and skills) that learners are expected to acquire at different grades. We sometimes also use the concept of *education policy* or *policy* for such a curriculum-as-plan.

In constructing curriculum or educational policy, educators and policy-makers come back to the same basic question: "Which knowledge is of most worth" (Pinar 2012, 1–2). Each new decade witnesses a debate on curriculum content, the importance of various school subjects, and the best way to transfer knowledge. This is obvious, as new knowledge shapes our understanding, attitudes, and behavior. Following such changes, curricula must also change. Education policy reforms must also create and maintain power dimensions that circulate globally, visible through the educational arenas, which produce both possibilities and limitations within national educational institutions (Verger et al. 2018, 2–34).

Currently, curriculum theory research is a large and complex field that can be studied from critical, political, feminist, ethnic, and ecological viewpoints, among others (see f. ex. Rasmussen and Gowlett 2015). We chose to examine the RE school curriculum in three national contexts, using four historical curriculum orientations derived from Eisner and Vallance, reworked by Deng and Luke (2008, cf. Wahlström 2015, 37–39).

A Study of a School Subject

School subjects are often taken for granted and as a given (Goodson and Marsh 1996, 1). However, school subjects within the curriculum are constructed, or made up, and intersect with different societal structures and

power relationships. Therefore, teaching a school subject is never a neutral activity. It is normative and prescriptive, and reproduces parts of a cultural transmission (Deng and Luke 2008; Taylor 2004). Therefore, school subjects create "regimes of truth" for organizing school knowledge and set the framework for the school's organization and teaching (Goodson and Marsh 1996, 1–2). Furthermore, school subjects have been constructed at different time periods. Major "selective traditions" have grown up within school subjects (Apple 1990; Williams 1989) and act as tacit frameworks for selecting content and method (Williams 1989; Sund and Wickman 2011). Therefore, we deem that closely reading our case curricula for RE is interesting, as they show which knowledge content, values, and religious literacies are considered legitimate, worthwhile, and actionable as a future citizen. In other words, we hope "to see how curriculum is a contested cultural document that excludes some identities as it includes others" (Watt 2016, 26).

Curriculum Perspectives on School Subjects

The normative questions on which types of knowledge should be included or excluded in a school subject are most interesting for curriculum theorists and developers, as well as teachers in their daily work of selecting instruction content. The responses to these questions depend on theoretical orientations and perspectives, as well as ideological and cultural opinions and positions (Deng and Luke 2008, 6).

Our work is inspired by a well-known, often-used framework for analyzing a school subject, based on four, historical, curriculum orientations originally derived from Eisner and Vallance (1974, 1–18),[5] and further used by Deng and Luke (2008). The four curriculum orientations are *academic rationalism*, *social efficiency*, *humanism*, and *social reconstructionism*. These will be used as an analytic framework and discussed in conjunction with our analysis.

Reading and Analyzing Policy Texts/Curricula in a School Subject

Our method of analyzing the RE texts is inspired by a Critical Discourse Analysis approach (CDA), in which language is viewed as a social phenomenon and part of social practice, upheld and articulated by different actors (Fairclough 2003, 23–28). Therefore, discourse theory in general is concerned with human expressions, most often in the form of spoken or written language. A basic view within discourse theory is that when people say or write, they use fused, generally accepted knowledge in a society, while also feeding back to society when repeating and reinforcing such shared knowledge (Chilton 2004). Spoken or written discourses are articulated and networked with other, non-discursive elements in various ways in "orders of discourse" (Fairclough 2003, 25). Certain discourses not only include what is said and articulated, but also determine what actually can and can't be said, and what is and isn't acceptable. In this approach, the word *critical* signifies an attempt to analyze structural relationships of dominance, power, and control, as manifested in language (Fairclough 1995, 23–25, 2003, 11). Therefore, power is a central concept in CDA (Fairclough 1995, 1), as it differentiates, selects, includes, and excludes (cf. von Brömssen and Athiemoolam 2018; Cohen et al. 2018, 687–688).

Methodologically, we first located each of the curriculum texts into the national educational contexts of Denmark, Scotland, and Sweden. It is worth noting that a curriculum text constitutes a specific genre. In our cases, the curricula texts are three states' educational policy texts.[6] As mentioned previously, such policy-making is seen as an arena of struggle over meaning or "the politics of discourse" (Taylor 2004). This closely follows Pinar's "complicated conversations" (2012, 493). Second, we marked important features within sentences, as well as individual words in the curriculum texts, to make key themes and categories that spoke to Deng and Luke's (2008) theoretical framework.

The Background and Context of RE in Denmark

In 1536, the Evangelical Lutheran People's Church was established in Denmark after the Lutheran reformation replaced Roman Catholicism. This tradition is still the majority within Denmark, with a membership of more than 70%[7] (cf. Buchardt 2014; Jensen 2005). The Constitution of 1849 introduced democracy and freedom of religion, but the Lutheran-Protestant Church (with the additional name *Folk-Church*) continued to function as the state religion. The relationship between the state and the church is much debated, but "the Folk-Church is part of the so-called Danish tradition and integral to something called Danishness" (Jensen 2005, 66). However, globalization has changed Denmark, as well as the rest of Europe, into a multicultural nation with many different traditions and lifestyles. However, Jensen (2005, 66) argues that Denmark "is not a multi-religious country," as "the total amount of members of other non-Christian religious amounts to no more than one percent." Even if Europe's multiculturalism has increased, Jensen's argument is still interesting, as European multiculturalism often seems to be uncritically enlarged in debates.

Despite establishment of freedom of religion, RE in Denmark was confessional until 1975 (Jensen 2005, 67; Jensen and Kjeldsen 2013, 193). In 1960, the possibility of teaching foreign religions was added to the Danish curriculum and enlarged in 1975 with content labeled as *Foreign Religions and Other World Views* (Jensen and Kjeldsen 2013, 193–194). In a 1993 comprehensive curriculum reform, a content area called *Life-philosophy and Ethics* was introduced (Jensen and Kjeldsen 2013, 199). This content, influenced by Danish theologians Grundtvig and Løgstrup, has been called anti-intellectual for its criticism of reason and its romanticized view of the child (Böwadt 2009a, b).

The RE curriculum is mandatory in all forms of education, except during the year in which confirmation and its preparation take place (Folkeskoleloven § 5 stk. 2).[8] This clearly shows a continued connection between education and the Danish Lutheran-Protestant Church, or the *Folk-Church*. The school and the local church coordinate confirmation

preparation time and the school schedule to ensure this can take place. It is also possible to opt out from RE. As the children are still under school supervision, parents and schools must agree on other activities children who opt out of RE will carry out during this time.

An Analysis of the RE Non-denominational Subject in Denmark

The current RE subject in public schools is called *Kristendomskundskab*, or *Knowledge of Christianity*. The overall aim of the RE subject is stated as:

> Students in the subject *Knowledge of Christianity* must acquire knowledge and skills that enable them to understand and relate the significance of the religious dimension to the individual's perception of life and its relationship to others. (*Knowledge on Christianity*, The purpose of the subject 2019, 3)

The name *Knowledge of Christianity* signals quite a monoreligious concept of the subject. The specific concept of the religious dimension is also introduced, but without further explanations in the curriculum. Jensen and Kjeldsen (2013, 201) discuss the concept of *religious dimension*:

> The premise for the description of the subject is that the human being is conceived of as imbued with a deep need for searching for the meaning of life […]. The questioning of the fundamental condition of life, with no un-ambiguous [or 'easy'] answers, is what is defined as the religious dimension of life.

In the second paragraph of the purpose of the subject, perspectives on Christianity as a historical and a current phenomenon, and Biblical stories are selected as overall content. The stories about which students should have knowledge should be significant for "the values of our cultural context." The meaning of this raises questions, as this expression both excludes and includes unspecified values and cultures. However, students in 9th grade are required to have knowledge on "other religions and life views." Jensen and Kjeldsen mention that the guidelines allow for

teaching in this area and *may* also take place at the primary level (2013, 201). The second paragraph reads as follows:

> Students must acquire knowledge of Christianity in historical and contemporary contexts, as well as biblical narratives and their significance for the values of our cultural context. In addition, students in the oldest grades must acquire knowledge of other religions and life views. (*Knowledge on Christianity*, The purpose of the subject 2019, 3)

In the third paragraph of the purpose, student competencies are mentioned, underlining personal attitudes, co-responsibilities, and actions in a democratic society:

> Students should be able to use their professional skills in personal attitudes, co-responsibility and action in a democratic society. (*Knowledge on Christianity*, The purpose of the subject 2019, 3)

Thereafter, the curriculum mentions common goals—three goals in each of the four themes or content areas. The four content areas are (1) *Life-philosophy and ethics,* (2) *Biblical narratives,* (3) *Christianity,* and (4) *Non-Christian religions and other world views*. Of these ten common goals, only one connects to the theme of *Non-Christian religions and other world views*:

> The student can relate to main ideas and issues in the origins, history and present forms of life of the major world religions and other life views. (*Knowledge on Christianity*, Common goals 2019, 4)

The common goal is "relate to main ideas," which is qualitatively different from the other competence goals. The other goals are formulated as "must acquire" and "should be able to use," which is also used for the other common goals in the curriculum.

The first theme in the Danish curriculum is *Life-philosophy and ethics*, and the common goal for the oldest student in grade 9 reads:

> The student can relate to the content and significance of the religious dimension on the basis of basic questions of life and ethical principles. (*Knowledge on Christianity*, Common goals 2019, 4)

As discussed in earlier research, *Life-philosophy and ethics* is a core approach in the Danish curriculum, although hotly contested (see Böwadt 2009a, b). Together with *Biblical narratives*, *Life-philosophy and ethics* "[is] seen as the royal road for learning not just *about* but also *from* religion" (Jensen and Kjeldsen 2013, 201, authors' italics).

In summary, we can conclude from analyzing the Danish RE curriculum, and examining the above examples, that the subject fits in a humanistic curriculum tradition (cf. Deng and Luke 2008), with an overall function to provide each student with knowledge that contributes to personal growth, self-actualization, and an understanding of "the religious dimension." It is heavily weighted toward knowledge of Christianity and Biblical narratives, with only one common goal in relation to "major world religions and other life views." Furthermore, the name of the RE subject signals a Christian-centered, predominantly mono-religious subject.

The Background and Context of RE in Scotland

Christianity remains the largest single religion in Scotland. However, census and social attitude survey data show a decline in self-identification with Christianity and a burgeoning number of people of no religion. The 2011 census revealed, for the first time since records began, that membership of the Church of Scotland was no longer the majority position with regard to religion (National Records of Scotland, 2018). While the current national church is the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, it is important to recognize that it is not under the control of the state. Although 53.8% of the Scottish population identified as Christian in the 2011 census, making it the largest religious group in Scotland, there are several other religions in practice, each with its own history and development (see f. ex. Tinker 2017, 189).

The Scottish Education Act of 1872 created a national system of compulsory elementary schools. Prior to this, the churches financed the Scottish parish school system (Nixon 2016, 6–19; Tinker 2017, 189–190). However, the churches could no longer support the burgeoning school population of the late nineteenth century, so the state intervened. The 1872 Act still provides the legislative framework for non-denominational RE in Scottish schools. By 1918, Catholic schools in Scotland were brought under the Educational Act, while preserving their own Roman Catholic faith ethos (Tinker 2017, 189).

An Analysis of the Non-denominational RME Curriculum in Scotland

The current Scottish *Curriculum for Excellence* covers Scotland's history, as there are two separate sections in the curriculum documents: one for non-confessional and non-denominational schools (Section 2 in the curriculum); and one for Catholic schools following Catholic principles (Section 1 in the curriculum). We analyze the curriculum for non-denominational schools, as this is 85% of all schools (see Nixon 2016).

The RE subject in Scotland is *Religious and Moral Education, Experiences and Outcomes* (RME) and is constructed within three overarching themes: Christianity, world religions selected for study, and development of beliefs and values. The RME is integrative (Alberts 2010), as students share the same classroom, regardless of personal relation to the subject. However, parents have a legal right to withdraw their children from RME if they feel the curriculum conflicts with their own beliefs. In practice, very few parents do so (Nixon 2016). Therefore, RME is a mandatory part of the 3–18 curriculum and one of eight curricular areas. Progress and achievement is assessed and reported in the same way as for other subject areas in Scottish schools.

The introduction to RME in the curriculum states:

> Scotland is now a nation which reflects a wide range of beliefs, values and traditions. Religious and moral education enables children and young people to explore the world's major religions and approaches to living [that]

> are independent of religious belief, and to be challenged by these different beliefs and values. It supports children and young people in developing responsible attitudes to other people, their values and their capacity for moral judgments. (*RME Curriculum*, 22)

As can be seen in the citation above, diversity in Scottish society is underlined right from the beginning, followed by words and phrases, such as *explore*, *to be challenged*, *developing responsible attitudes*, *values*, and *capacity for moral judgment*, connected to children's and young peoples' learning in RME. Immediately thereafter, Scottish religious history is mentioned: "The study of Christianity, which has shaped the history and traditions of Scotland, and continues to exert an influence on national life, is an essential feature of religious and moral education for all children and young people" (*RME Curriculum*, 22).

Christianity is pointed out as the creator of the Scottish religious traditions and continues to affect national life. The many variations in today's religious landscape and influences from different traditions are not mentioned at all, which seems contradictory to the opening paragraph, which may be interpreted as silencing diversity. However, curriculum texts are often contradictory, as they are part of complicated conversations (Pinar 2012, 493).

Within the RME approach, religion is featured as "a human experience," in which students must study both religious and non-religious views. The first content in the text, attributed to the first theme, is *Christianity*. This comprises Christian and Biblical stories; teachings of Jesus and other figures in Christianity; Christian beliefs about God, Jesus, the human condition, and the natural world; and how these beliefs lead to actions for Christians. Christian values and morality have a significant place in the curriculum, stating that these reflections should be extended to the Scottish, as well in the global context. This is framed as: "I can explain how the values of Christianity contribute to as well as challenge Scottish and other societies."

Content for the second theme, *World religions selected for study*, includes the study of world religions, and beliefs and values based upon religious or other positions. The third theme covers content such as understanding what is fair and unfair; developing awareness of diversity of belief in

modern Scotland; and understanding values such as honesty, respect, and compassion, and how they might be applied in relation to moral issues. This is stated in the curriculum as:

> I am able to apply my understanding of a range of moral viewpoints, including those which are independent of religion, to specific moral issues and am aware of the diversity of moral viewpoints held in modern Scotland and the wider world. (*RME Curriculum*)

As seen from the above quotations, Christianity is singled out and put forward within what can be called a *cultural heritage perspective* in the content of the curriculum. This is separate from formulations such as *Christianity and world religions selected for study* and *Recognizing the place of Christianity in the Scottish context*.

Competences that students should acquire in relation to religion and moral values are emphasized through verbs such as: *Apply*, *recognize*, *learn about* and *from*, *explore and develop*, *investigate and understand*, *establish*, *make*, *reflect*, *discern*, and *think critically* and *act*. Interestingly, *establish* is used twice as a strong verb, in terms of the fact that students should "establish values, such as wisdom, justice, compassion and integrity, [and] establish a firm foundation for lifelong learning, further learning, and adult life" (RME Curriculum). A discourse of lifelong learning comes through, which is specific to the Scottish curriculum. Words such as *action* and *lifelong learning*, and the setting "I can apply my developing understanding of morality to consider a range of moral dilemmas in order to find ways which could promote a more just and compassionate society," point toward a social reconstructionist curriculum, which emphasizes its social and political aspects (Deng and Luke 2008). While diversity in society is mentioned in the curriculum, it is not very strongly advocated. However, the curriculum states that RME enables the student to "recognize and understand religious diversity and the importance of religion in society."

Specific attitudes that should be developed in studying RME include developing respect for others and understanding their beliefs and values; understanding what is fair and unfair; why caring and sharing are

important; developing awareness of diverse beliefs in modern Scotland; and understanding values such as honesty, respect, and compassion.

In summary, the non-denominational Scottish RME curriculum has a strong social reconstructionist tradition, calling for a just, pluralistic society. The RME curriculum articulates that reflecting on religious education issues "might lead to changes in society." This RE curriculum also stands in a distinctly moral curriculum tradition, clearly aiming to educate students to make them moral citizens (Linde 2012; cf. McKinney and McCluskey 2017).

The Background and Context of RE in Sweden

Religious education has a long history in Swedish schools (see Hartman 2012; von Brömssen 2018). The Swedish curriculum subject *Knowledge of Religions* is compulsory throughout all grades, from year 1 in primary school to upper secondary school, and is considered integrative. Education about and learning from different religions, worldviews, and ethics take place in religiously mixed classrooms. Since 1997, there have been no opt-out options, as the subject is regarded the same as any other within the curriculum (Lgr 11 and Lgy 11). The curriculum subject has been non-confessional and non-denominational since 1962 and should be neutral in relation to different religions and worldviews (School Law 2010:800, 6§).

An Analysis of the RE Curriculum in Sweden

Religious education in Sweden is currently comparable with any other humanistic or social science subject in public schools. The Swedish RE curriculum initially states:

> Teaching should take as its starting point a view of society characterized by openness regarding lifestyle, outlooks on life, differences between people, and also give students the opportunity to develop a preparedness for understanding and living in a society characterized by diversity. (*Lgr* 11)

The curriculum has a strong societal dimension, underlining a diverse society and diverse outlooks on life as its starting point and a partial motivation for teaching RE. The introductory text below explains the overarching aim of RE for students:

> Teaching in religion should essentially give students the opportunities to develop their ability to: analyse Christianity, other religions and other outlooks on life, as well as different interpretations and use of these, analyse how religions affect and are affected by conditions and events in society, reflect over life issues and their own and other's identity, reason and discuss moral issues and values based on ethical concepts and models, and search for information about religions and other outlooks on life and evaluate the relevance and credibility of sources. (*Lgr* 11)

Thus, Swedish RE is formulated as a secular, plural subject that teaches "religions and other outlooks on life, religion and society, identity and life issues, and ethics." Even so, the curriculum points toward students' abilities to "analyse Christianity, other religions, and other outlooks on life."

As in the Scottish curriculum, there is a cultural-heritage perspective built into the Swedish RE curriculum, in which Christianity is singled out and mentioned first in the text. This actually makes discussing "other religions and other outlooks on life" into an othering exercise and suggests that these worldviews are considered somewhat secondary. Another competing discourse is established by repeated use of the word *different* in the phrase "how people with different religious traditions live with and express their religion and belief in different ways." This wording can contribute to the othering discourse. The dominant, normalized, established discourse relates to Christianity, even though the RE approach should be neutral, according to the Swedish School Law.

The competences in this RE curriculum are *analyze* (twice), *reflect*, *reason*, and *search*. These words point to quite an analytical curriculum, in which students are positioned distant from their studies. For example, ethics should be studied based on ethical concepts and models. However, ethics are not mentioned in relation to the students themselves. Attitudes such as tolerance and respect for others' worldviews are emphasized and highlighted as part of the fundamental values of the school.

The Swedish RE curriculum clearly focuses on knowledge and analysis of different beliefs, rather than primarily on supporting the personal development of students' own thoughts and existential understanding of life (cf. Selander 2011). Using Deng and Luke's definitions (2008), we consider the current Swedish RE curriculum to be categorized as an academic rationalist curriculum. This type of curriculum is focused on making students use and appreciate the ideas and works that constitute various intellectual disciplines; in this case, the academic discipline and canon in religious studies aimed at a primarily scientific understanding of the world.

RE and Post-secularity—A Concluding Discussion

In concluding our analysis of the curricula from Denmark, Scotland, and Sweden, we note that RE plays a role as a mandatory subject in all three educational systems for state-maintained public schools. It is also categorized as a non-confessional, non-denominational subject in each national context. However, the analysis shows that each curriculum differs when it comes to tradition, even if it claims to be non-denominational/non-confessional. Therefore, even though there are global ideas and challenges to education and RE, such as increased national and international testing, standardization, and competitiveness (see Verger et al. 2018), the state and its actors still strongly influence curricula construction, at least when it comes to RE.

Our work here uses a relatively traditional way of analyzing curricula, still interesting as it shows clear differences even though all three curricula are framed within a non-confessional approach. Of course, there are many nuances that can be made within each curriculum tradition. At an overall analytic level, the Danish curriculum follows a humanistic tradition, Scotland's curriculum follows a social constructionist tradition, and the Swedish curriculum uses a rational curriculum tradition. Such traditions have consequences for constructing knowledge of the subject

and how students develop religious literacy. These curricula traditions will, in turn, influence further religious developments in society.

What then about the idea of a post-secular society, and its relevance for RE education and curriculum construction? *Post-secularity* broadly means a renewed interest in religion and spirituality, or some combination thereof in secular societies. However, the concept of *post-secularity* is characterized by wide diversity of opinions and approaches, much of it rather ambivalent. Turner (2016, 24) argues "The idea of the post-secular society means basically that secular authorities can no longer simply ignore religion." We echo Turner's phrase, arguing that education can no longer simply ignore RE. This brings us back to the curriculum theoretical question: Which type of knowledge is most valuable in RE? In global education-policy discussions, literacy, numeracy, and quantitatively measured subjects are hotly debated and currently considered most important. However, subjects in the social and humanistic areas seem undervalued, which risks erasing quality and equality in both education and society as a whole (cf. Sayed et al. 2018).

Therefore, which type of RE subject could be constructed that reflects recent, national and global developments in the very broad field of study areas of religion that are the basis for the RE subject, as well as the goals of educating future citizens in a post-secular society? These are challenging questions. Thinking about RE as policy actors or teachers requires, we think, a global, intercultural view, which many students already might live in their social, everyday lives. It also requires an answer to the question on what the meaning of education is, and furthermore what the meaning of RE is when offered to pupils in public schools. These are "complicated conversations" as argued by Pinar (2012), and even more so in what might be called a post-secular society.

Notes

1. See Alberts, 2010; Aldridge, 2015; Barnes, 2020; Biesta et al., 2019; Chidester, 2003; Conroy 2016; Crisp and Dinham 2019; Cusack and Nurwanto 2017; Dinham and Francis 2015; Dinham and Shaw 2017; Franken 2017; Franken and Loobuyck 2011; Gearon, 2013; Jackson,

2014; Jensen and Kjeldsen, 2013; Kjeldsen, 2019; Kuusisto et al., 2016; Lewin, 2017; Moulin, 2015; Ntho-Ntho and Nieuwenhuis, 2016; and Wielzen and Ter Avest 2017. These are a few of the scholars taking part in the debate. There are many voices, and the field is quickly expanding. See also: Religious Education in Schools. https://iarf.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Religious-Education-in-Schools.pdf. [Retrieved 20200123].

2. The concept of post-secularism is currently gaining relevance (Casanova, 1974; Knott, 2005; Habermas, 2006; Rosati & Stoeckl, 2012; Sigurdsson, 2015). For a critical discussion of the concept, see Turner (2016, 649–667).
3. This chapter draws on previous work in the READY-project (http://www.readyproject.eu/), and the article Religious Literacy in the Curriculum in Compulsory Education in Austria, Scotland and Sweden – a Three-Country Policy Comparison by Kerstin von Brömssen, Heinz Ivkovits and Graeme Nixon in *Journal of Beliefs & Values, Studies in Religion & Education*, (2020). https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2020.1737909. This chapter is extensively rewritten, but the curriculum analysis concerning Scotland and Sweden have partly the same starting points and analyses.
4. For a more extensive elaboration of the field of curriculum studies, see Pinar et al. (2008, 67–238).
5. In their literature review, Eisner and Vallance (1974, 2, 5–14) considered five concepts as major curriculum orientations: Curriculum as development of cognitive processes curriculum; curriculum as technology; curriculum as self-actualization or consumatory experience; curriculum of social-reconstruction relevance; and curriculum as an academic rationalist orientation. Although these perspectives might seem to be from another educational era, their major curriculum orientations still stand today and are important for ongoing curriculum policy debates about the aims of education and the construction of school subjects (see also Deng & Luke, 2008, 6; McNeil, 1985). Deng and Luke (2008) make use of four major curriculum orientations.
6. Scotland is part of the United Kingdom, yet has a certain degree of autonomy.
7. Kirkeministeriet. https://www.folkekirken.dk/om-folkekirken/folkekirken-i-tal (Retrieved 1/11/2020).
8. https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=209946#id73c451e7-10bb-40dc-8fac-311fbc943490 [Retrieved 200131].

References

Alberts, W. (2010). The Academic Study of Religions and Integrative Religious Education in Europe. *British Journal of Religious Education, 32*(3), 275–290.

Aldridge, A. (2015). *A Hermeneutics of Religious Education*. London: Bloomsbury.

Apple, M. W. (1979/2018). *Ideology and Curriculum* (4th.ed. E-book). London: Taylor & Francis.

Apple, M. W. (1990). Is There a Curriculum Voice to Reclaim? *Phi Delta Kappan, 71*(7), 526–530.

Ball, S. J. (2012). *Global Education Inc. New Policy Networks and the Neo-Liberal Imaginary*. London: Routledge.

Barnes, L. P. (2020). *Crisis, Controversy and the Future of Religious Education*. London: Routledge.

Bernstein, B. (1971). On Classification and Framing of Educational Knowledge. In M. F. D. Young (Ed.), *Knowledge and Control* (pp. 47–69). London: Collier-Macmillan. Reprinted in Bernstein, B. (1977) *Class, Codes and Control*: *Volume 3, Towards a Theory of Educational Transmissions* (pp. 85–115). Revised Edition. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Biesta, G., Aldridge, D., Hannam, P., & Whittle, S. (2019). *Religious Literacy: A Way Forward for Religious Literacy.* Brunel University London & Hampshire Inspection and Advisory Service. Retrieved January 7, 2020, from https://www.reonline.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Religious-Literacy-Biesta-Aldridge-Hannam-Whittle-June-2019.pdf.

Bobbitt, F. (1918). *The Curriculum.* Universal Digital Library. Retrieved January 15, 2020, from https://archive.org/details/curriculum008619mbp/page/n6/mode/2up.

Böwadt, P. R. (2009a). *Livsfilosofi og pædagogik. En kritisk undersøgelse af den danske og tyske livsfilosofi med særligt henblik på disse traditioners pædagogiske egnethed* [*Lebensphilosophie and Education. A Critical Study of the Danish and German Lebensphilosophie with Special Consideration of the Applicability of These Traditions to Education*]. E-bok. Gyldendal Uddannelse

Böwadt, P. R. (2009b). The Courage to Be: The Impact of Lebensphilosophie on Danish RE. *British Journal of Religious Education, 31*(1), 29–39. https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200802559981.

Brubaker, D. L. (2004). *Revitalizing Curriculum Leadership. Inspiring and Empowering Your School Community*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

von Brömssen, K. (2018). Constructions of Curriculum in Theory and the Situation in the Classroom, Differences and Commonalities. In P. Schreiner

(Ed.), *Are Your Ready? Diversity and Religious Education Across Europe—The Story of the READY-Project* (pp. 87–89). Münster: Waxmann.

von Brömssen, K., & Athiemoolam, L. (2018). Analysis of Pre-service Teachers' Role-plays on Religious Issues in Classroom Contexts. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences, 3*(4), 563–573. https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.3.4.13.

Buchardt, M. (1998). Senmoderne udfordringer til læreruddannelsen: Kan man konstruere almengyldige og givne værdier? [Late-Modern Challenges to Teacher Training: Can Universal and Irrefutable Values Be Established?]. *Unge Pædagoger, 7*(8), 3–12.

Buchardt, M. (2014). Religious Education in Schools in Denmark. In *Religious Education at Schools in Europe* (Part 3: Northern Europe) (pp. 45–74). Vienna: Vienna University Press.

Buchardt, M. (2017). Religious Education Research in Welfare State Denmark. A Historical and Institutional Perspective on an Epistemological Discussion. *Nordidactica—Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education, 2017*(1), 49–65.

Carlsson, D., & Thalén, P. (red.). (2015). *Det postsekulära klassrummet. Mot ett vidgat religionskunskapsbegrepp* [*The Postsecular Classroom. Towards an Expanded Concept of Religion*]. Uppsala: Swedish Science Press.

Casanova, J. (1974). *Public Religions in the Modern World*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Chidester, D. (2003). Religion Education in South Africa: Teaching and Learning About Religion, Religions, and Religious Diversity. *British Journal of Religious Education, 25*(4), 261–278. https://doi.org/10.1080/0141620030250402.

Chilton, P. (2004). *Analysing Political Discourse. Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research Methods in Education* (8th ed.). London: Routledge.

Council of Europe. (2002). *Recommendation Rec (2002)12 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on Education for Democratic Citizenship*. Retrieved November 1, 2020, from www.coe.int.

Council of Europe. (2008a). *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue*. Retrieved January 11, 2020, from www.coe.int.

Council of Europe. (2008b). *Recommendation CM/Rec (2008)12 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the Dimension of Religions and Non-religious*

Convictions Within Intercultural Education. Retrieved January 11, 2020, from www.coe.int.

Curriculum for Excellence. *Religious and Moral Education. Experiences and Outcomes*. Retrieved November 2, 2019, from https://education.gov.scot/Documents/rme-eo.pdf.

Cusack, C. M., & Nurwanto, N. (2017). Addressing Multicultural Societies: Lessons from Religious Education Curriculum Policy in Indonesia and England. *Journal of Religious Education, 64*(3), 157–168.

Deng, Z., & Luke, A. (2008). Subject Matter. Defining and Theorizing School Subjects. In M. F. Connelly, F. H. Ming, & J. Phillion (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Curriculum and Instruction* (pp. 66–85). London: Sage Publications.

Eisner, E. W., & Vallance, E. (1974). Introduction—Five Conceptions of Curriculum: Their Roots and Implications for Curriculum Planning. In *Conflicting Conceptions of Curriculum* (pp. 1–18). Berkeley, CA: McCutchan.

Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.

Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing Discourse and Text: Textual Analysis for Social Research*. London: Routledge.

Goodson, I., & Marsh, C. J. (1996). *Studying School Subjects*. London: The Falmer Press.

Gulson, K. N., Clarke, M., & Bendix Petersen, E. (2015). *Education Policy and Contemporary Theory. Implications for Research*. London: Routledge.

Habermas, J. (2006). On the Relations Between the Secular Liberal State and Religion. In H. de Vries & L. E. Sullivan (Eds.), *Political Theologies. Public Religions in a Post-secular World* (pp. 251–260). New York: Fordham University Press.

Hartman, S. (2012). *Det pedagogiska kulturarvet. Traditioner och idéer i svensk undervisningshistoria* [*The Educational Cultural Heritage. Traditions and Ideas in Swedish Teaching History*]. Stockholm: Natur och Kultur Akademisk.

Jackson, R. (2014). *Signposts—Policy and Practice for Teaching about Religions and Non-religious Worldviews in Intercultural Education*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Jensen, T. (2005). European and Danish Religious Education: Human Rights, the Secular State and Rethinking Religious Education and Plurality. *Religion and Education, 32*(1), 60–78. https://doi.org/10.1080/15507394.2005.10012351.

Jensen, T., & Kjeldsen, K. (2013). RE in Denmark—Political and Professional Discourses and Debates, Pats and Present. *Temenos, 49*(2), 185–223.

Jensen, T. (2000). Et religionskritisk religionsfag—en sekulær stats svar på den flerreligiøse udfordring (A Critical RE—The Reaction of a Secular State to the Challenges of Religious Diversity). In L. Christoffersen & J. Bæk Simonsen (Eds.), *Visioner for Religionsfrihed, Demokrati og Etnisk Ligestilling* (pp. 103–132). København: Nævnet for Etnisk Ligestilling.

The Journal i.e. Religion in the Classroom: How Other Countries in the EU Deal With It. August 3, 2016. Retrieved October 12, 2019, from https://www.thejournal.ie/religion-classroom-eu-examples-primary-divestment-2887905-Aug2016/.

Knott, K. (2005). *The Location of Religion. A Spatial Analysis*. London: Equinox Publishing Ltd..

Kristendomskundskab, Fælles Mål 2019. Børne—og Undervisningsminsiteriet. Retrieved January 11, 2020, from https://emu.dk/sites/default/files/2019-08/GSK.%20Fælles%20Mål.%20Kristendomskundskab.pdf.

Lewin, D. (2017). *Educational Philosophy for a Post-secular Age*. London: Routledge.

Lgr 11, Curriculum for the Compulsory School, Preschool Class and School-Age Educare 2011. Revised 2018. Stockholm: The National Agency for Education.

Linde, G. (2012). *Det ska ni veta! En introduktion till läroplansteori* [*You'll Know! An Introduction to Curriculum Theory*]. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Lundgren, U. P. (1983). Social Production and Reproduction as a Context for Curriculum Theorizing. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 15*(2), 143–154.

McKinney, S. J., & McCluskey, R. (2017). Does Religious Education Matter in Non-denominational Schools in Scotland? In M. Shanahan (Ed.), *Does Religious Education Matter?* (pp. 152–166). London: Routledge.

McNeil, J. D. (1985). *Curriculum: A Comprehensive Introduction* (3rd. ed.). Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

Moulin, D. (2015). Doubts about Religious Education in Public Schooling. *International Journal of Christianity & Education, 19*, 135–148. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056997115583583.

National Records of Scotland. (2018). Retrieved February 17, 2020, from https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/.

Nixon, G. (2016). Conscientious Withdrawal from Religious Education in Scotland: Anachronism or Necessary Right? *British Journal of Religious Education, 40*(1), 6–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2016.1161597.

Ntho-Ntho, A. M., & Nieuwenhuis, J. (2016). Religion in Education Policy in South Africa: A Challenge of Change. *British Journal of Religious Education, 38*(3), 236–248. https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2014.984583.

OSCE—Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. (2007). *The Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religion or Belief in Public Schools*. Retrieved January 11, 2020, from www.osce.org.

Pinar, W. F. (2008). Curriculum Theory Since 1950: Crisis, Reconceptualization, Internationalization. In F. M. Connelly, M. F. He, & J. Phillion (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Curriculum and Instruction* (pp. 491–513). London: Sage.

Pinar, W. F. (2012). *What is Curriculum Theory?* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.

Ramirez, F. O., & Boli, J. (1987). The Political Construction of Mass Schooling. European Origins and Worldwide Institutionalism. *Sociology of Education, 60*(1), 2–17.

Rasmussen, M. L., & Gowlett, C. (2015). Queer Theory, Policy and Education. In K. N. Gulson, M. Clarke, & E. Bendix Petersen (Eds.), *Education Policy and Contemporary Theory. Implications for Research*. London: Routledge.

Religious Education in Schools: School Education in Relation with Freedom of Religion and Belief, Tolerance, and Non-Discrimination, International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF). (2002). Retrieved January 10, 2020, from https://iarf.net/resources/publications/ReligiousEducationinSchools.pdf.

Rizvi, F., & Lingard, B. (2010). *Globalizing Educational Policy*. London: Routledge.

Rosati, M., & Stoeckl, K. (2012). *Multiple Modernities and Postsecular Societies*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Sayed, Y., Ahmed, R., & Mogliacci, R. (2018). The 2030 Global Education Agenda and the SDG:s Process, Policy and Prospects. In A. Verger, M. Novelli, & H. Kosar Altinyelken (Eds.), *Global Education Policy and International Development. New Agendas, Issues and Policies* (2nd ed., pp. 185–207). London: Bloomsbury.

Schreiner, P. (2015). Religious Education in the European Context. In J. Berglund, T. Lundén, & P. Strandbrink (Eds.), *Crossings and Crosses—Teaching Religion in Border Crossings* (pp. 125–139). Boston and Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH.

Selander, S. (2011). Från livsfrågor, etik och reflektion till samhälle, kunskap och analys [From Life Issues, Ethics and Reflection to Society, Knowledge and Analysis]. *Religion & Livsfrågor,* 2, 18–21. Retrieved December 8, 2019, from http://www.flr.se/tidningar/rol-1102.pdf.

Sigurdson, O. (2015). *Det postsekulära tillståndet—Religion, modernitet, politik* [*The Post-secular Condition—Religion, Modernity, Politics*]. Göteborg: Glänta produktion.

Stoeckl, K. (2015) *The Future of Religious Education in Europe*. European University Institute. Retrieved January 12, 2020, from https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/784a01b0-ca48-11e5-a4b5-01aa75ed71a1/language-en.

Sund, P., & Wickman, P.-O. (2011). Socialization Content in Schools and Education for Sustainable Development—I. A Study of Teachers' Selective Traditions. *Environmental Education Research, 17*(5), 599–624.

Swedish School Law. (2010:800). 6§. Retrieved January 14, 2020, from http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/skollag-2010800_sfs-2010-800.

Taylor, S. (2004). Researching Educational Policy and Change in 'New Times': Using Critical Discourse Analysis. *Journal of Education Policy, 19*(4), 433–451. https://doi.org/10.1080/0268093042000227483.

The READY-Project. Retrieved January 25, 2020, from http://www.readyproject.eu/.

Tinker, F. (2017). A Case for Expanding Multi-Faith Education: Scotland. In D. R. Wielzen & I. Ter Avest (Eds.), *Interfaith Education for All. Theoretical Perspectives and Best Practices for Transformative Action* (pp. 189–200). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Turner, B. S. (2016). Religion in a Post-secular Society. In B. S. Turner (Ed.), *The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion* (pp. 649–667). Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd..

United Nation. (2006, latest update). *Religious Tolerance. Understanding, Tolerance, Coexistence*. Retrieved January 25, 2020, from http://www.religioustolerance.org/un_dec.htm.

Verger, A., Novelli, M., & Altinyelken, H. K. (Eds.). (2018). *Global Education Policy and International Development. New Agendas, Issues and Policies* (2nd ed.). London: Bloomsbury.

Wahlström, N. (2015) *Läroplansteori och didaktik* [*Curriculum Theory and Didactics*]. Malmö: Gleerups Utbildning AB.

Watt, D. (2016). Muslim Female Students Confront Islamophobia: Negotiating Identities In-Between Family, Schooling, and the Mass Media. *Journal of Family Diversity in Education, 2*(1), 21–36.

Westbury, I. (2008). Making Curricula. Why Do States Make Curricula, and How? In F. M. Connelly, M. F. He, & J. Phillion (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Curriculum and Instruction* (pp. 45–65). London: Sage.

Williams, R. (1989). Hegemony and the Selective Tradition. In C. de Castell, A. Luke, & C. Luke (Eds.), *Language, Authority and Criticism: Readings on the School Textbook* (pp. 56–60). Philadelphia, PA: The Falmer Press.

von Brömssen, K., Ivkovits, H., & Nixon, G. (2020). Religious Literacy in the Curriculum in Compulsory Education in Austria, Scotland and Sweden—A Three-Country Policy Comparison. *Journal of Beliefs & Values, 41*(2), 132–149.

5

What About Transformative Religious Education?

Gunnar J. Gunnarsson

Introduction

Religious Education in a post-secular age assumes that religion is still an influential factor in shaping culture and society and affects people's daily lives. Over the last two decades it has been pointed out that religion is playing an increasingly important role in the society, both in dialogue between people of different religions and in the context of social tension and conflict (Weisse 2010, 188). Therefore, some scholars have questioned last century's secularisation theories (Berger 1999, 1–18) or even described them as a myth (Bellah 2001). Religious diversity has become an important part of the pluralism of society, and religion is back on the agenda in Western societies in the media as well as in political and general discourse. Different religions and life views are now one possibility of many for developing spiritual or religious beliefs. Young people, born into a modern society, learn that the values, beliefs and lifestyles available

G. J. Gunnarsson (✉)
School of Education, University of Iceland, Reykjavík, Iceland
e-mail: gunnarjg@hi.is

O. Franck, P. Thalén (eds.), *Religious Education in a Post-Secular Age*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47503-1_5

to them are no longer based on a single ideology (Ziebertz et al. 2006, 204). Studies show that young people are aware of the religious diversity in society and among friends, and they are positive towards cultural and religious diversity. At the same time, the daily life of many of young people is secularised. Religion, religious activity or the church is not a significant part of their daily life, and they look at their own and others' religious views as a private matter and they believe in their own personal way (Gunnarsson et al. 2016, 108). However, other studies suggest that young people, coming from a wide range of social, cultural and religious backgrounds, show themselves to be aware of the increased importance of religion in their life and society. Young people in Europe want to broaden their knowledge of the religious dimension and of different religious traditions because they take religion seriously as a factor for dialogue and conflict and share a strong desire for people from different backgrounds to live together in peace (Knauth and Körs 2011, 221). School is one of the first places where children have daily contact with different values, religions and worldviews. Children do not leave their values and convictions outside the classroom, and therefore the religious dimension of human experience is of relevance to multicultural education because this dimension is a part of the culture and identity of a large number of individuals (Milot 2007, 22).

Religious education is therefore an important part of educating people in so-called multicultural or pluralistic societies. The knowledge about different religions can contribute to recognition of the importance of respecting everyone's right to practice their religion or beliefs and increase understanding of social complexity and enhance social cohesion (*Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching About Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools*, 2007, 13). Societal changes call for changed emphases and approaches in religious education. How can we organise the teaching and learning about religions, what approaches can we use and what goals do we consider important?

In this chapter I will take changes in religious education in Iceland as an example and discuss how it has become a part of social studies and how the social studies, including religious education, is connected to what is called the fundamental pillars of education in the National Curriculum Guide. That leads to questions about approaches and

objectives of social studies and of religious education. In that regard I will discuss the question if so-called transformative education is possible in religious education.

Changes in Religious Education: Iceland as an Example

Over the last decades, Iceland has faced rapid social changes and the languages, cultures and religions of Iceland's population have become increasingly diverse. It called for changes in legal framework and school curricula. In 2008, new legislation changed the name of the RE-subject from being "Christian knowledge, ethics and religious studies" to "religious education" (Compulsory School Act, No. 91/2008). In the following curriculum, a major change was made. Now the religious education became a part of the social studies curriculum together with history, geography, sociology, life skills education and ethics (The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools—With Subject Areas, 2013). Before that, in 2011, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in Iceland issued the general part of the Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for the Preschool, the Compulsory school and the Upper secondary school. In all three curricula, there is a chapter on what is called the fundamental pillars of education. The chapters describe six fundamental pillars of education that are to be mirrored in school activities. The fundamental pillars are literacy in the widest sense, education towards sustainability, health and welfare, democracy and human rights, equality and creativity. They were all supposed to be visible in learning and teaching, working methods, organisation and development plans of schools and furthermore, in its relations with its local community (The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools—With Subject Areas, 14). This implies that the curricula of the subject fields should take account of these fundamental pillars of education. With the following subject areas curriculum guide of 2013 for compulsory schools, the curricula of individual subjects were merged into larger entities and religious education thus became a part of social studies as mentioned

before. That entails, among other things, that the role of religious education is primarily described in the context of the subjects that are included there. But what about the fact that the curricula of the subject fields should take account of the previously mentioned fundamentals of education? How and to what degree do the six fundamental pillars of education appear in the curricula of social studies and therefore in religious education?

In the beginning it is useful to see how The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide discusses the role of the fundamental pillars. According to the Curriculum guide they "refer to social, cultural, environmental and ecological literacy so that children and youth may develop mentally and physically, thrive in society and cooperate with others. The fundamental pillars also refer to a vision of the future, ability and will to influence and be active in maintaining society, change it and develop" (The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools—With Subject Areas, 14). And furthermore: "They are socially oriented as they are to promote increased equality and democracy and to ensure well-educated and healthy citizens, both for participating in and for changing and improving society and also for contemporary employment" (p. 14).

Here we can see a number of different emphases: social, cultural, environmental and ecological literacy; children's and youth's mental and physical development so they can thrive in society and cooperate with others; ability and will to influence and be active in maintaining society, changing it and developing it; promotion of increased equality and democracy; promotion of well-educated and healthy citizens, both for participating in and for changing and improving society. These are comprehensive goals and emphases and one can wonder how individual subjects can contribute to them.

If we look at how the subject area in the Icelandic National Curriculum guide describes the role of social studies, we find the following description:

> Social studies are those subjects that pertain to society and culture in an informative and critical manner. They are founded on the duty of each society to educate pupils about values such as equality, democracy, concern and respect, and the importance of these values for a happy life. […] Social studies are intended to assist pupils in responding to the challenges of their

> environment and immediate surroundings in a sensible manner and to define for them their responsibility for the means that individuals choose in order to find their way among people anywhere. Social studies are intended to enhance pupils' understanding of certain basic qualities of human life and their division, by explaining how they entail various duties, rights and values as an inseparable part of social and ethical reality. Examples of such qualities are justice, knowledge, freedom, friendship, respect and responsibility (The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools—With Subject Areas, 201).

It is clear that the description of the role of social studies reflects many elements of the fundamental pillars of education. They should educate pupils about values such as equality and democracy, and two of the fundamental pillars are equality and democracy and human rights. Social studies are intended to assist pupils in responding to the challenges of their environment and immediate surroundings, and one of the fundamental pillars is education towards sustainability. Social studies are also intended to enhance pupils' understanding of certain basic qualities of human life and their division, qualities like justice, knowledge, freedom, friendship, respect and responsibility. This is in line with fundamental pillars like health and welfare, equality, democracy and human rights. This is also in line with the description of the role of the fundamental pillars.

There is no doubt that the description of the role of social studies includes important elements of the fundamental pillars of education in the National curriculum guide. The question is how the different subjects of social studies, such as citizenship/life skills education, geography, history, religious education, and ethics, approach the teaching and learning so that the essentials of the fundamental pillars can be achieved. In this chapter I will not discuss different approaches in religious education, but instead refer to my discussion in the book *Challenging Life: Existential Questions as a Resource for Education* (Gunnarsson 2018, 70–72). Nevertheless, I argue that contextual approaches are more useful in religious education in times of great social change and growing religious diversity. In this chapter my interest is in what might be called "transformative education" in social studies and therefore in religious education.

Transformative Education in Social Studies?

In recent years some scholars have discussed the importance and value of transformative education in order to promote young people's ability to cope with complex reality. In the description of the role of the fundamental pillars of education, we see emphasis on the ability and will to influence and be active in maintaining society, changing it and developing it. We also see emphasis on the promotion of increased equality and democracy and of well-educated and healthy citizens, both for participating in and for changing and improving society. The question is whether transformative education can be of help to achieve these goals.

I will first take two examples from the discussion on transformative education, that is, James A. Banks (2008) and his discussion on transformative education in citizenship education, and Joseph M. Kirman's (2003) discussion on transformative education in geography and ethics.

Banks (2008, 135–137) discusses the issue in the context of multicultural societies and multicultural teaching with a particular emphasis on the position of different community groups, especially minorities, and in view of the danger of children of foreign origin not experiencing themselves as real citizens in the country in which they live, partly because their history and culture are not accepted as equal to the background and culture of the majority in society. He emphasises, among other things, the necessity of transformative education in order for students to acquire clear and thoughtful awareness of cultural, national, regional and global identities and how they are interconnected and came to be. Thus, they learn to know, accept and respect each person's cultural identity and self-image. He believes that such education is based, among other things, on enabling students to acquire the necessary information to identify problems in society and to acquire the ability to challenge inequalities within their own community, society and the world at large. It should also lead to the ability to take action to create a just and democratic society. Transformative citizenship education should thus help students clarify their own values and value judgements, as well as being an incentive to engage in thoughtful individual or collective civic action. Such education thus involves critical thinking or what has been called critical citizenship

education. In addition, Banks mentions that transformative education involves cooperation rather than competition between students with different social, ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

In the opinion of Banks (2008, 136), transformative education implies that students acquire the knowledge, values and skills that make them what Clarke (1996, 6) calls deep citizens. In that regard, Banks discusses the different levels of civic and democratic consciousness. The lowest level is the awareness of legal civil rights and obligations without any further impact on active participation in the political system. At the next level, there is some activity, particularly with participation in elections and suchlike. In the third stage, there is a democratic consciousness that involves not only participating in elections but also direct efforts to actualise existing laws and conventions, for example, by taking part in protests, writing articles and publicly discussing important and controversial issues, particularly to support and maintain existing social and political structures. In the fourth stage, which Banks calls transformative citizenship, there is the ability and willingness to engage in civic action aimed at activating values, moral principles and ideals beyond those of existing laws and conventions. Transformative citizens thus take action to promote social justice and equality, even if their actions violate, challenge or dismantle existing laws, conventions or structures. Banks maintains that while transformative teachers accept and respect students at all these levels of citizenship, they should help them to become transformative citizens.

Here are various things worth considering and discussing, and placing in the context of the school's role, the fundamental pillars of education, and the subject matter of social studies. But first let's take a look at Joseph Kirman. When Kirman (2003, 93–95) discusses transformative geography education, he refers to Noddings' (1984) existential philosophy of caring and, not least, to the moral aspect that is interwoven with it. Thus, caring does not involve just acting according to given rules and customs, but lovingly and wholeheartedly. The moral aspect, in Kirman's (1992, 9) opinion, expands the caring beyond personal one-on-one relationships to all relationships. It includes a good standard of values for actions based on love, kindness and respect for human dignity, where love includes unselfish care for the welfare of others, kindness leads to active

helpfulness and human dignity revolves around respect and nobility, which is inherent in all human beings. This ideology and its moral aspect, in Kirman's opinion, include criteria for what is right and wrong both in personal and extended relationships. Transformative geography therefore expands attention from limited personal connections and interests to expanded moral connections with care for all life and the earth as a whole as a guide. It also includes geographical aspects relating to human rights and seeks to divert attention from what is to what ought to be and is inquiry driven. On this basis, Kirman (2003, 95) presents three fundamental elements of transformative geography:

1. Critical thinking—the issue studied carefully
2. Decision-making—made on the basis of the data and information generated by the study
3. Actions—based on decision-making, action is taken, either individually or collectively.

In Kirman's opinion, transformative geography requires action and thereby links him to the ideas of critical geographers and radical humanism. Ethics, human rights and sustainability are the guiding principles here. Thus, we see similar emphases here as with Banks. Transformative education should lead to action with the aim of making the world a better place to live.

Here we can of course reflect on the ideas of Banks and Kirman and their relation to the role of the school and social studies teaching. What should it be? We can of course have different opinions about that, but we are immediately faced with the fact that the emphases of Banks and Kirman are directly related to the various emphases we see in the fundamental pillars of education, such as sustainability, welfare, democracy, human rights and equality. We also see similar emphases with them and in the description in the Icelandic National Curriculum Guide of the role of social studies, which has previously been referred to. From this it can be concluded that transformative education is appropriate if the intention is to attain what the fundamental pillars deal with and are intended to bring about. It is not to be doubted, however, that some consider that the emphases of Banks and Kirman go far and are even considered rather

political. How far can the school go in encouraging students to take action in matters that might be seen as political or controversial? Biesta (2010) points out that in discussions about democratic education there is a strong tendency to see the role of education as that of preparation of children and young people for their future participation in democratic life. The same emphasis can be seen in the Icelandic Compulsory School Act (No. 91/2008). Biesta discusses the work of Hannah Arendt with special focus on her ideas about the relationship between education and politics and finds out that her writings on the subject seem to be informed by a "developmentalistic" perspective in which it is maintained that the child is not yet ready for political life, so education has to be separated from politics and seen as a preparation for future participation in political life (Biesta 2010, 556–575). This might be seen as an argument against the idea of transformative education as we see it in the writings of Banks and Kirman. However, Biesta continues and points out that Hannah Arendt's writings on politics and the role of understanding in political life point in a different direction as they articulate what it means to exist political—that is, to exist together in plurality. Her writings highlight that political existence is neither based on, nor can be guaranteed by, moral qualities such as tolerance and respect. Therefore, Biesta argues for a democratic education that focuses on creating opportunities for political existence inside and outside schools and how we can learn from political existence. "The students 'learn democracy' through their participation in the contexts and practices, that make up their everyday lives, in school, college and university, and in society at large" (Biesta 2011, 6).

The question remains of how to achieve the competence criteria of the Icelandic National Curriculum Guide in social studies which are based on and refer to the fundamental pillars. The fundamental pillars should be integrated into the National Curriculum Guide at all levels of education and therefore it can be argued with good reason that social studies are in many ways well suited to achieving their goals. If we agree with Biesta's views on democratic education and that the emphases and approaches of Banks and Kirman may apply in various branches of social studies, such as citizenship/life skills education, geography, ethics and so forth, then the question arises as to whether transformative education, as

they describe it, can apply in religious education, especially in view of the fact that religious education, like other subjects, is supposed to contribute to the previously mentioned fundamental pillars of education.

What About Religious Education?

In the well-known report *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching About Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools*, one of the main conclusions is a strong emphasis on the value of knowledge about different religions. This knowledge can contribute to recognition of the importance of respecting everyone's right to practice their religion or beliefs, increase understanding of social complexity and enhance social cohesion. At the same time, knowledge about religions can reduce disputes and conflicts that result from a lack of understanding of the beliefs of others. It is also emphasised that the most effective is that religious education go hand in hand with inculcating respect for the rights of others, even if there is disagreement about religions and beliefs. Freedom of religion and belief is a universal human right, and it involves a commitment to respecting the rights and equality of all people. (Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching About Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools, 2007, 13–14).

The guiding principles set out in the report then lay out the guidelines for what to look out for when organising and conducting religious education in public schools. The focus is on issues such as fairness, accuracy, academic professionalism, respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and civic values, religious freedom, mutual respect and understanding. Here we find emphases that have parallels in what Banks and Kirman talk about in their discussions on transformative education, issues such as human rights, equality, respect and so forth. Here there are also emphases that are analogous to what we see in the fundamental pillars of education according to the Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for compulsory schools.

It is known that religious education in public schools is considered sensitive and difficult, and it is therefore possible to wonder how it can become transformative. For example, it cannot include indoctrination in certain religions or beliefs, at least not in a public school with a joint religious education for all students. Teachers in public schools are

responsible to all of their students, and by extension to their parents. In a multicultural and pluralistic society, it is important to keep this in mind. Elizabeth Campbell (2003, 83) emphasises that in the capacity of the professional role, the teacher is not simply a lone individual or private citizen, free to express opinions while being answerable only to an internal conscience. When teachers speak they may be seen to be speaking with the authority of the institution or the school and the profession of teaching behind them. This means that teachers are not supposed to express or foster their personal beliefs or to indoctrinate students into particular religions or beliefs.

On the other hand, religious education can undoubtedly include indoctrination in what was mentioned above, that is, respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and civic values, religious freedom, mutual respect and understanding. Can we then talk about transformative education in that regard?

Here, I find it interesting to recall what Michael Grimmitt (1987, 224–226) maintained about 30 years ago in his discussion of religious education when he distinguished between "learning about religion" and "learning from religion". Learning about religion, according to Grimmitt's definition, implies that students learn about the world's major religions, their traditions, convictions, doctrines, values, and rituals, as well as their influence on individuals, communities and cultures. He is of the opinion that learning about religions involves objective knowledge and, first and foremost, provides students with a general understanding of religions. On the other hand, learning from religion, in Grimmitt's sense, involves what students learn from their religious education about themselves, about being able to understand fundamental questions of existence and their own experiences, and to consider how they can respond. They are trained in understanding fundamental values and learning how to interpret them. At the same time they learn to pay attention to the shaping effects of one's own beliefs and values on personal development and about their potential for identifying the spiritual dimension of their experience, as well as about the need to be responsible for their own decision-making, especially in matters of belief and conduct. Grimmitt maintains that this assimilation of knowledge leads to better self-knowledge and personal understanding, that is, promotes subjective knowledge.

It can be argued using various arguments that what Grimmitt says about learning from religions is close to what is said when discussing transformative education. The idea, then, is that it is not enough to acquire objective knowledge about different religions and beliefs, but at the same time lessons should be drawn from learning about religions. Thus, religious education can contribute to strengthening self-understanding and personal convictions and proficiency in comparing one's own opinions and convictions with other kinds of opinions and convictions—and even challenging one's own assumptions and opinions, if appropriate.

Religious education in the spirit of transformative education could thus promote proficiency in giving arguments for one's own convictions while leading to tolerance and respect for the attitudes and rights of others. As such, it can lead to an understanding of the importance of human rights and religious freedom, and the value of standing on one's own convictions. It can then lead to the ability and willingness to take action when those rights are trampled upon or dishonoured in any context. This is in harmony with the emphasis of Kirman and Banks on the ability to take action when appropriate, with the aim of making the world a better place to live in.

Conclusion

In the Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools, it is stated that religious education is "intended to enhance the understanding of prevailing religions and different religious traditions based on tolerance and broadmindedness" (The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools—With Subject Areas, 202). Here, the concepts of tolerance and open-mindedness become key concepts. And in the competence criteria of social studies, emphasis is placed, among other things, on the students being able to "explain with examples the diversity of human life and people's different origins, respect people's freedom to different religions, life values, opinions and ways of life" (The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools—With Subject Areas, 208). This is in line with the fundamental pillars of

education in the Curriculum. The question is: How can we achieve those goals? Possibly, transformative education, as an approach in religious education, can contribute to this. When Banks (2008) talks about transformative citizenship, he emphasises the ability and willingness to engage in civic action aimed at activating values, moral principles and ideals. Transformative citizens thus take action to promote social justice and equality. When this is placed in the context of religious teaching, the issue is not about indoctrination in certain religions or beliefs, but about understanding of the diversity of human life and people's different origins and respect for people's freedom to different religions, life values, opinions and ways of life. This is about human rights and the ability and willingness to take action when they are not respected. The three fundamental elements of transformative geography Kirman (2003) presents can be of help when working with this in the RE-classroom, that is (1) critical thinking when the issue is studied carefully, for example, by studying and discussing examples where human rights or people's freedom to different religions and beliefs are in question; (2) decision-making, where the students wonder, on the basis of the data and information generated by the study, what to do about it; and finally (3) actions, based on the decision-making, where the students discuss what they can do about the matter and make decisions about doing something either individually or collectively. The students are to learn to exist together in plurality, as Arendt emphasises when she talks about what it means to exist politically. Religious education is important in that regard when we think about growing religious diversity. It can be a part of what Biesta (2010) calls a democratic education that focuses on creating opportunities for political existence inside and outside schools and how we can learn from political existence. Human rights and freedom of religion and belief is a part of that political existence. Transformative religious education can among other things teach students to safeguard those values and take action when trampled on. In this way the students have not only learned about different religions and religious diversity; they have also learned from religions (Grimmitt 1987) as they are trained in understanding fundamental values and how to interpret them and act upon them.

References

Banks, J. A. (2008). Diversity, Group Identity, and Citizenship Education in a Global Age. *Educational Researcher, 37*(3), 129–139.

Bellah, R. (2001). Between Religion and Social Science. In R. Bellah (Ed.), *Beyond Belief. Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditionalist World* (2nd ed., pp. 237–259). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Berger, P. (1999). The Desecularization of the World: A Global Over view. In P. Berger (Ed.), *The Desecularization of the World. Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (pp. 1–18). Washington: Eerdmans Publishing.

Biesta, G. J. J. (2010). How to Exist Politically and Learn from It: Hanna Arendt and the Problem of Democratic Education. *Teachers college Record, 112*(2), 556–575.

Biesta, G. J. J. (2011). *Learning Democracy in School and Society. Education, Lifelong Learning and the Politics of Citizenship*. Rotterdam; Boston; Taipei: Sense Publishers.

Campbell, E. (2003). *The Ethical Teacher*. Berkshire and New York: Open University Press.

Clarke, P. B. (1996). *Deep Citizenship*. London: Pluta Press.

Compulsory School Act, No. 91/2008 [Lög um grunnskóla, nr. 91/2008].

Grimmitt, M. (1987). *Religious Education and Human Development. The Relationship Between Studying Religions and Personal, Social and Moral Education*. Wakering: McCrimmons.

Gunnarsson, G. J. (2018). Is a 'Life Question Approach' Appropriate when Religious Education has Become a Part of Social Studies? In J. Ristiniemi, G. Skeie, & K. Sporre (Eds.), *Challenging Life: Existential Questions as a Resource for Education* (pp. 69–82). Münster and New York: Waxmann.

Gunnarsson, G. J., Ragnarsdóttir, H., Finnbogason, G. E., & Jónsdóttir, H. (2016). Young People's Views on Religions in a Multicultural Society. *Theological Journal. Special issue "Shifting borders in Religious Education", 69*(1), 93–109.

Kirman, J. M. (1992). Values, Technology, and Social Studies. *McGill Journal of Education, 27*(1), 5–18.

Kirman, J. M. (2003). Transformative Geography: Ethics and Action in Elementary and Secondary Geography Education. *The Journal of Geography, 102*(3), 93–98.

Knauth, T., & Körs, A. (2011). The 'Contextual Setting Approach': A Contribution to Understanding How Young People View and Experience

Religion and Education in Europe. *British Journal of Religious Education, 33*(2), 209–223.

Milot, M. (2007). The Religious Dimension in Intercultural Education. In J. Keast (Ed.), *Religious Diversity and Intercultural Education: A Reference Book for Schools* (pp. 19–30). Strasbourg: The Council of Europe.

Noddings, N. (1984). *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools—With Subject Areas. (2013). Reykjavik, Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching About Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools. (2007). OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODHIR). Retrieved from https://www.osce.org/odihr/29154?download=true.

Weisse, W. (2010). REDCo: A European Research Project on Religion in Education. *Religion and Education, 37*, 187–202.

Ziebertz, H.-G., Kalbheim, B., & Riegel, U. (2006). A Typology of Religious Attitudes Among Young People in Germany. *Journal of Beliefs and Values, 27*(2), 203–214.

6

Transition in RE in Finland

Martin Ubani, Saila Poulter, and Inkeri Rissanen

Introduction

In this chapter, we will discuss key questions regarding religious education in Finnish state schools today. Recent years have shown that issues related to dialogue, citizenship skills, social integration have moved into the forefront when discussing religious education (Jackson 2014a). Similarly, several researchers have analysed the challenges that diversification, secularisation and post-secularity create for education in religions

M. Ubani (✉)
University of Eastern Finland, Kuopio, Finland
e-mail: martin.ubani@uef.fi

S. Poulter
University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland
e-mail: saila.poulter@helsinki.fi

I. Rissanen
Tampere University, Tampere, Finland
e-mail: inkeri.rissanen@tuni.fi

O. Franck, P. Thalén (eds.), *Religious Education in a Post-Secular Age*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47503-1_6

and non-religious worldviews in Finnish state schools (Ubani et al. 2019a). When we refer to Finnish society in a post-secular context, we do not wish to overstate the rising impact of religion in Europe, but acknowledge the resurgence of public religion and the emergence of an increasingly pluralistic public sphere in Finland too. We convey criticism of the secular normativity of schools and of the liberal-secular foundation of the mainstream approaches of multicultural education, which have emerged against a backdrop of the notion of post-secularity (Coulby and Zambeta 2008; Ubani 2013a). In the Nordic context too, scholars have criticised the othering of non-secular and non-Western worldviews in educational thinking and practices (see e.g. Berglund 2017; Poulter et al. 2016).

Currently in Finland there is an increasing demand to develop integrated practices of religious education towards the Nordic parallels (Åhs et al. 2017). In contrast to most Western and other Nordic countries, in Finland RE is legislated so that students are divided into separate classes based on their religious affiliation, yet the aims are similar to the other countries in that instruction does not include faith formation or devotional objectives (Rothgangel et al. 2014; Kallioniemi and Ubani 2016; Ubani and Tirri 2014). The current rapid developments in municipalities and schools towards resolving the demands on religious education in terms of dialogue, integration and multiculturalism as questions of practice—arguably overlooking the legislative, philosophical and moral aspects of integrated instruction—seems to indicate that in Finland RE as a subject and the respective scholarly output has for a long period remained relatively sedentary in relation to current questions of dialogue, diversity and encounter. Practical solutions to integration can to some extent be interpreted as post-secular realities that make local authorities use their power and adopt independent solutions regarding ways of organising RE, overtaking the slower mechanisms of democratic policy-making with regard to RE in state schools.

As indicated above, the starting point of the article is that various developments have contributed to a situation where the subject of religious education is to some extent marred by lack of focus and cohesion, rendering it restricted in its capacity to react to societal changes while still maintaining a core identity. Some studies have highlighted, for instance, a so-called secularist framework in which the subject has existed in an

isolated position in state education for decades (Ubani 2019). Evidently, there are elements in history that can be identified as contributing to the current lack of substantive cohesion and the instrumentalisation of the core elements in Finnish religious education. To understand change in curricular and scholarly thinking, however, it is vital to elaborate on the broader socio-cultural context in which different types of changes are embedded. In our examination of the current situation with regard to RE, we wish to recognise the complexity and multi-layered nature of historical trajectories (Popkewitz 2011). One needs to understand the power used in particular historical processes through which shifting conditions, effects and understandings of school subjects have been produced (Poulter et al. 2016). It is also critical to see what knowledge emerges through the subject itself and to understand RE in the making of an educated person. As Poulter et al. (2019, 221) remark, RE is a tool for advancing new forms of civic hegemonies, which should also be critically approached.

In order to examine the current situation in a comprehensive framework, this chapter will first focus on the basis and developments of RE in the course of Finnish public education. It will then discuss the characteristics and developments of Religious Education as an academic research discipline in Finland. Finally, the focus will be on the current situation as has been recently analysed in "Contextualising dialogue, secularisation and pluralism. Religion in Finnish public education" (Ubani et al. 2019a) by leading Finnish researchers of religion and religious education in Finnish state education.

The Historical Trajectory Surrounding RE in Finland Until the 2000s

The historical trajectory of Finnish RE illustrates not only a deep socio-cultural secularisation but also an educational shift that has pushed RE towards being a more heterogenous school subject. As Finnish RE has traditionally been understood as a place for strengthening knowledge of students' own religion and religious identity, this understanding is

currently challenged due to the diversification of life styles, values and identities. There is also new knowledge on the identity formation process, non-religiosity and pluralism, which question this traditional role of RE. What is also significant is the weakening role of theology in educational discussion and research, and also the reluctance of RE scholars to engage with traditional theological knowledge to tackle the challenges posed by a post-secular mentality. The following historical trajectory is based on Poulter's (2013) doctoral thesis, which aims to identify the key elements in the formation of religious education in the course of Finnish comprehensive education.

Starting the historical analysis from the beginning of Finnish mass education in the 1860s, it is important to note the state taking over responsibility for education from the Finnish Evangelical-Lutheran Church and connecting this process to wider ideological, political and economic attempts at modernisation (Koski and Filander 2012). Together with the overall educational ethos characterised by the unifying trinity of Christian morality, RE (which at that time was the confessional teaching of Lutheran Christianity) embraced the Lutheran faith and nationalism. The role of RE was to perform a socialising and civic task by nurturing religious life. Strong emphasis on national unity, community and reconciliation was further announced in the aftermath of the First World War, resulting in Finnish independence in 1917 and a civil war soon after. Children were to love and honour their home, religion and fatherland. The Christian moral code legitimised the purpose of the school, and religious and secular aims were seen as identical. The aim of RE was to lead them to knowledge of God by studying the Bible and arouse their willingness to fulfil God's will (Poulter 2013, 137–164). In 1923, the Religious Freedom Act came into force, followed by the definition of RE as a confessional subject of the majority religion, which allowed exemptions for pupils of other religious affiliation or non-religion, organised the teaching of Orthodox Christianity and created a separate subject for secular pupils (Saine 2000, 107).

The period after the Second World War meant fragmentation of the Christian value base in education and societally. This was marked by rapid economic growth, industrialisation, migration, urbanisation, secularisation and strengthening of the political Left. In a relatively short

time, Finland became a modern country, which also signified a deep fragmentation of its Christian value base (Innanen 2006, 60–61). In educational thinking, inspired by the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights (1948), recognition of individual rights together with an emphasis on democracy were advocated (Kähkönen 1976, 172–173). In RE, however, religion was strongly acknowledged for promoting ethical development and membership of society. It was no longer solely Christian dogma that dictated the aims of RE; more general educational goals and societal facts were now given space. In the 1970s, school reform introduced a marked ideological shift from the old school system. The goal of RE was to help children reflect on ethical issues but now, particularistic Lutheran ethics were replaced by liberal ethics that emphasised individual values and personal life questions. Teaching of world religions also meant that the cohesion based on Christian dogma was fragmented in RE (Poulter 2013, 164–180).

The last decade before the new millennium was characterised by increasing internationalisation, the rise of neo-liberalist politics and a deep economic recession. A secularised and pluralised society called for individual freedom and self-realisation as the ultimate values of education (Launonen 2000). As background disciplines, educational sciences were replacing theological disciplines and taking a step away from the understanding of religion as 'religious'. Religion in RE was mainly reflected in cultural and societal dimensions and, through moral education, the aim was to get pupils to see their own responsibility in the world. The subject was now intended to provide students with the elements required to construct a personal worldview. As a counterweight to individualism, existential questions, tolerance and the skills needed for living in a multicultural society were emphasised in RE (Poulter 2013, 181–190). As Finland received quite a large number of immigrants in the 1990s, there was an impetus to reflect the religious rights of the minorities vis-á-vis the status of the majority. In curricular development, several so-called minority religions like Islam and Baha'i were established as part of RE (Innanen 2006; Saine 2000, 191–199).

The beginning of the twenty-first century ushered in a new awareness of a complex and polarised world where the understanding of diversity of religions was of ultimate concern. The individual was understood as a

learner experiencing constant change, and communication between different worldviews, recognition of social responsibility and global ethics were seen as vital (Poulter 2013, 190–196). In 2003, the Freedom of Religion Act was reformed and, as a part of that, RE continued to be organised according to the denomination of the pupil. However, "confession" was changed to expression of "one's own religion" (Basic Education Act, Amendment 2003/454, 13§). Interestingly enough, this change in principle did not result in any change in the content of RE. It can be assumed that the conservative views saw this as a pivotal moment to anchor RE to the denominational basis and to object to the increasing secularisation of school.

The current national curriculum (2014) continues to emphasise the diversity of religions and worldviews as a starting point for learning. However, the way to manage diversity has been to formulate shared aims for learning for all religions and to prove the overlapping elements in RE. The curriculum also contains strengthening elements of skills-based thinking that are a sign of the instrumentalisation of the subject (Poulter et al. 2019, 221).

The way Finnish RE has managed to adapt to the shifting educational visions as a part of the educational success of Finland has been rather reactive. Having a foundation in the unquestioned secular-Lutheranism, RE has not been able to seriously challenge its own rationale in the changing world and find a voice independent of political and religious/ideological interest groups. The way to respond to the challenge posed by increasing pluralism has been to create a system, which visibly recognises diversity but is lacking coherence. The current model of RE has been justified but also problematised by the arguments that recognising the right of minorities and children to their own religion maintains democratic principles and serves as a prime example of the multicultural ideal (see Poulter et al. 2017). The multiplication of different religions taught in segregated classes offered an answer to a difficult societal situation in the 1990s when Finland was getting more multicultural and there was a need to react to the challenge posed by newcomers who did not share the same religious, historical and national narrative. However, this decision

has led to the diversification of visions of RE compatible with multicultural ideals, while intercultural initiatives between different religions and non-religious worldviews have recently been debated both in academic and public discussion.

A Developing Finnish Research Community Around RE

Formation of Religious Education as a Modern Research Field in Finland

In addition to curricular developments, there also exist parallel developments in the Finnish academic research that can be identified as contributing to the lack of substantive cohesion in RE. As in other Nordic countries, until the 1990s Religious Education in Finland as an academic discipline is perhaps most conveniently to be viewed in relation to Practical Theology (Osbeck and Buchardt 2017; Räsänen 2017). Religious Education as a modern academic discipline was established in the era of Kalevi Tamminen and lasted from the late 1960s until the 1990s. Similarly, the outlook of religious education in school was traditionalist theological. Following research by Goldman (1964) and similar to many Western countries (Kallioniemi and Ubani 2010, 2012), Psychology of Religion was the discipline that Religious Education relied on (Ubani 2017), although it was also always aware of developments in educational studies (Räsänen 2017). Räsänen describes much of this period as the era of the individual-empirical paradigm, one of five major subsequent paradigms in Finnish Religious Education research. In Tamminen's era, Religious Education in Finland became internationally connected (Räsänen 2017). Arguably much of Tamminen's era was dominated by traditionalist theology and Psychology of Religion stage perception on children's development. Other disciplines such as Religious Studies and Anthropology contributed for most part merely to the content of RE, and educational sciences to some extent limited the practice of religious education (Ubani 2017).

For 30 years from the 1960s, the field of Religious Education in Finland was to a great extent dominated by the views represented by Tamminen. This can also be seen in the research produced in that era (Ubani 2017, 97; Räsänen 2017). Tamminen's role in the establishment of what can be termed the Nordic Religious Education research community has been duly acknowledged elsewhere (Osbeck and Buchardt 2017; Hartman 2017). With regard to Religious Education in Finland, his 30 years as the Chair of Religious Education was even more foundational. Hartman (2017) has described how research in Religious Education in different Nordic countries has varied in its dominant approaches. What is distinctive in Finnish research compared to other Nordic countries is that, according to Hartman, the scholars tend to work on empirical materials with a behavioural sciences approach (p. 119). This emphasis on empirical studies has been characteristic of Religious Education in Finland since the era of Tamminen.

Speaking of Tamminen's era, it must be admitted, however, that the possibility for greater discussion of religious education in the discipline of Religious Education was also limited because of a limited number of practitioners in its research. For instance, the field gained its second and third professorships only around the turn of millennium. In other words, it was not merely a question of power and paradigms but also a question of the sheer number of independent practitioners. It can also be added that the match between Religious Education as an academic discipline and religious education as a school subject started to dissolve visibly in the 1980s, notwithstanding previous minor differences (Ubani 2017). Until then, Religious Education was the uncontested uniform academic counterpart of religious education in state education, and even after that—if not until today—some aspects especially related to Psychology of Religion are still somewhat recognised in, for instance, RE didactics books (see Ubani 2013b).

After the mid-1980s, it became evident that Humanistic Psychology was gradually challenging and substituting Psychology of Religion in the understanding of the pupil in Religious Education. However, as stated earlier, this change had a more profound effect on religious education as a school subject than on research in Religious Education. The humanistic psychological viewpoint was largely represented in the work of Hannele

Niemi (1991) and can be perceived as one of the influences on Kirsi Tirri's and Arto Kallioniemi's work in Religious Education (Ubani 2017). However, all these scholars have been quite eclectic in their production. Suffice to say that, while Psychology of Religion as a discipline is today still functioning mainly at the University of Helsinki in the work of Räsänen (2002), this school can be recognised as a contributor to the academic debate surrounding the subject of religious education in the 2000s. However, their work represents a more fundamental change in the scholarly communities surrounding religious education. Coinciding with the retirement of Tamminen, it was Niemi and later Kallioniemi and to some extent Tirri who were active in the strengthening of the Didactics of RE as the academic framework for religious education rather than Theology. In other words, their work was instrumental in founding the Didactics of RE as an (applied) educational science. It should be noted that Pyysiäinen's study on the confessionality of RE was in this sense already a non-traditional study on religious education, as it fitted well with its departure from theological premises. However, together with the changes in curricula during the 1990s, the shift became particularly evident in the latter part of the decade.

Characteristics of the Emerging Finnish RE-Scholarly Community after the Turn of the Millennium

In Finland, the 2000s witnessed the activation of a new scholarly community with regard to religious education: Religious Studies. Behind the redefining of the nature of the subject as given according to one's own religious education, scholars of Religious Studies such as Sakaranaho became active, especially with regard to the minority religions and Islam in particular (Sakaranaho 2018; Sakaranaho and Jamisto 2008). However, the contribution of Religious Studies was not and has not been strong in this field in Finland. It could be that, at this time, much of the focus was on the legitimisation of the subject in state education and there religious studies had little to offer or were given little space. Suffice to say, the role of religious studies in religious education has until this day remained remarkably minor, especially as it was often portrayed as offering a

suitable option to managing plurality in societies. It could be that the linkage of Religious Studies to education and didactics in particular has been weak in Finland in particular, which arguably has limited its role in the academic discourse in Religious Education.

In the 2000s, however, it was Multicultural Education that became the shared source of influence for scholars discussing religious education (Ubani 2017). When looking at recent studies on the subject (Ubani et al. 2019a), it is evident that, perhaps for the first time in the history of the discussion, there are enough independent researchers focusing on religious education to form a scholarly community with a critical mass, and that these seem to share at least some premises with regard to conceptualising plurality in the classroom. They are thus sufficiently grounded in multicultural education to be able to start to contribute to cumulative knowledge building (Ubani 2017).

While the construction of research-based knowledge has been criticised for being weak and fragmented (Ubani 2017, 102), recently there have been initiatives towards the research-based discussion of issues related to religion in state education (Ubani et al. 2019b). Suffice to say, Rissanen et al. (2019) have also recognised that this has become so prevalent that it risks recognising minority within-tradition perspectives and perhaps even secularist outlooks in the scholarly discussion. Anyway, in the Finnish context it has been stated that the number of researchers connected by different theories from Multicultural Education is exceptional and may provide a platform for a dialogical discussion about the core of religious education. It could also be that, depending on the kind of multiculturalism advocated among the researchers, Religious Studies could also become more relevant, especially its new recognition and research knowledge of the diversity of non-religious outlooks and (partly aided by this) its merits in conceptualising worldviews in an inclusive manner. However, arguably without developing an adherence to the didactics of RE and educational discourse, its relevance will remain narrowed down to content knowledge production.

The presentation and analysis of studies of religion in Finnish state education (Ubani et al. 2019a) by leading scholars from Finland can be viewed as an effort to overcome lack of cohesion in research that has not made cumulative knowledge production possible, but likens studies in

Religious Education to "guerrilla attacks" (Osbeck 2017) where isolated studies occur based on the individual interest of the student. Furthermore, at the moment philosophical research on religious education is quite scarce (see Poulter 2013). It could be that the dominant empirical nature of studies as identified by Hartman (2017) as characteristically Finnish could prove problematic in the development of the field and in its contribution to the development of religious education as a school subject.

The analysis by Ubani (2017) shows that, during the history of Finnish Religious Education research, there have been only a few dissertations that focus on the fundamental issues current in religious education as a subject, both philosophical in their approach. One is by Pyysiäinen (1982) who studied the concept of confessionality in the context of religious education, and the other by Poulter (2013) who examined the role of religious education in civic education. Both these studies question the nature of the subject. All other studies on the list (p. 97) focus on issues close to RE but do not offer much in developing current RE. They produce knowledge about aspects related to RE, but little research-based support for developing the subject. One distinction could be the study from the field of law by Hokkanen (2014), which advocates integration in the subject, but can be seen as an afterthought to the discussion on the legitimacy of RE. This study has not really been acknowledged in academic or public discussions concerning RE. It seems that the discussion on the role of religion has shifted from the legitimation discourse in the 2010s, thus limiting its contribution to Religious Education. Similarly, questions related to confessionality in education (Kimanen 2015; see also Ubani 2018a), while being at the core of the current solution, seem rather to be issues belonging to the former discourse and at the moment not widely acknowledged.

Currently in religious education, it can be argued that several key issues lack either conceptual clarity, contextual sensitivity or both. [SP5] Such an issue is what is termed dialogue of religions/dialogue of beliefs/dialogue of worldviews/inter-religious dialogue in education (Ubani 2019). Arguably, while the field was preoccupied with questions of the legitimacy of RE as a subject in the context of Freedom of Religion in the first decade of the 2000s, research on other core elements related to the subject remained to some extent stale. Such topics include the core of

religious education in the 2000s, learning in religious education and the role and nature of worldview development in religious education. Arguably, if the next wave of case studies on religious education focusing on integrated religious education (Åhs et al. 2016, 2017; Kimanen and Poulter 2018; Korkeakoski and Ubani 2018; Ubani 2018a, b) are to be significant contributors to the core development of the subject, the questions related to the role of worldviews in education and dialogue in education are issues that need to be resolved, not only on practical but also philosophical levels.

Current Challenges in Finland in Framing the Core of RE for a Post-secular Society

The development of RE as a school subject and academic discipline alongside societal changes has been described above. In short, in Finland the shift from a confessional to a liberal paradigm of RE (see e.g. Wright 2004; Barnes 2007) in argumentation concerning religious education has occurred gradually, starting as early as just after the Second World War and accelerating during the past decades as the multiculturalisation of society and the globally increasing political significance of religion have increased the emphasis being put on the social aims of RE. Finnish RE has followed developments in the wider European context; the legitimacy of RE in Europe is increasingly understood to lie in its potential to contribute to a democratic European society. For instance, in the Toledo guiding principles of religious education (ODIHR 2007) and the European Council's recommendations concerning RE (Jackson 2014b), knowledge about religions and beliefs is regarded as valuable because it promotes respect for freedom of religion, democratic citizenship and social cohesion, and reduces conflicts caused by lack of understanding.

At the moment, it seems that in Finland this form of liberal RE and its social educational aims are receiving rather unquestioned support, both from the Finnish scholarly community and in public debate. This is at least the mainstream discourse through which the legitimacy of RE in contemporary Finnish post-secular society is argued. However, the

post-secular and religiously diverse context also indicates that there are a multitude of interest groups around RE with their own particular needs and wishes regarding the subject and, while these groups (e.g. religious minority groups) also rely on liberal RE discourses (e.g. what RE needs to be in order for it to promote human rights and peaceful coexistence), they may interpret the core of RE in different ways. Thus, this consensus around the liberal aims of RE hides the fact that the ideas concerning the intellectual core of liberal RE are somewhat dispersed, both among experts and the general public. The core seems to be understood differently depending on whether the emphasis is put on the educational needs of the religious/worldview minorities or the majority. In addition to the perspectives of stakeholder groups, differences in RE scholars' argumentation also reflect this tendency. A recent book (Ubani et al. 2019a) in which most of the contemporary RE scholars in Finland reflect on their key theoretical and empirical findings provides an overview of the current views on RE in the Finnish academic community. The following observations are based on a meta-analysis of these book chapters (see also Rissanen et al. 2019).

In accordance with the liberal paradigm, RE in Finland is supposed to "give a basic competence for living as a citizen in a postmodern multireligious society" (e.g. Ubani and Kallioniemi 2012) and contribute to human rights education (e.g. Matilainen and Kallioniemi 2012). However, there is lack of cohesion in the ideas of what contents of RE would best serve the pursuance of these aims, and different approaches can be detected from the argumentation of Finnish RE scholars. First, one prominent approach for pursuing the social aims of RE is to emphasise broad understanding of religions and worldviews developed through shared discussions (often termed 'dialogue') with the aim of promoting mutual understanding in a diverse society. The underlying interest is to reduce discrimination by increasing familiarity and reducing prejudices, and in this way to support the actualisation of human rights in society. For this interest, knowledge based on the (western) phenomenological study of religion boosted by students' own experiences and knowledge serves well, and an integrated model of RE is seen as a favourable option. Sometimes RE is seen as an arena for the development of common values across worldviews and global citizenship, but this discourse does not

necessarily pay attention to the power dynamics of worldview plurality in society, nor does it differentiate students' knowledge needs based on their background or minority/majority position in the society.

Second, another line of argumentation deals with RE as a space where commitment to human rights and other key societal values is promoted by seeking the legitimation of and commitment to these values from the perspective of students' 'own religion or worldview'. This argumentation is sometimes used to defend the potential of the current Finnish religious education model to pursue the aforementioned social aims of RE. This discourse is based on a rather technical interest in knowledge since educators are given the task of strengthening students' commitment to liberal human rights values by promoting interpretations of religion that are compatible with them. Also, the interest groups around religious education—mostly minority religious communities—seem to rely on these claims when they argue for the maintaining of the current Finnish model. They regard religious education as important for the identity development of minority students, and hold that knowledge about their own traditions helps students to find a way and willingness to commit to a democratic multicultural society. However, researchers also detect problems in this approach. The disciplinary basis of knowledge is ambiguous: the interpretation of the basic sources of religious traditions could indicate drawing from theological disciplines, but in reality it seems that deep theological scrutiny is not regarded as practice of the subject. Instead, educators (in a broad sense, teachers, curriculum designers, text book authors) pick and choose material from religious traditions to support 'learning from' religion for the benefit of predetermined educational values. Educational sciences play a significant role in formulating the aims of the subject, and scrutiny of religion is not necessary based on disciplinary perspectives but on the power of educators to selectively use religion as a resource for the promotion of educational goals (see e.g. Rissanen 2012).

Third, a more critical interest in knowledge occasionally is expressed by Finnish RE scholars, but in contrast to the contemporary mainstream approaches of intercultural/ multicultural education, which are grounded in critical and emancipatory interests, the critical practices of RE have been to a large extent in a marginal position. Komulainen (2005)

developed a critical and post-liberal theological argumentation for RE compatible with the challenges of secular and multicultural paradigms, but his efforts received little attention. However, it could be argued that, to truly promote the social aims of RE such as democratic citizenship and human rights values in a multicultural society, space needs to be made for the plurality of knowledge in education and RE. This seems to be an interest of some minority RE groups, too. For instance, the emphasis on "Western Islamic studies" has been criticised by some Islamic education teachers (Onniselkä 2011, 137).

Fourth, what the studies show is that the examination of RE should acknowledge the broader context surrounding the subject in public education, that is, how religion is being handled as an entire school educational endeavour (Ubani and Ojala 2018). Conclusively, what the different studies indicate is that the handling of religion in state schools in general is in a state of transition, and that this transition influences the discourses and development agenda around religious education. It seems that, predominantly in the Finnish context, post-secularity translates to the transition from the secularist handling of religion to cultural interpretations of religion. In this situation the visible presence of religions is becoming increasingly normalised in school life although in a reduced manner (Ubani 2019).

Arguably as a consequence, religious truth claims, what is to be understood as 'religious', are no longer under scrutiny. However, the post-secularising context treats majority and minority religions differently. While Lutheranism is still handled more or less in a secularist framework and pushed to the private sphere, Islam and other minority religions are being handled in terms of multiculturalism, and their more visible presence and recognition as identity markers are defended. The Finnish case also shows that Lutheranism as a majority worldview position is an ambiguous matter: while church membership is still very high and Lutheranism can be seen as part of the state establishment and national heritage, it is not clear what culturalised 'secular-Lutheranism' in terms of Finnishness or as a part of educational values and ideals means today. However, essentialising the treatment of secular-Lutheranism among educators, policy-makers and sometimes also scholars influences Finnish discourses on religion in education and religious education.

Discussion (Grounding RE 'Otherwise')

In this chapter, we wish to argue that the changed societal reality in Finland towards post-secularity requires new critical ways of looking at RE and religion in public education. It calls for rapid action in "thinking otherwise" (Poulter 2013), as RE as a subject and the research surrounding it have had problems in adapting to the present societal situation. The aforementioned transition in Finnish RE certainly serves as a unique national case for RE as a school subject and as a meeting point for different knowledge conceptions embedded into shifting educational ideals. However, it finds parallel developments in other European countries too. Barnes (2020, 185) in his attempt to identify the crisis of RE in England argues that RE professionals themselves have engaged with powerful policies, pedagogies and practices, which result in shallow responses to identify the core of RE. We have a similar challenge in Finland as scholars face pressure to design their research vision according to the changing political visions. We also recognise the need for a reflexive reading of the history of RE and criticality in estimating the underlying assumptions of new answers that in part have contributed to the alleged fragmentation of the core of RE. Scholars need to understand how our understanding of the current state has been moulded through national and local policies, voices and ideas, and how the collective thinking has been shaped by scholarly knowledge production in which we also see our role.

While closely observing British debate on RE, Finnish RE scholars never seriously engaged in the debate on critical religious education in their own context (Wright 2007; Barnes 2007). A particular challenge today is to think how multiplicity in the forms of different 'own religions' taught at school could translate into the genuine plurality of many theologies, and to create a dialogical space between them. Seeking perspectives outside the mainstream liberal framework for RE, we suggest viewing the contribution of theology in the form of the appreciation of theologies of different religions, something that has been widely neglected. We therefore suggest viewing theology as a relevant dialogue partner in the classroom, not something inherently connected to confessional nature of RE but rather powerful in contributing to inclusion and the

recognition of diversity in and through RE, and buffering against the instrumentalisation of RE to shifting political agenda.

On the other hand, instrumentalist views and approaches to RE as a securitisation tool with the aims of preventing different forms of radicalisation and controlling religion (see e.g. Berglund 2015, p. 4) may also acknowledge the relevance of theology. The need to familiarise students with, for instance, sacred texts and the history of their interpretation has been mainly argued as an important part of Islamic religious education, and as an effort to "protect" Muslim youth from radicalist propaganda grounded in the shallow and fragmented reading of the Qur'an (Rissanen 2012). However, in current post-secular Europe, it is necessary to acknowledge how the instrumentalisation of religion for political purposes concerns Islam and Muslims, and to pay attention to the ways, for example, in which the populist right-wing parties endeavour to frame their agenda as a defence of 'Christian values' and promote an image of a (homogenous) Christian culture under threat. Since religions are increasingly being used for political propagandist purposes, an important question is whether the 'social aims' of RE can be met by the religious studies-based analysis of religions and their societal and cultural impact, or whether RE should take religion as seriously as it is taken by political actors and give all students (theological) tools to read and interpret religion profoundly. Outside the RE community, the new need for theology sometimes seems to be more readily acknowledged. An interesting example of this was when a Guardian editorial (25 December 2019) called for an examination of the "theological roots of liberal vision of Christianity" in defence of the cultural appropriation of Christianity for aggressive xenophobia.

However, instead of promoting 'the right interpretation' of religion (e.g. liberal Islam or liberal Christianity) and seeing RE as a measure used by the state to control religions, protection from the simplifying use of religions in political rhetoric could come from the aims of developing theological literacy and increasing epistemological pluralism in RE with an aim to educate students also to 'see otherwise'. Thus, in the Finnish case this would mean not only drawing from different theological traditions in the different RE curricula, but also familiarising all students to some extent with different theological traditions.

Thus far, Finnish RE has managed to deal with diversity in a manner that does not create dialogue and critical reflexivity between different religious theologies on an epistemological level. Recognition of particular religious identities in the name of a multicultural right, manifested in the segregative RE model, does not translate to the recognition of different knowledges, so does not create a space for the investigation of inter-theologies. Epistemological pluralism (Andreotti et al. 2012) not only attempts to give voice to different ways of knowledge, but also takes seriously those voices that have been subordinated to the hegemonic understanding of forming the core knowledge in RE. From an educational point of view, it is important to bring these differing even conflicting understandings of religious truth claims into the forefront of instruction about RE. Nevertheless, it is important to discuss, whose religious truths we give a voice to and on whose terms. Real liberal education is the freedom to be critical of one's own assumptions and background, not blindly rejecting traditional knowledge but investigating its roots, sources and claims of truth (Poulter 2013, 223).

Furthermore, epistemological pluralism could also mean thinking, asking, knowing, being and relating 'otherwise' as a scholarly community of RE. If knowledge of other theological traditions such as Islamic theology were given space in wider academic discussion, and if scholars of RE brought the plurality of knowledges in RE to the forefront, that would give an alternative basis for avoiding the instrumentalisation and thinking of the core of RE. If education is reduced to the simple acquisition of competences and skills, it misses the point of what is educational in the sense of *Bildung* (Rothgangel et al. 2014, 20–21). Reflecting the knowledge basis of RE is ultimately a question of what knowledge is of most worth. If RE continues to be rooted firmly in educational sciences, it must take seriously the epistemological claims from different religious traditions. Instead of continuing to neutralise religious content in RE, critical awareness in thinking of the core elements of RE could be epistemologically framed as 'otherwise', which challenges secular-liberal, Lutheran hegemonic and 'traditional' positions.

However, currently the rising understanding of non-religiosity and the concept of a worldview increasingly parallel to the concept of religion challenges the understanding of the core of RE as the conceptual focus of

the subject. The dialogue with secular worldviews has to be seen as a vital part of the future of RE but the burning question is whether we can use religion and worldview as parallel concepts and approach them in a common pedagogical framework? Putting more emphasis on worldview as an umbrella concept and developing approaches of 'worldview education' are signs of moving further away from theology as the disciplinary basis of religious education, and may limit the understanding of religion as a distinct 'sociological category' (Rothgangel 2013).

Knowledge in RE should not be subordinate to other knowledge in the educational system, nor should it be based merely on technical interest in promoting students' commitment to the dominant values in society with the help of religion. Rather, dominant values and truths could also be critically examined with theology-based knowledge. This implies that nothing—even human rights, liberal democratic values or the other ideological groundings of the education system itself—is too sacred to be critically examined in RE. In regard to the Finnish debates on the organisation model of religious education, relying on critical interest in knowledge does not necessarily indicate favouring a certain model, but it implies the necessity to allow space for minority knowledge in RE in one way or another. From a disciplinary perspective, this means that not only knowledge formed in the western (and Christianity-inspired) study of religion is taken into account; knowledge(s) formed in other theological traditions (e.g. Islamic theology) would also be given space. Giving space to minority knowledges cannot mean giving space only to the knowledge that minority students bring to the classroom. Altogether, it is vital to keep in mind that questions about whose knowledge and what knowledge interests should be furthered in RE are fundamental, and precede the questions concerning preferable models for organising RE in an increasingly post-secular situation.

References

Andreotti, V., Ahenakew, C., & Cooper, G. (2012). Equivocal Knowing and Elusive Realities: Imagining Global Citizenship Otherwise. In V. Andreotti & L. Souza (Eds.), *Postcolonial Perspectives on Global Citizenship Education* (pp. 221–238). New York: Routledge.

Barnes, P. (2007). Developing a New Post-liberal Paradigm for British Religious Education. *Journal of Beliefs and Values, 28*(1), 17–32.

Barnes, P. (2020). Crisis, Controversy and the Future of Religious Education . Abingdon: Routledge.

Berglund, J. (2015). *Publicly Funded Islamic Education in Europe and the United States*. Washington: Brookings Institution.

Berglund, J. (2017). Secular Normativity and the Religification of Muslims in Swedish Public Schooling. *Oxford Review of Education, 43*(5), 524–535.

Coulby, D., & Zambeta, E. (2008). Intercultural Education, Religion and Modernity. Editorial. *Intercultural Education, 19*(4), 293–295.

Goldman, R. (1964). *Religious Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Hartman, S. (2017). Response: On RE Research in the Nordic Countries—A Few Notes. *Nordidactica: Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education, 1*, 118–122.

Hokkanen, P. (2014). Uskonnonvapaus monikulttuuristuvassa koulussa. [Freedom of Religion in Multicultural School] Acta Wasaensia, 307. Wasa: University of Wasa.

Innanen, T. (2006). *Uskonnon opettamista ja oppimista maalaisyhteisössä. Paikallistutkimus Kallislahden kyläkoulun ajalta ja alueelta.* [Teaching and Learning Religion in the Rural Community: A Context-based Study on Kallislahti School] Joensuu: Joensuun yliopisto.

Jackson, R. (Ed.). (2014a). *Religion, Education, Dialogue and Conflict: Perspectives on Religious Education Research*. London: Routledge.

Jackson, R. (2014b). *Signposts—Policy and Practice for Teaching About Religions and Non-Religious Worldviews in Intercultural Education*. Council of Europe: The European Wergeland Centre.

Kallioniemi, A. & Ubani, M. (2010). Uskonnon didaktiikka luokanopettajankoulutuksessa. [Religious Education in Class Teacher Training]. In A. Kallioniemi, A. Toom, H. Linnansaari, & M. Ubani (Eds.), *Akateeminen luokanopettajankoulutus. 30 vuotta teoriaa, käytäntöä ja maistereita*. Kasvatusalan julkaisuja (pp. 243–270). Turku: Suomen kasvatustieteellinen seura.

Kallioniemi, A., & Ubani, M. (2012). Uskonnon ainedidaktiikka tieteenalana ja tutkimusalueena. [Religious Education as a Discipline and a Research Tradition]. In A. Virta & A. Kallioniemi (Eds.), *Ainedidaktiikka tutkimuskohteena ja tiedonalana* (pp. 195–216). Suomen kasvatutieteellisen seuran julkaisuja.

Kallioniemi, A., & Ubani, M. (2016). Religious Education. In H. Niemi, A. Kallioniemi, & A. Toom (Eds.), *The Miracle of PISA. The Principles and Practices of Teaching and Learning in Finnish Schools* (2nd ed., pp. 179–190). Rotterdam: Sense.

Kimanen, A. (2015). Complicated Confessionality. How the Concept 'Confessional' Could Serve the Debate on Religious Education Better? *Journal of Religious Education, 63*(2–3), 129–140. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40839-016-0023-3.

Kimanen, A., & Poulter, S. (2018). Teacher Discourse Constructing Different Social Positions of Pupils in Finnish Separative and Integrative Religious Education. *Journal of Beliefs & Values, 39*(2), 144–156.

Komulainen, J. (2005). Systemaattinen teologia ja uskonnonopetus. In A. Kallioniemi & J. Luodeslampi (Eds.), *Uskonnonopetus uudella vuosituhannella.* [Religious Education at the Turn of the New Millennium] (pp. 280–302). Helsinki: Kirjapaja.

Korkeakoski, K., & Ubani, M. (2018). What Positive Things Do Students from Different Backgrounds See in Integrated RE Lessons with Collaborative Teaching? Three Cases from a Finnish Teaching Experiment. *Journal of Religious Education, 66*(1), 49–64. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40839-018-0056-x.

Koski, L., & Filander, K. (2012). Transforming Causal Logics in Finnish Adult Education: Historical and Moral Transitions Rewritten. *International Journal of Lifelong Learning, 32*(5), 583–599.

Kähkönen, E. (1976). *Uskonnonopetuksen asema Suomen koulunuudistuksessa 1944–1970.* [The State of Religious Education in the Finnish School Reform 1944–1970]. Helsinki: Suomalainen teologinen kirjallisuusseura.

Launonen, L. (2000). *Eettinen kasvatusajattelu suomalaisen koulun pedagogisissa teksteissä 1860-luvulta 1990-luvulle.* (Diss.) [Ethical Educational Thinking in Finnish Schooling Documents from 1960 to 1990] Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän yliopisto.

Matilainen, M., & Kallioniemi, A. (2012). Human Rights Education in Religious Education in Finnish Upper Secondary School. *Religious Education Journal of Australia, 28*(1), 16–22.

Niemi, H. (1991). *Uskonnon didaktiikka: Oppilaista elämän subjekteja* [Religious Education: Helping Pupils to Become Subjects]. Helsinki: Otava.

ODIHR. (2007). Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching About Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools. Retrieved January 11, 2020, from http://www.osce.org/odihr/29154.

Onniselkä, S. (2011). Islamin opetus koulussa. In T. Martikainen & T. Sakaranaho (Eds.), *Mitä muslimit tarkoittavat? Keskustelua islamilaisista virtauksista Suomessa ja Euroopassa [What Do the Muslims Mean? Discussion on Islamic Influences in Finland and in Europe]* (pp. 122–138). Turku: Savukeidas.

Osbeck, C. (2017). Examples of Knowledge Contributions in Swedish RE—A Discussion of Disciplines as Frames for Knowledge Re/Production. *Nordidactica: Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education, 1*, 66–86.

Osbeck, C., & Buchardt, M. (2017). Editorial. Epistemologies of Religious Education Research in the Nordic Welfare States. *Nordidactica: Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education, 1*, I–VII.

Popkewitz, T. S. (2011). Curriculum History, Schooling and the History of the Present. *History of Education, 40*(1), 1–19.

Poulter, S. (2013). *Kansalaisena maallistuneessa maailmassa. Koulun uskonnonopetuksen yhteiskunnallisen tehtävän tarkastelua*. [Citizenship in Secular Age: The Civic Task of Religious Education]. Diss. Ainedidaktisen tutkimusseuran julkaisuja. Helsinki: Ainedidaktiikan seura.

Poulter, S., Kuusisto, A., Malama, M., & Kallioniemi, A. (2017). Examining Religious Education in Finland from a Human Rights Perspective. In A. Sjöborg & H-G. Ziebertz (Eds.), *Religion, Education and Human Rights: Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives*. Religion and Human Rights (vol. 1, pp. 49–61). Cham: Springer International Publishing AG.

Poulter, S., Riitaoja, A.-L., & Kuusisto, A. (2016). Thinking Multicultural Education 'Otherwise'—From a Secularist Construction Towards a Plurality of Epistemologies and Worldviews. *Globalisation, Societies and Education, 14*(1), 68–86. https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2014.989964.

Poulter, S., Rissanen, I., & Ubani, M. (2019). Discussion. In M. Ubani, I. Rissanen, & S. Poulter (Eds.), *Contextualising Dialogue, Pluralism and Secularisation: Cases Analyses on Finnish Public Education* (pp. 217–228). Münster: Waxmann.

Pyysiäinen, M. (1982). *Tunnustuksellinen, tunnustukseton ja objektiivinen uskonnonopetus: opetussuunnitelma-analyysi Suomen ja Ruotsin peruskoulun uskonnonopetuksen tavoitteista ja sisällöstä*. [Confessional, Non-Confessional and Objective Religious Education: Curricular Analysis of Religious Education in Finnish and Swedish Compulsory Schools]. Diss. Helsinki: Kirjapaja.

Rissanen, I. (2012). Teaching Islamic education in Finnish Schools: A Field of Negotiations. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 28*(5), 740–749.

Rissanen, I., Ubani, M., & Poulter, S. (2019). Key Issues of Religion in Finnish Public Education. In M. Ubani, I. Rissanen, & S. Poulter (Eds.), *Contextualising Dialogue, Pluralism and Secularisation: Cases Analyses on Finnish Public Education* (pp. 203–216). Münster: Waxmann.

Rothgangel, M. (2013). What Is Religious Education? An Epistemological Guide. In M. Rothgangel, T. Schlag & F. Schweitzer (Eds.) with G. Adam & R. Lachman, *Basics of Religious Education* (pp. 13–28). Göttingen: V & R Unipress.

Rothgangel, M., Jackson, R., Jäggle, M., & Skeie, G. (Eds.). (2014). *Religious Education at Schools in Europe*. Göttingen: V&R Unipress.

Räsänen, A. (2002). Aikuisen uskonnollisuus. *Tutkimus Fritz Oserin uskonnollisen arvioinnin kehityksen teoriasta ja sen pätevyydestä aikuisilla suomalaisilla koehenkilöillä.* [Religiosity of and Adult. A Study of Fritz Oser's Theory on Religious Thinking and Development: A Case of Finnish Adults] Dissertation. Department of Practical Theology, University of Helsinki.

Räsänen, A. (2017). Researching Religious Education in Finland. In F. Schweitzer & R. Boschki (Eds.), *Researching Religious Education: Classroom Processes and Outcomes* (pp. 287–301). Münster: Waxmann.

Saine, H. (2000). *Uskonnonopetus Suomen oppivelvollisuuskoulussa 1900-luvulla.* [Religious Education in Finnish Compulsory School in the 20th Century] Sarja C, 165. Turun yliopisto.

Sakaranaho, T. (2018). Encountering Religious Diversity: Multilevel Governance of Islamic Education in Finland and Ireland. *Journal of Religious Education, 66*(2), 111–124.

Sakaranaho, T., & Jamisto, A. (Eds.) (2008). Monikulttuurisuus ja uudistuva katsomusaineiden opetus. [Multiculturalism and Transforming Religious and Worldview Education] Uskontotiede 11. Helsingin yliopisto.

Ubani, M. (2013a). Threats and Solutions. Religion and Multiculturalism in Educational Policy. *Intercultural Education, 24*(3), 195–210.

Ubani, M. (2013b). *Peruskoulun uskonnonopetus [Didactics of Religious Education]*. Helsinki: PS-Kustannus.

Ubani, M. (2017). Contextualising the Contribution of RE Scholarly Communities to the Development of RE Didactics in Finland Over Recent Decades. *Nordidactica: Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education, 1*, 87–108.

Ubani, M. (2018a). What Makes Students Feel Authentic in an Integrated RE Classroom? *Journal of Beliefs and Values, 39*(2), 169–181.

Ubani, M. (2018b). Do Students Feel Authentic in Integrated RE? A Quantitative Analysis. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality, 23*(2), 152–179.

Ubani, M. (2019). Religion and Multiculturalism in Finnish Public Schools: The Secularist—Culturalist Transition. In M. Ubani, I. Rissanen, & S. Poulter (Eds.), *Contextualising Dialogue, Pluralism and Secularisation: Cases Analyses on Finnish Public Education*. Münster: Waxmann.

Ubani, M., & Ojala, E. (2018). Introduction. *Journal of Religious Education, 66*(2), 79–83. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40839-018-0067-7.

Ubani, M., & Tirri, K. (2014). Religious education in Finnish schools. In M. Rothgangel, M. Jäggle, & G. Skeie (Eds.), *Religious Education in Schools in Europe. Part 3: Northern Europe* (pp. 99–120). Wien: Vienna University Press.

Ubani, M., Rissanen, I., & Poulter, S. (Eds.). (2019a). *Contextualising Dialogue, Secularisation and Pluralism. Religion in Finnish Public Education*. Münster: Waxmann.

Ubani, M., Poulter, S., & Rissanen, I. (2019b). Introduction to Contextualising Dialogue, Secularisation and Pluralism in Finnish Public Education. In M. Ubani, I. Rissanen, & S. Poulter (Eds.), *Contextualising Dialogue, Pluralism and Secularisation: Cases Analyses on Finnish Public Education* (pp. 7–16). Münster: Waxmann.

Wright, A. (2004). *Religion, Education and Post-modernity*. London: Routledge Falmer.

Wright, A. (2007). Critical Religious Education, Multiculturalism and the Pursuit of Truth. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

Åhs, V., Poulter, S., & Kallioniemi, A. (2016). Encountering Worldviews: Pupil Perspectives on Integrative Worldview Education in a Finnish Secondary School Context. *Religion & Education, 43*(2), 208–229. https://doi.org/10.1080/15507394.2015.1128311.

Åhs, V., Poulter, S., & Kallioniemi, A. (2017). Preparing for a World of Worldviews: Parental and School Stakeholder Views on Integrative Worldview Education in a Finnish Context. *British Journal of Religious Education*. https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2017.1292211.

7

Uncertainty and Mortality: Two Stubborn Particulars of Religious Education

Julian Stern

Introduction

There is a craving for certainty. Since the seventeenth century, models of scientific and administrative-bureaucratic certainty have promoted a confidence that attempted, it seems, to replace the confidence—the faith—in religion. Descartes was one of the builders of this model. He created a logic and epistemology that was compelling—starting with a proof of his existence (his 'cogito ergo sum', 'I think therefore I am', Descartes 1912, p. 27), in the *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason, and Seeking Truth in the Sciences*. Later in the same text, he illustrated the power of philosophy in science by 'proving', contrary to Harvey's recent publications, that blood circulated by heat rather than by being pumped—that is, the heart was a 'furnace' not a pump (Fye 2003). Interestingly, Fye—in a journal of cardiology—does not use Descartes' error to demonstrate that Descartes' philosophical certainty was unreasonable.

J. Stern (✉)
York St John University, York, UK
e-mail: j.stern@yorksj.ac.uk

O. Franck, P. Thalén (eds.), *Religious Education in a Post-Secular Age*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47503-1_7

Instead, he writes of how Descartes encouraged Harvey to complete more experiments, and therefore stimulated further, good quality, cardiological science. That is a generous assessment. Descartes' belief in certainty, and his belief that philosophy could bring certainty to science, is problematic. It is misleading when it comes to how scientists work, and it is misleading in giving the impression to non-scientists, and to non-philosophers, that there is a standard of certainty that can be reached, as modelled by science and philosophy. Within contemporary education, the influence continues, especially in the prioritising of 'powerful knowledge' above deep understanding, exploration, insights, attitudes and skills. The prioritising of certainty in education is particularly inimical to religious education, and to religion, in a 'post-secular' world where a wide range of mutually contradictory religious and non-religious beliefs and practices co-exist in all societies and, thanks to electronic media, are visible to all. It is not that all certainty is damaging: it is the ability of certainty to 'drown out' uncertainty, excluding legitimate and valuable uncertainties, that is critiqued here. This chapter therefore explores the value of uncertainty in religious education, and to complement this, it explores one particular certainty—that of mortality—that is addressed by religious education.

My concern with the nature and significance of uncertainty in school religious education was stimulated by being invited to join a project called 'big ideas for RE' (Wintersgill 2017). The project aimed for the 'identification of Principles and Big Ideas for RE, which can then be used as criteria for selecting and sequencing subject content' (personal correspondence). It was based on similar work in science education (Harlen 2010, 2015). The religious education project was chaired by Michael Reiss—a science educator involved in Harlen's project. In the 'big ideas for RE' meetings, one of the religious education specialists noted how difficult it was in religious education to deal with the presence of conflicting truth statements (there is or there isn't a god, Jesus is or isn't the son of God, when we die we are or are not reincarnated). Most teachers avoid answering the 'is it true?' question with a response like 'many people *believe* it is true'. There is a tension in religious education between conflicting truths (there is a great deal of fundamental disagreement between—and within—religious traditions), and the wish to say 'let us not worry about truth for now, and try to understand what different

people believe' (the epoché, or suspension of disbelief, of phenomenological research). A more extreme version of that tension is between those who believe there is one truth that should be promoted in religious education (and all other views must be described as incorrect), and those who believe there is no such thing as absolute truth and all positions are equally valid ('this is not a matter of true or false'). Truth, in other words, divides teachers. When the 'big ideas in RE' group raised this issue, what did Reiss, the science educator, say? He drew our attention to the 'big ideas in science' and explained that, in the science documents, there was no mention at all of 'truth'.

> A scientific theory or model representing relationships between variables or components of a system must fit the observations available at the time and lead to predictions that can be tested. Any theory or model is provisional and subject to revision in the light of new data even though it may have led to predictions in accord with data in the past. Every model has its strengths and limitations in accounting for observations. (Harlen 2010, p. 23)

Even more straightforward is the statement that '[s]cientific explanations, theories and models are those that best fit the evidence available at a particular time' (Harlen 2015, p. 17). The word 'truth' is not mentioned: scientists are not trading in truths, but in 'best fits' to the available evidence. Religious education seems to be more concerned than science is with the role of truth in the curriculum. There are other approaches to science, no doubt, but this 'living without truth' version is particularly interesting. It suggests that the influence of Cartesian 'certainty' may be more present in religious education than in science—after science, through the falsifiability thesis of Popper (2002, pp. 57–73) or Heisenberg's 'uncertainty principle' (Heisenberg 1927, with which Popper 1967 disagreed), left certainty behind. Sinclair, a UK science educator, researches the 'messy' nature of real science. Children and young people should be taught about 'famous scientists' not because they are the 'guardians of truth', but because they demonstrate how uncertain science is and how most of their discoveries and theories have since then been disproven or superseded. As physicist Richard Feynman says, 'I would rather have questions that can't be answered than answers that can't be

questioned' (quoted in Sinclair and Strachan 2016, p. 21). Science education therefore should be just as messy as religious education. The similarities are stressed by the philosopher of science Karl Popper.

> My thesis is that what we call 'science' is differentiated from the older myths not by being something distinct from a myth, but by being accompanied by a second-order tradition—that of critically discussing the myth. … If we understand that, then … [w]e shall understand that, in a certain sense, science is myth-making just as religion is. (Popper 2002, pp. 170–171)

In response to Popper's claim, many religious education specialists will say that there is also a very strong tradition of 'critical discussion' within religions and within religious education. Yet having a philosopher of science like Popper describe science and religion as so similar is a valuable reminder of the uncertainty at the heart of both. And the religious education scholar Durka, in a powerful phrase, takes us directly to the heart of my argument by highlighting 'the learned uncertainty of teachers' (Durka 2002, p. 1). Religious education in a post-secular world is—or should be—at the forefront of understanding how teachers and students are and will always be living in uncertainty, whilst *also* searching for truth. Truth and uncertainty are not enemies. They are good companions—indeed, the best of companions. Uncertainty without truth is confusion; truth without uncertainty is stale.

This chapter presents uncertainty and mortality as two 'stubborn particulars' (Cherry 1995) of post-secular, non-confessional, RE: its distinctive features and its distinctive contribution to the curriculum.

Uncertainty in Religious Education

Donald Rumsfeld, US Secretary of State for Defence was talking about evidence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. What he said about the information available to him—the information (and lack of information) that led to the US-led and UK-supported invasion of Iraq in 2003—has become his most quoted statement:

> There are known knowns. There are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we now know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we do not know we don't know. (Quoted in Logan 2009, p. 712)

Although at the time, Rumsfeld was much joked about, what he said (if not the policy it justified) was perfectly sensible. Indeed, it may have been based on a famous technique known as the Johari Window (Luft 1963), which has been used by psychologists and counsellors since the 1960s to explore what we know about ourselves. It is also useful—I suggest—as a way of understanding the subject-matter of religious education. With a philosophy of education, Aimee Quickfall, I have developed a version of the Johari window, taking account of Rumsfeld's description, and adapting it further for use in educational contexts. As the 'Johari' Window was named for shortened versions of the forenames of the authors (i.e. Joseph and Harry), Quickfall and I describe this as the *Jumee Window*.

Each of the four boxes, A, B, C and D, can be described in more detail and exemplified.

	What I know (e.g. about myself, or about other things)	What I don't know (e.g. about myself, or an established piece of knowledge)
What other people know (e.g. about me, or about an established field)	Window A: **Known knowns** (things known by us and by others, well-established 'facts')	Window B: **Unknown** (by me) **knowns** (by others) (e.g. a language not yet learned by me, a set of facts to be learned)
What other people don't know (e.g. about me, or about an established or new field)	Window C: **Known** (by me) **unknowns** (by others) (e.g. my secrets, or my as yet unshared insights)	Window D: **Unknown unknowns** (e.g. the profoundly mysterious or ineffable)

Fig. 7.1 A Jumee Window

A. Some religious education focuses on the known knowns, that which is already known by everyone in the room. These are the familiar and oft-repeated facts and topics covered in lessons over many years. At Christmas most Christians celebrate Jesus' birth; Muslims are likely to pray in mosques; Hindus often believe in reincarnation. There is no problem in repeating familiar facts. Children and young people enjoy knowing things and repeating them back. Seasonal celebrations and rituals—repeated singing of, say, Christmas carols—can be valuable keystones in the lives of the school community.
B. Much religious education (and most of what I used to teach) focuses on the unknown knowns: the facts as yet unknown to the children and young people, but known to the teacher or the writers of textbooks or exam papers. There are no great surprises, and learners can gain 'powerful' knowledge (Young, in Young et al. 2014, pp. 65–88). The thirteenth-century Afghan poet Rumi similarly describes the memorising of facts as what helps you 'rise in the world' as you 'stroll … in and out of fields of knowledge' (Rumi 1995, p. 178).
C. This is the category that covers much of what those in universities describe as research. As Logan says, much professional scientific research is based on developing known unknowns into known knowns. 'At the outset the researcher does not know whether or not the results will support the … hypothesis', but 'it is common for the researcher to believe that the result that will be obtained will be within a range of known possibilities' (Logan 2009, p. 712).
D. 'Occasionally', Logan continues, 'the result is completely unexpected—it was an unknown unknown' (Logan 2009, p. 712). This window includes the odd surprises such as the accidental 'discovery' of penicillin by Alexander Fleming (who forgot to put away his petri dishes), the accidental development of the Post-it note by Spencer Silver and Arthur Fry (originally a 'failed' attempt to develop a glue), or the accidental 'discovery' of saccharin by Constantine Fahlberg (who didn't wash her hands before lunch and found the lunch strangely sweet). But it also includes the profoundly mysterious or ineffable. This type of learning is important to all of schooling, and most important for—and most distinctively characteristic of—religious education. As Moore says, 'Religious educators are called to

> inspire, encourage, inform, interpret, and mentor with people … [who] live on a bridge between the expressible and inexpressible, supported on one side by the mysteries of religious experience, and on the other, by words and explanations from their cultures and religious traditions' (Moore 1998, p. 271). Classroom relationships in religious education 'focus on the bridge where people live—where they encounter the ineffable and cannot resist expressing the inexpressible' (Moore 1998, p. 271).

All four types of learning have their own contributions to make to schooling. 'A' and 'B' learning are useful—as Rumi described in the thirteenth century, and as Young et al. (2014), Hirsch (2016) and Prothero (2007) describe it in more recent years. Hirsch writes of 'why knowledge matters', whilst Prothero (2007) writes specifically of *religious* literacy—finishing his influential book with a dictionary of key terms (across a number of religions), and a quiz—with answers. Both Hirsch and Prothero bemoan the lack of a common knowledge amongst America's youth (and adults), and both suggest that such 'A' and 'B' knowledge (as I refer to them) should be equitably distributed—for precisely the same 'rise in the world' social mobility reasons as given by Rumi. Many of the apparently well-known 'facts' covered by religious education are not as certain as they at first appear, and are often problematic overgeneralisations, or are incorrect, or are vigorously contested. (A simple example is the naming of the Muhammad as the 'founder' of Islam, whilst Muslims typically see Islam as pre-dating the 'final prophet'.) Yet the value of religious literacy in the sense promoted by Prothero is significant. It cannot, however, provide a complete description of the knowledge to be addressed by a curriculum. 'C' and 'D' learning are also of vital importance. 'C' learning might be described as conventional research, developing and sharing new insights as a result of investigating an issue (see Stern 2018a). Those insights and issues—in religious education—can be very personal, the thoughts and ideas that we all have, about topics such as the meaning of life and death. As well as 'C' learning, religious education—like every subject—should also stretch into 'D' learning (also in Stern 2018a), the learning that is surprising and unexpected perhaps even by the researcher,

the learning that might be difficult to express clearly. Aldous Huxley describes 'D' learning well, when he says this:

> From pure sensation to the intuition of beauty, from pleasure and pain to love and the mystical ecstasy and death—all the things that are fundamental, all the things that, to the human spirit, are most profoundly significant, can only be experienced, not expressed. The rest is always and everywhere silence.
>
> After silence that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music. (And, significantly, silence is an integral part of all good music.) (Huxley 1950, p. 19)

Uncertainty and silence and the exploration of the personal—all are to be experienced and nurtured in religious education, in the face of the (known and unknown) 'unknowns' of religious education, and the contested character of most of religious education's most valuable 'knowns'. As Rumi describes it, this second kind of intelligence is 'a spring overflowing its springbox' and is 'fluid'—'a fountainhead / from within you, moving out' (Rumi 1995, p. 178).

There is much talk in religious education about the need for knowledge and the need for mastery (James and Stern 2019). Yet both knowledge (in its 'A' and 'B' senses) and mastery seem to be based on the assumption that knowledge is safe, bounded and uncontested, and this does not seem appropriate in religious education—especially in non-confessional religious education. It is important to promote curiosity in religious education (the real purpose of James and Stern 2019, and Stern 2018a, b), which allows for surprise (Stern 2013). Surprise is a symptom of 'C' and 'D' learning taking place. It is a sign of research taking place. And it is a sign that religious education is more than a 'festival of facts'—*more than*, not an *alternative* to, a festival of facts. Curiosity is needed as much by teachers as by students. Religious education teachers can be overwhelmed by the amount of knowledge they need to accrue to teach the subject with integrity and confidence. Experienced teachers, let alone trainee teachers, at both primary and secondary levels are prone to being daunted by the amount of 'stuff' in a subject that covers many religions and non-religious ways of life, and that attempts to recognise the diversity within as well as between traditions. Why would they not be daunted?

They are responsible for a subject that draws on the whole world's cultures. Some will respond by restricting their work to 'A' and 'B' learning, and will ask for a book that describes the facts they have to know, to teach the subject. Others will respond by being exciting at the prospect of engaging with such a huge—largely unknown—subject, a subject that screams out for 'C' and 'D' learning. I wish to encourage more and more teachers to join this latter group.

A keen sense of uncertainty can be paralysing. However, with the right encouragement, uncertainty becomes the stimulus for the very best of education. Teachers need to nurture their own creative uncertainty, and they need to nurture the same in their students. That will stimulate a process of exploration, including exploration of their own values and beliefs. The 'learned uncertainty of teachers' has the capacity to motivate and excite, encouraging teachers and students to listen more attentively to others. A pedagogy that is driven by curiosity and openness, the search (and the re-search) for insights, a dive into the profoundly mysterious, is an approach that is both viable and, in religious education, the only credible approach to teaching and learning. As Durka says, 'When we regard teaching as a "dance" between the knowers and the material, … [t]he focus is not on instant answers but rather on adventure, wrestling with untruth, silence and listening' (Durka 2002, p. 18). This means that we cannot 'withdraw into an attitude of omnipotence' because, if we do, 'we lose opportunities to learn from our students, and we fail to provide an atmosphere for them to discover what they know' (Durka 2002, p. 41).

> Teaching is unpredictable from hour to hour, from minute to minute. There are tears when you don't expect them, laughter when you might predict tears. There are flashes of insight and embarrassing displays of ignorance. The results are usually uncertain. (Durka 2002, p. 63)

Durka concludes, saying that '[t]he more attuned we are to the needs of our students, the more unsure we are of what they or we actually achieve', and '[t]he more we engage with our students as persons, the more we affirm our own incompleteness … [as w]e become more aware of spaces still to be explored, desires still to be uncovered, possibilities still to be opened' (Durka 2002, p. 64).

The Certainty of Mortality and Our Uncertain Knowledge of Death

Matching a much-needed recognition of uncertainty is the certainty of mortality. (The certainty of mortality is accompanied, it should be said, by profound mystery: as Peter Pan says, 'To die will be an awfully big adventure', Barrie 2004, p. 84). During a classroom conversation on mourning and death, being filmed as part of a research project (Bakker and ter Avest, in Avest et al. 2009, p. 165), one boy in a group of 'troublesome and tough' students starts crying. The teacher offers the opportunity to 'go to the restroom', but the boy wants to stay in the classroom. Meanwhile, another boy whispers to the person with the camera that they should not zoom in on the crying boy. Allowing an upset student to go to the restroom is kind and helpful. Even kinder is the atmosphere in the class that made the student comfortable staying, and allowed another student to keep attention off him. How much better is such an approach than the vague talk in euphemisms that usually accompanies the topic of death, vague references to going to a better place or sleeping or floating off to heaven (never hell) in a non-specific indeterminable way. (It is not my intention to downplay beliefs in life after death in heaven: I am concerned, rather, that too many people use 'they are in heaven now' as an *insincere* way of avoiding discussing death.) There is a certainty in mortality and it is important that this is recognised in religious education. Rosenzweig, a post-secular philosopher before his time, promotes the importance of recognising mortality. He describes much of enlightenment intellectual life—stimulated by Descartes' philosophy—as suffering from a 'paralysis' (Rosenzweig 1999, p. 39), a form of 'acute *apoplexia philosophica*' (Rosenzweig 1999, p. 59). Whereas '[c]ommon sense puts its faith in the strength of reality', he says, '[t]he philosopher, suspicious, retreats from the flow of reality into the protected circle of his wonder … [where, b]ounded by his magic circle of mounting wonder, he is not interested in the actual event' (Rosenzweig 1999, p. 42). The most obviously avoided 'actual event' is death: 'reason's illness' is 'merely an attempt to elude death' (Rosenzweig 1999, p. 102). Teachers, similarly, may be 'lost for words' (Holland 2001, p. 46) when it comes to our mortality.

They may be paralysed by the prospect of death, as much as by the prospect of the vastness of possible learning in religious education. And yet religious education, of all school subjects, can and should recognise mortality.

The poet Phillip Larkin talks of 'the intrusion of death into our lives' (quoted in Bradford 2005, p. 259), and here I am encouraging this intrusion into a discussion of religious education. It is one of the ways in which we can care for our learners (Noddings 2005, 2006). Many religious education lessons on death rehearse well-known 'facts': Christians believe in heaven (and perhaps hell), Hindus have reincarnation, atheists believe that death is an absolute end, and so on. Yet a questionnaire carried out in 1997 as part of an RE Festival (http://old.natre.org.uk/db/) asked children and young people aged 7–18 many things including what they thought happened to them when they die. Their responses are most informative, in the sense described by Durka. The students had their own views on what happens when they die (their own 'C' learning, unknown to most religious education teachers), and these views were expressed more powerfully than the textbook accounts available to them. Here are four (uncorrected) example responses from 11-year-olds:

> I think that death is just a place you have to go back to. Everyone is going to go there weather they like it or not.
>
> I dont think there is such thing as an afterlife and when we die we are dead and that is the end of us but if we are murdered we turn into spirits.
>
> You go to a church to have a cermoney and people cry. You get beried and get eaton by maggots or over animals. You get to sleep and be peaceful.
>
> I afraid of death but part of me want's to die.

What is surprising, I suggest, is not that these views are 'correct' or 'incorrect' (according to the students' own reported religious or non-religious allegiances), or that they are sophisticated or philosophically interesting responses (even if many of them are). The surprise is that the students seem to have such strong, deeply felt, personal views, views that most teachers of religious education (myself included) avoid asking about and avoid thinking about. On this as on most topics, teachers tend to focus on the 'certainties' of 'A' and 'B' learning, and miss out 'C' and 'D'

learning. Even when schools teach about death (and not all do), death itself is not always allowed to make an appearance. The real views of students and teachers on the topic are often suppressed. Those situations are examples of what Rosenzweig describes as *apoplexia philosophica*, a surfeit of Cartesian certainty. Children and young people know about death, but they also know that schools will often ignore or actively suppress such 'reality'. A rare—and therefore surprising—exception to the suppression of death in school is provided by Basil Hume (later, Cardinal Hume), when head of Ampleforth School. He described the school to prospective parents. When asked what Ampleforth prepared its boys for, he replied, 'We prepare them for death' (quoted in Pirrie 2005, p. 8).

Kessler writes about the need in schools with 'soul' (Kessler 2000) to be places where 'we know how to let ourselves grieve', so that 'we can lose a loved one or end a relationship, a class, or phase of life with a sense of completion and fullness that allows us to love again next time' (Kessler, in Liston and Garrison 2004, p. 152). In contrast, '[w]hen we are so afraid of grief that we close our hearts to sadness, the doorways to love, to beauty, to joy are closed as well' (Kessler, in Liston and Garrison 2004, p. 152). There are many books on the topic that can be used sensitively in schools. Bruna's (2018), *Dear Grandma Bunny* can be used with very young children:

> Miffy felt so very sad. Why was it Miffy cried? What had caused that teardrop? Her grandmother had died. (Bruna 2018)

Older primary and younger secondary students might use *Michael Rosen's Sad Book* (Rosen and Blake 2004):

> This is me being sad. Maybe you think I'm being happy in this picture. Really I'm being sad but pretending I'm being happy. I'm doing that because I think people won't like me if I look sad.

Care is shown when these issues, issues that children and adults think about and experience, are raised sensitively and honestly (Stern 2018b). Religious education, of all subjects of the curriculum, has a wonderful

opportunity to deal with mortality. It will bring people together, even as it recognises how people will also be separated—they will move on to a better place, they may also die. That is a stubborn particular that everyone—young and old—has thought about, though all too few have talked about. Let religious education have a special place in the curriculum, if only for that topic. The certainty of mortality is complemented by our radically uncertain 'knowledge' of what the people we work with think of death—making it a wonderful source of 'C' and 'D' learning for all.

Conclusion: The Stubborn Particulars of Uncertainty and Mortality

We apparently live in a 'post-secular' world (Blond 1998; Bowie 2017). This refers to the 'failure' of the supposed modernist, atheist, secularist project or the rediscovery of religious elements in apparently secular theories, along with the recognition that much of the world never did go through the 'European'-type process of secularisation. The post-secular world in which we live is one in which people 'stubbornly' persist in disagreeing with each other about almost everything—personal, political, religious, artistic, sporting and much more. Our contemporary world pushes us, rightly, to recognise the value of the diverse insights gained from religious and non-religious traditions—not least, the insights into our mortality. We need to allow for uncertainty, if we are to recognise value in different traditions. Religious education necessarily recognises the inherent uncertainty that can drive curiosity and care for the full range of traditions studied. So, in conclusion, I want to emphasise four insights:

- Uncertainty (the first stubborn particular of education) drives curiosity in and beyond religious education. It is characteristic of 'C' and 'D' learning.
- Care drives religious education's encounter with mortality (the second stubborn particular of education). Death as a topic in religious education should encourage 'C' and 'D' learning.

- Post-secular schools, communities and societies are *disagreeable*, in the sense that they are filled with conflicting views and ways of being, and these can be explored and exemplified by religious education. Uncertainty is generally a better basis for disagreement than certainty, so the school's role—and particularly religious education's role—in recognising the value of uncertainty can itself contribute to healthy disagreement.
- Without religious education, schools would find it much harder to exhibit care for education and for the people in the school. Religious education is the subject that can and should be saturated in caring, uncertainty and mortality.

Durka's 'learned uncertainty of teachers' is crucial to schools, and consequently is crucial to post-secular communities. Religious education can be uncertainty's, and mortality's, greatest, richest, ally.

Bibliography

Avest, I. t., Jozsa, D.-P., Knauth, T., Rosón, J., & Skeie, G. (Eds.). (2009). *Dialogue and Conflict on Religion: Studies of Classroom Interaction in European Countries*. Münster: Waxmann.

Barrie, J. M. (2004 [1911, 1906]). *Peter Pan: Peter and Wendy* and *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*. London: Penguin.

Blond, P. (Ed.). (1998). *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology*. London: Routledge.

Bowie, R. A. (2017). *Dignity and Human Rights Education: Exploring Ultimate Worth in a Post-Secular World*. Oxford: Peter Lang.

Bradford, R. (2005). *First Boredom, Then Fear: The Life of Philip Larkin*. London: Peter Owen.

Bruna, D. (2018 [1996]). *Dear Grandma Bunny*. London: Simon and Schuster.

Cherry, F. (1995). *The 'Stubborn Particulars' of Social Psychology: Essays on the Research Process*. London: Routledge.

Descartes, R. (1912 [1637, 1641, 1644]). *A Discourse on Method, Meditations and Principles*. London, Toronto, New York: Dent Dutton.

Durka, G. (2002). *The Teacher's Calling: A Spirituality for Those Who Teach*. New York: Paulist Press.

Fye, W. B. (2003). Profiles in Cardiology: René Descartes. *Clinical Cardiology, 26*, 49–51.

Harlen, W. (Ed.). (2010). *Principles and Big Ideas of Science Education*. Hatfield, Hertfordshire: The Association of Science Education.

Harlen, W. (Ed.). (2015). *Working with Big Ideas of Science Education*. Trieste, Italy: IAP: The Global Network of Science Academies.

Heisenberg, W. (1927). 'Über den anschaulichen Inhalt der quantentheoretischen Kinematik und Mechanik' [On the Perceptible Content of Quantum Theoretical Kinematics and Mechanics]. *Zeitschrift fur Physik, 43*, 172–198.

Hirsch, E. D. (2016). *Why Knowledge Matters: Rescuing Our Children from Failed Educational Theories*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Holland, J. (2001). *Understanding Children's Experiences of Parental Bereavement*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Huxley, A. (1950 [1931]). *Music at Night and Other Essays*. Edinburgh: Penguin in Association with Chatto & Windus.

James, M., & Stern, L. J. (2019). *Mastering Primary Religious Education*. London: Bloomsbury.

Kessler, R. (2000). *The Soul of Education: Helping Students Find Connection, Compassion, and Character at School*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Liston, D., & Garrison, J. (Eds.). (2004). *Teaching, Learning, and Loving: Reclaiming Passion in Educational Practice*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

Logan, D. C. (2009). Known Knowns, Known Unknowns, Unknown Unknowns and the Propagation of Scientific Enquiry. *Journal of Experimental Botany, 60*(3), 712–714.

Luft, J. (1963). *Group Processes: An Introduction to Group Dynamics*. Palo Alto, CA: National Press Books.

Moore, M. E. M. (1998). Poetry, Prophecy, and Power. *Religious Education, 93*(3), 268–287.

Noddings, N. (2005). *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education* (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Noddings, N. (2006). Educational Leaders as Caring Teachers. *School Leadership and Management, 26*(4), 339–345.

Pirrie, A. (2005). The Disenchanted Assembly: The Consultation on Religious Observance in Scottish Schools. *Scottish Affairs, 50*, 1–16.

Popper, K. (1967). Quantum Mechanics Without 'The Observer'. In M. Bunge (Ed.), *Quantum Theory and Reality*. Berlin: Springer.

Popper, K. (2002 [1959]). *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*. London: Routledge.

Prothero, S. (2007). *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know—And Doesn't*. New York: HarperCollins.
Rosen, M., & Blake, Q. (2004). *Michael Rosen's Sad Book*. London: Walker Books.
Rosenzweig, F. (1999 [1921]). *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy: A View of World, Man, and God*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Rumi. (1995). *The Essential Rumi*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
Sinclair, A., & Strachan, A. (2016). The Messy Nature of Science: Famous Scientists Can Help Clear Up. *Primary Science, 145*, 21–23.
Stern, L. J. (2013). Surprise in Schools: Martin Buber and Dialogic Schooling. *Forum: For Promoting 3-19 Comprehensive Education, 55*(1), 45–58.
Stern, L. J. (2018a). *Teaching Religious Education: Researchers in the Classroom* (2nd ed.). London: Bloomsbury.
Stern, L. J. (2018b). *A Philosophy of Schooling: Care and Curiosity in Community*. London: Palgrave.
Wintersgill, B. (Ed.). (2017). *Big Ideas for Religious Education*. Exeter: University of Exeter.
Young, M., & Lambert, D., with Roberts, C. and Roberts, M. (2014). *Knowledge and the Future School: Curriculum and Social Justice*. London: Bloomsbury.

8

Changing the Game in English Religious Education: 1971 and 2018

Denise Cush

Schools Council Working Paper 36 and Its Impact on RE in England and Wales (and Me)

Almost 50 years ago, in 1971, a small booklet was published which marked a 'step change' in RE in England and Wales. In 1975, when encountering it on my teacher training course in RE for secondary schools (pupils aged 11–18) it changed my life. I have compared this to a conversion experience, in that it converted me from Theology to Religious Studies, and from being lukewarm about a career in teaching RE to a lifelong passionate commitment to the subject, understood as an integrative, non-confessional, multi-worldview, objective (as far as humanly possible), critical and pluralistic enterprise. The booklet was modest not only in size but in its self-description as 'a working paper, not a report' that did not 'claim to know all the answers' but intended to 'raise questions' (Schools Council 1971: 5). It was also modest in that the

D. Cush (✉)
Bath Spa University, Bath, UK
e-mail: d.cush@bathspa.ac.uk

O. Franck, P. Thalén (eds.), *Religious Education in a Post-Secular Age*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47503-1_8

actual authors are not named, as this was not then the policy of the Schools Council, and it is attributed to 'the thinking of those engaged on the work of the Schools Council Project on Religious Education in Secondary Schools after the first eighteen months'. However, it was actually drafted by the Deputy Director of the Project, Donald Horder (d. 1976), with substantial contributions from the project team of Andre Farrant, Mary Hayward and Roderick McLeod, the overall Director of the Project being Ninian Smart. In an obituary for Donald Horder, Smart writes of Horder's dedication to 'what he liked to call, and rightly, "the New RE"' (Smart and Alves 1976: 53).

Schools Council Working Paper 36 (hereafter WP36) was indeed revolutionary. The paper emerged from a project which surveyed existing practice in RE and recent research, involving academics, practising teachers and other professionals. The most innovative suggestions were changes in both content and approach to the subject. The greatest change of content was from a focus on Christian tradition, especially the Biblical text shared by diverse denominations, to the religious traditions of the whole world. Although some teachers were already starting to teach a range of religions in the late 1960s (p. 62), it is perhaps difficult to realise today how radical a move that was half a century ago, and how welcome it was for young teachers such as myself to have WP36 support this change. Although the focus was mainly on 'religions', WP36 also supported a similar 'sympathetic study' of 'alternatives to religious faith such as secular Humanism, Marxism and Maoism' (p. 66).

Perhaps even more important was the change in approach, from a confessional to a non-confessional one. Categorising the three main approaches as confessional/dogmatic, antidogmatic or phenomenological/undogmatic, it wholeheartedly endorses the third approach, recognising that although this was innovative, there were teachers that were already working this way 'almost by instinct'. This recognition of the ability of classroom teachers to anticipate the findings of experts and researchers is one of the many strengths of WP36, though I would probably refer to 'experience' rather than 'instinct'. What a relief it was to find that the RE teacher was no longer expected to assume or teach pupils that a particular tradition or text was 'true', but could embark on an a exploration, with the students, of a wide range of traditions, with the goal of

trying to know and understand more, rather than gain commitment to a particular tradition.

WP36 manages to cover much ground in a short space. It includes a brief history of how RE came to be included in state-funded education in England and Wales; arguments for including RE in the curriculum; a summary of recent research; a discussion of the nature of the subject, aims, objectives and content; integrated studies; the needs of children from minority groups; the relationship with moral education; requirements for teacher training; objectivity and neutrality; the Christian RE teacher; RE in faith-based schools; school worship and examinations. Many of the issues it deals with are still being debated half a century later, and many of its recommendations are still relevant.

The change from a Christian content to one including a range of religions only affected legislation in 1988, when the Education Reform Act required the local Agreed Syllabuses for RE, used by state-funded schools without a religious foundation and those schools with a religious foundation that were fully state-funded, to 'reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, whilst taking account of the principal religions represented in Great Britain'. Even so that represents a compromise between those campaigning for Christian content and those campaigning for a multi-faith approach, and as non-religious worldviews were not mentioned in law, was interpreted by many as excluding such.

Ninian Smart and the 'Phenomenological' Approach to RE

Given that Ninian Smart was the Director of the project, it is perhaps not surprising that WP36 supports what it calls the 'explicit religion' approach, especially the phenomenological approach of Smart. The phenomenology of religion has a long history (see for example Cox 2006) and it would be more accurate to talk of many 'phenomenological approaches' rather than one. Smart's version involved taking an open, methodologically agnostic approach to study, employing the phenomenological tools of 'epoché' (the

attempt to put one's existing preconceptions and prejudices to one side) and empathy (the attempt to understand what the adherents themselves intend, requiring the exercise of sensitivity and imagination). Smart and the Department at Lancaster University pioneered in the late 1960s the discipline of 'Religious Studies' as opposed to 'Theology', which was 'a radically new approach to the study of religion at university level' (WP36, p. 37) involving changes of content, aims and methods. Some of my own favourite quotations from Smart are the following:

> The study of religions is a science, then, that requires a sensitive and artistic heart. (1971: 13)

> religious education must transcend the informative … not in the direction of evangelising, but in the direction of initiation into understanding the meaning of, and into questions about the truth and worth of, religion. (1968: 105)

> religious studies should emphasise the descriptive, historical side of religion, but needs thereby to enter into dialogue with the parahistorical claims of religions and anti-religious outlooks. (1968: 106)

These three quotations cannot do justice to Smart's large body of work but give a flavour of the Smartian version of phenomenology; the attempt to give as far as possible an objective, 'scientific' account of the religions and non-religious worldviews studied, whilst also drawing upon the subjectivity and imagination of the student. It is not merely describing factual information, but about understanding what the material studied, whether beliefs, values or practices mean to the adherent, their sense of identity and of community. Further, it is not uncritical, but invites the student to engage with an evaluation of the material studied, not only intellectually, but also existentially.

Another important contribution of Smart is his well-known 'dimensions' of religion, originally six, later expanded to seven or eight, which feature in different orders in his various publications. To some extent escaping the difficulties of defining 'religion', the stress on the different dimensions of religions/worldviews (however many and exactly which

are identified) attempts to ensure that the pictures painted of religions and quasi-religious worldviews are balanced and well-rounded, including not only the doctrinal/philosophical teachings, narrative/mythological texts and ethical/legal teachings, but also how religions are lived in practice—the ritual/practical, social/institutional, experiential/emotional as well as material products such as art and architecture and involvement with the political.

What I, as a young teacher, appreciated was not so much philosophical phenomenology, but rather the general approach to the traditions and people I was exploring with the students, characterised by Smart as a 'warm distance' (1979: 8). Evaluation and critique were not ruled out, but should not be engaged in prematurely, before knowing as much as possible about the material under consideration, and trying as far as possible to see it from the point of view of the people involved. The term 'phenomenology' was useful, in that it sounded impressively academic (according to Smart, 'Michael Pye used to say that the word phenomenology ... was very, very useful when talking to Vice Chancellors and I'm sure he makes it sound very scientific, technical and esoteric at the same time' [1995: 10]), but also that it seemed to give Religious Studies a methodology of its own. Characterised by Smart as a polymethodic subject, drawing as it does upon a wide range of disciplines from the arts, humanities and social sciences, including history, literary criticism, media studies, creative arts, sociology, anthropology, psychology, philosophy and theology, Religious Studies sometimes struggles to be seen as a discipline in its own right. In the next two decades, 'phenomenology' in British RE, became a kind of proxy for 'multi-faith RE' or a 'religious studies' approach, rather than referring to phenomenological theory or methods.

Philip Barnes' Critique of the Approach to RE Recommended by Working Paper 36

A substantial critique of WP36 was provided by Philip Barnes in 2002, 30 years after its publication. Acknowledging that it is 'widely regarded as one of the most influential documents on British religious education in

the post-war era' (Barnes 2002: 61), Barnes criticises the paper on several grounds, mainly its conflation of confessional RE with indoctrination and its advocacy of a phenomenological approach. Agreeing with Barnes that we must re-read WP36 rather than relying on our memories of it, I find myself seeing something in his first criticism, but find that I do not recognise the version of the phenomenological approach attacked.

The criticism that WP36 conflates 'confessional' with 'indoctrination' and makes the former illegitimate does have something in it. The confessional approach is given the alternative name 'dogmatic' and associated with the aim of 'intellectual and cultic indoctrination' (p. 21). Terence Copley points out that this contributed to making 'confessional' a term of abuse when employed by many followers of the New RE (Copley 1997: 104). Confessional, or 'denominational' RE as some prefer to describe it to escape from these pejorative associations, clearly does not necessarily mean indoctrination. A more open confessional RE is possible, such as in the Belgian concept of 'Catholic schools of dialogue', and as practised in many Catholic and Anglican church schools in England. In defence of WP36, in 1971, given the established and dominant nature of Christian theology at universities and confessional RE in schools, and even now looking at RE worldwide, perhaps the argument required an over-statement to make the point. As both Barnes and myself found on re-reading WP36, it argues that in fully state-funded schools in plural societies, a non-confessional, integrative RE is the most appropriate. It does leave room for denominational schools to engage in confessional RE, though given the reality of the actual worldviews of many pupils, and the world in which all pupils must live and work, the non-confessional multi-faith RE proposed by WP36 is also recommended for 'faith-based' school. As Barnes states, 'properly interpreted and assessed, *Working Paper 36* leaves room for a chastened form of confessional religious education in church schools that can claim to be as truly educational as it is truly religious'. However, I would add that this requires funding of this part of the curriculum by the religious body concerned, as with the English category, currently being eroded, of the 'voluntary aided school', and that parents and pupils know what the school stands for and have a real choice about whether to go there.

On phenomenology, I find that I do not recognise the version of a phenomenological approach attacked by Barnes. Although some criticisms are of the followers of WP36 rather than the document itself, the approach is described as often merely learning 'about' religions rather than addressing the existential concerns of pupils, as nearly always involving a thematic treatment, as effectively removing any critical dimension from RE, and as implicitly teaching that all religions are different expressions of the same reality. The claim that 'contemporary advocates of phenomenology are almost unanimous in their support for a thematic rather than a systematic presentation of religious beliefs and practices' (Barnes 2002: 71–2) is presented without evidence or examples. Many RE syllabuses over the decades have utilised a mixture of 'systematic' and 'thematic' units, as recommended by the Westhill Project (Rudge 2000). Moreover, there are different 'thematic' approaches; at worst imposing categories derived from one religion or context on another, but at best focusing on concepts crucial for understanding the complex, diverse and inter-related nature of so-called religions/worldviews and on the questions raised by our shared human experience (see Teece 1993). The phenomenological approach has also conversely been blamed for creating the 'world religions paradigm' (see e.g. Owen 2011: 254) and leading to the presentation of religions in reified silos. The other issues, having also been raised by religious studies scholars, will be dealt with below.

Further Critiques of a Phenomenological Approach, Smart and WP36, in Both Religious Studies at University Level and RE in Schools, and a Case for the Defence

The heyday of the phenomenology of religion in UK universities (not that there were ever many university departments dominated by this approach rather than Theology) and the 'phenomenological' approach to RE in schools was probably from the 1970s to the late 1990s (Sutcliffe 2004: xxii; Jackson 1997).

There have been many criticisms of the phenomenological approach from both Religious Studies scholars (e.g. Flood 1999; Fitzgerald 2000) and from within RE (e.g. Jackson 1997 and Hannam 2019 as well as Barnes). Although appreciating some of the problems identified, I contend that a generally phenomenological approach as championed by Smart and WP36, meaning a methodologically agnostic attempt to acknowledge and put aside prejudices, the effort to be sensitive to the believer's point of view, and a content that includes a range of worldviews is the most appropriate at all levels of education in a world where we are increasingly aware of plurality, and issues of equality and power. Smart himself said that phenomenology 'is a dreadful word of course' (1995: 10) and it may perhaps be that a better name would be a 'study of religions approach' (cf. Alberts 2007), though that would need careful defining so as not to exclude the existential dimension of RE.

The accusation of being merely descriptive and not engaging with issues of meaning and truth (Barnes 2002: 73) might perhaps be true in some RE classrooms but is simply not true of WP36 or Smart (Jackson 1997: 13–14), as illustrated by the quotations from Smart above or any reading of Smart himself. In no way was the critical dimension removed from RE. Rather the student is encouraged to avoid premature evaluation based on inadequate knowledge and failure to attempt to see the insider's viewpoint. Only after gaining knowledge and understanding is one 'in a better position to judge wisely about religious truth' (Smart 1971: 12). As well as intellectual evaluation, WP36 maintained that RE is not just what was later called 'learning about' religions/worldviews, but also contributes to the pupil's 'personal search for meaning … both a dialogue with experience and a dialogue with living religions' (p. 43).

Some have seen the approach as a subtle indoctrination into liberal Christian theology (see Jackson 1997: 21; Barnes 2002: 73). Tim Fitzgerald (2000) takes this further in arguing that 'religious studies' more generally, by endorsing and reifying the idea of a distinct area of human experience called 'religion', is 'covert theology'. It is true that non-confessional, multi-faith RE emerged mostly from within liberal protestant circles, in countries like Sweden and the UK, rather than in self-consciously secular contexts, but it does not necessarily follow that it promotes a view that all religions are different expressions of the same

holy reality, or even that religion in general is a good thing. Chater and Erricker (2013: 71) claim that RE has a tendency to portray religions positively rather than honestly and politically, which they see as a legacy of phenomenology and anthropology. Whether this is true or not, it is certainly not the position of WP36 which states 'a teacher will not use his position to advance any cause other than that of responsible scholarship' (p. 27). Whether a teacher emphasises positive elements of a tradition or negative consequences of some its teachings and practices usually depends on her classroom context, the age of the children and whether the pre-conceptions they come with from family or media are initially positive or negative.

Several critics, such as Flood (1999) or Hannam (2019) claim that there is too much stress on individual experience. Smart certainly stresses the centrality of the experiential, but this does not require viewing 'religious experience' philosophically as a special and unchallengeable form of knowledge, rather it rescues religions/worldviews from being viewed as merely intellectual propositions.

One of the strongest arguments against phenomenology is that it is 'essentialist'; putting forward the idea that through its methods the scholar can grasp the 'essence' of whatever they are attempting to understand. This 'eidetic vision' was an important part of the philosophical phenomenology of Husserl; that by employing epoché it is possible to intuit what something actually is. Although Husserl gives a fascinating account of how our consciousness works, the existence of universal essences has, as Jackson argues, been contested by 'much recent work in philosophy, the social sciences, cultural criticism and literary theory' (Jackson 1997: 23), and I would add, by feminist theory and much longer ago by Buddhist philosophy ('no-self' and 'emptiness'). In Religious Studies, the claim of any 'essence' to a particular religious phenomenon, tradition or religion per se has largely been discarded. However, I would argue that neither WP36 nor Smart are essentialist. On religion, for example, WP36 says 'no definition is adequate' (p. 16). Although Smart makes use of the denial of the 'possibility of an experience of the invisible world' (1971: 22) as a way of distinguishing between the 'religious' and the 'non-religious', this does not make him an essentialist about religion as further on in the text he sees the division between sacred and secular

something which is a construct of 'western men … today' (p. 49). Eidetic vision did not feature much in the version of the phenomenological study of religions that was employed in RE.

The phenomenological approach has been blamed for the 'World Religions Paradigm' (see e.g. Owen 2011); the creation of a category modelled on the notion of religion derived from Western and Christian presumptions. In RE this has led to the reification of a set of major traditions (in England this became six in the mid-1980s with the addition of Buddhism to Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism) a series of 'isms', ignoring diversity within traditions, the connections between them and the wealth of smaller groups including 'indigenous' traditions and newer religions, and all the complex interactions that occur in real-life 'religions'. WP36 does use the term 'world religions' but I would argue that this was simply shorthand for 'let's study other religions and not just Christianity' rather than intending to construct a hard category. In fact the suggestion is 'the study of the world's religions' (p. 62), in the context of a discussion of the term 'comparative religion' which anticipates some of the objections to imposing presuppositions on the phenomena studied. The 'big five/six' cannot be blamed on Smart, as his list of traditions included Confucianism, Jainism and Latter Day Saints as well as indigenous traditions, and his accounts throughout his many publications stress sheer diversity and change over time and space.

There has been much debate about the meaning and possibility of objectivity or impartiality or neutrality in study, writing and teaching (see e.g. *British Journal of Religious Education* 40.1, 2017). The modernist concept of objectivity has been much criticised, including by feminists. We all bring our own background, assumptions and experience to bear when trying to make sense of an unfamiliar religion/worldview, and in any case there is no unified religion/worldview to understand. What is accepted as 'objective truth' is often the perspective of whoever holds power. The attempt to 'put aside' one's own views, as seems to be recommended by 'epoché', is accused of being both impossible and unethical.

WP36, while recommending an objective approach, spends some time discussing the meaning of objectivity and does not have a naïve view that an absolute objectivity available only to the omniscient can be achieved. It is well aware that there are no '"bare facts" free of all interpretive

elements', and that 'every fact is set within a framework of presuppositions' (p. 23). What is recommended is the recognition of one's own assumptions, now called reflexivity, and the representation of viewpoints other than one's own as impartially as possible with imagination and sensitivity. 'Objective' to WP36 means that the promotion or commendation of one particular worldview is inappropriate for the teacher in the community school.

In conclusion, I would argue that much of WP36 stands the test of time, that many of the criticisms raised against the approach it recommends can be at least in part refuted by a careful re-reading, and that many of the 'questions for public discussion' it raises are still being discussed. These include the lack of clarity or agreement on the nature, aims, purposes of RE, the criteria for selecting content and the impact of the technological revolution and knowledge explosion. WP36 problematises the concept of 'religion' and 'education', the difficulty of separating the religious from the cultural or secular, as well as the confusion of RE with promoting the "'British way of life" (whatever that is)' (p. 27). Although pre-dating Grimmitt's famous 'learning about' and 'learning from', it discusses getting the right balance between 'the study of religion as an historical, social and psychological phenomenon' and 'the personal quest for meaning and purpose' (pp. 19–20), 'a dialogue with experience and a dialogue with living religions' (p. 43). Though focusing on 'religions', WP36 recommends the inclusion in RE of non-religious worldviews, without using that term, still a somewhat controversial suggestion today.

Changes to the Religious Landscape of the UK and Some Trends in Academic Study in the Last Five Decades

However, things have not stood still for the last five decades, in academic religious studies, in religious education or in the world around us. This can only be briefly outlined here. WP36 was written before the Iranian revolution, the fall of the Berlin wall, or 9/11/2001. Religion(s) seem to feature much more in the news media whilst simultaneously playing less

part in the claimed adherence, practice or experience of many in the Western world. Sociologists of religion, such as Linda Woodhead (2016), point to the changing religious landscape in the UK. There is increasing diversity, and familiarity with Christianity, though still the tradition with the most influence on British society, can no longer be assumed. From 2015, Woodhead tells us that those who call themselves 'non-religious', referred to as the 'nones', have tipped over the 50% mark. Similar situations are reported in other European countries, for example in Belgium (Franken 2016) or Finland (Nynäs 2018). Yet in contrast, or perhaps, as Nynäs argues, all part of the same change, some seem to be becoming more entrenched in their religious identities, and more conservative and even 'fundamentalist' forms of religion are attracting followers.

Increasingly people feel free to construct their own 'patchwork' worldviews, drawing upon a number of different traditions. This 'pick and mix' or 'bricolage' approach to religions/worldviews has been characterised by phrases such as 'patchwork religiosity' (Lähnemann 2008: 6); 'existentially interfaith' (Nesbitt 2011: 232); 'whateverism' (ter Avest et al. 2011: 88) or 'religion a la carte' (Franken 2016: 312). The knowledge explosion and communications technology (and perhaps 50 years of multi-faith RE) has made this more practically possible. There has been much discussion of whether there has been a 'spiritual revolution', a move from 'religion' to 'spirituality', where there is more stress on the individual and personal rather than external authorities, as well as debates about the meanings and utility of such terms (see e.g. Heelas 2002). Contemporary Paganism can be viewed as an example of a wider phenomenon which could be called a new paradigm of religiosity (see Cush and Robinson 2020). Here, the individual and her experience is the main authority. Several traditions are drawn upon (many Pagans e.g. talk about karma, and may include deities from different pantheons in their practice). There is not so much stress on creeds, doctrines, beliefs or metaphysical truth claims, and more stress on rituals, stories and mythology. There is a tendency to be the opposite of dogmatic, including in the ethical realm. Groups tend to be connected networks than institutions. The Sea of Faith

Network (see sofn.org.uk) talks about religion as a human creation, which might offend more traditional religious adherents, but within the new religiosity that is not necessarily so.

In academic Religious Studies there has been much more discussion about the very concepts of 'religion' and 'religions', an issue just hinted at in WP36 (p. 16), and a shift from phenomenology to ethnography among other methods (though WP36 does stress the need for encounter with real-life religion, mediated through resource materials if direct first-hand experience is not possible [p. 49]). Feminist, Queer and Postcolonial theories have questioned the concepts of religion and religions as constructions of dominant discourses as well as the methods of study used and the categories employed in analysis (see Cush and Robinson 2014 for a brief summary). The 'World Religions Paradigm' has been identified and much criticised as distorting the complex realities studied (see above), and in part blamed on RE in schools.

An important development is the debate around 'postsecularism'. The sharp division between what is 'religious' and what is 'secular' is becoming harder to maintain, but whether 'postsecularism' is the best term to describe what is happening is also contested. I tend to agree with Woodhead (2012: 7) that the term somewhat problematically suggests that 'religion' went away and now is back again, though have more sympathy with the suggestion of Bowie et al. (2012: 140) that 'postsecularism' describes 'a changing, complicating religious diversity and plurality, where new religious movements, new traditional religions, and contemporary secular sensibilities mix'. Richard Holloway came up with the description of 'non-binary' (in religion/non-religion as in other aspects of identity) for those who experience the problem of the religious/secular divide existentially (Holloway 2016). A useful discussion of how religious change, new religiosity, spirituality, postsecularity, and the influence of the new media are inter-related can be found in Nynäs (2018). He argues that 'neither the category of religion nor the concept of secularity provide sufficient tools for understanding the emerging complexity' (p. 62) which is 'how people combine spiritual and religious positions with secular values into authentic and meaningful subjective positions, and how these provide both public and private agencies' (p. 63).

The Commission on RE as a New 'Game-Changer' in English RE?

The Commission on RE was set up in 2016 by the REC to review the state of RE in England (only) and make recommendations for improvement, in a situation where several reports were noting that although some pupils were experiencing high quality RE, too many others were experiencing poor RE or even none at all, in spite of its compulsory legal status for all pupils not withdrawn by parents. The findings of the two-year investigation and the recommendations can be found in the Final Report (CoRE 2018) and an analysis of the main issues arising for an international audience can be found in Cush (2020). Might the Commission be viewed as marking a step-change in RE comparable to WP36? The report puts forward a new vision for RE which responds to the changes in society and developments in the relevant academic disciplines, some of which are outlined above.

One major recommendation is changing the name and focus of the subject to 'Religion and Worldviews'. This is not merely extending the subject content to include non-religious approaches to life, as suggested by WP36, Smart, and found in some classrooms, despite not being included by legislation. The Commission was not suggesting adding a series of non-religious 'isms' to a series of religious ones. It represents a move away from the World Religions Paradigm, and not towards a 'Global Worldviews Paradigm' to invent a name. In English schools from the mid-1980s RE the big six 'world religions' gradually solidified, and the Commission is attempting to move away from the presentation of monolithic traditions that do not reflect the sheer diversity within and interaction between them: 'worldviews are complex, diverse and plural' (CoRE 2018: 12). As well as reflecting a different understanding of religions, this move recognises that as the majority of young people no longer identify with institutional religions, it does not make sense to limit RE to the study of the same, which are increasingly not part of their experience even in the residual form of previous generations.

The new name has 'Religion' in the singular, in order to hint at the need for the subject to include the exploration of 'key concepts including "religion", "secularity", "spirituality" and "worldview"' (p. 12). The

Commission's understanding of 'worldview' is a broad one, covering both institutional worldviews in their complexity and diversity, newer forms of religiosity and non-religion, and the fluid personal world views of individuals. It thus recognises the academic debates about 'religion', 'religions', the 'world religions paradigm', the new forms of religiosity, the rise of the 'nones' and the difficulty of maintaining the religious/secular divide. Religions (plural) are included as worldviews. Some have suggested that the new name should be 'Worldview Studies' (Teece 2017, and for university level in the USA, Taves 2020), which would be an accurate description. However, the Commission decided to retain 'Religion', not out of conservatism, but to indicate the academic field of study to which this 'New new RE' relates. This may of course change. Meanwhile, the REC and TRS-UK (an association of Theology and Religious Studies university departments) are collaborating on a further in-depth exploration of the term 'Worldview'.

The Commission made ten further recommendations, most of which refer to the specific regulatory and organisational frameworks of the subject in England and to the need for improved teacher training, but the proposal of a National Entitlement for all pupils is of particular interest. The Entitlement is not framed in terms of specific content, but the crucial elements or big ideas which students need to explore in order to understand the complex, diverse and plural nature of worldviews. Teaching must focus on matters of central importance to worldviews; key concepts such as 'religion'; acknowledging diversity, change and interaction; the role of ritual, practices and the arts; questions of meaning raised by human experience; the impact of worldviews on individuals, societies and culture and vice-versa; and the many different ways in which religion and worldviews can be studied, including direct encounter with adherents (see CoRE 2018, pp. 12–13 for the statement in full).

Conclusion

The vision offered by the Commission looks forward to an RE which is both academically rigorous and personally inspiring. It responds to both the changing religious landscape and the developments in academic study

of religions and in RE research and teachers' experience in the past 50 years. In reframing the subject as 'Religion and Worldviews', in rejecting the 'World Religions Paradigm', in problematising the religious/secular divide, in being fully inclusive of a wider range of worldviews, in highlighting religions/worldviews as really lived and explored by ethnographers, recognising the new paradigm religiosity and including personal worldviews, it can perhaps claim to be the harbinger of a 'New new RE', and thus a step-change comparable with WP36. As with WP36, it may begin by raising questions, but also start to impact practice before bringing about any legislative change. It could also be seen as a development in the spirit of WP36, which as I have argued above, already contained the seeds of some of the plants which have grown in the new religious landscape.

Bibliography

Alberts, W. (2007). *Integrative Religious Education in Europe: A Study-of Religions Approach*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Barnes, P. L. (2002). Working Paper 36, Christian Confessionalism and Phenomenological Religious Education. *Journal of Education and Christian Belief, 6*(1), 61–77.

Bowie, B., Petersen, A., & Revell, L. (2012). Post-Secular Trends: Issues in Education and Faith (Editorial). *Journal of Beliefs and Values, 33*(2), 139–141.

Chater, M., & Erricker, C. (2013). *Does Religious Education Have a Future? Pedagogical and Policy Prospects*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Copley, T. (1997). *Teaching Religion: Fifty Years of Religious Education in England and Wales*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press.

CoRE (Commission on Religious Education). (2018). *Final Report: Religion and Worldviews, the Way Forward: A National Plan for RE.* London: RE Council. Retrieved March 28, 2019, from https://www.commissiononre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Final-Report-of-the-Commission-on-RE.pdf.

Cox, J. L. (2006). *A Guide to the Phenomenology of Religion: Key Figures, Formative Influences and Subsequent Debate*. London: Continuum.

Cush, D. (2020, forthcoming). Time for a Change? An Analysis of the Major Issues in English Religious Education Emerging from the Work of the Commission on Religious Education 2016–2018. In D. Lankshear & L. J. Francis

(Eds.), *Religious and Values Education: Contextual Challenges.* Oxford, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Frankfurt am Main, New York, Wien: Peter Lang.

Cush, D., & Robinson, C. (2014). Developments in Religious Studies: Towards a Dialogue with Religious Education. *British Journal of Religious Education, 36*(1), 4–17.

Cush, D., & Robinson, C. (2020, in press). 'Buddhism Isn't a Religion But Paganism Is' The Applicability of the Concept of 'Religion' to Dharmic and Nature-Based Traditions, and the Implications for Religious Education. In P. Hannam & G. Biesta (Eds.), *Religion and Education: The Forgotten Dimensions of Religious Education?* Brill|Shine.

Fitzgerald, T. (2000). *The Ideology of Religious Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Flood, G. (1999). *Beyond Phenomenology: Rethinking the Study of Religion*. London: Cassell.

Franken, L. (2016). The Freedom of Religion and the Freedom of Education in 21st Century Belgium. *British Journal of Religious Education, 38*(3), 308–324.

Hannam, P. (2019). *Religious Education and the Public Sphere*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Heelas, P. (2002). The Spiritual Revolution: from 'Religion' to 'Spirituality'. In L. Woodhead, P. Fletcher, H. Kawanami, & D. Smith (Eds.), *Religions in the Modern World* (pp. 357–377). London: Routledge.

Holloway, R. (2016, May 13). The Rainbow of Religious Belief: why extremist thinking doesn't work. *The Guardian*. Retrieved January 22, 2020, from https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/nov/13/the-rainbow-of-religious-belief-why-extremist-thinking-doesnt-work-richard-holloway.

Jackson, R. (1997). *Religious Education: an Interpretive Approach*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Lähnemann, J. (2008). Introduction—Interreligious and Values Education: Challenges, Developments and Projects in Europe. In J. Lähnemann & P. Schreiner (Eds.), *Interreligious and Values Education in Europe*. Münster: Comenius Institute.

Nesbitt, E. (2011). Sikh Diversity in the UK: Contexts and Evolution. In K. A. Jacobsen & K. Myrvold (Eds.), *Sikhs in Europe: Migrations, Identity and Representations* (pp. 225–252). Farnham: Ashgate.

Nynäs, P. (2018). Making Space for a Dialogical Notion of Religious Subjects: A Critical Discussion from the Perspective of Postsecularity and Religious Change in the West. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology, 31*(1), 54–71.

Owen, S. (2011). The World Religions Paradigm: Time for a Change. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education, 10*(3), 253–268.
Rudge, J. (2000). The Westhill Project. In M. Grimmitt (Ed.), *Pedagogies of Religious Education*. Great Wakering: McCrimmons.
Schools Council. (1971). *Working Paper 36: Religious Education in Secondary Schools*. London: Evans/Methuen.
Smart, N. (1968). *Secular Education and the Logic of Religion*. London: Faber and Faber.
Smart, N. (1971). *The Religious Experience of Mankind*. London: Collins.
Smart, N. (1975). What Is Religion? In N. Smart & D. Horder (Eds.), *New Movements in Religious Education* (pp. 13–22). London: Temple Smith.
Smart, N. (1979). *The Phenomenon of Christianity*. London: Collins.
Smart, N. (1995). The Values of Religious Studies. *The Journal of Beliefs and Values., 16*(2), 7–10.
Smart, N., & Alves, C. (1976). Donald Horder. *Learning for Living, 16*(2), 53. https://doi.org/10.1080/00239707608556936.
Sutcliffe, S. J. (2004). Introduction. In S. J. Sutcliffe (Ed.), *Religion: Empirical Studies* (pp. xvii–xliii). Aldershot: Ashgate.
Taves, A. (2020). From Religious Studies to Worldview Studies. *Religion, 50*(1), 137–147. https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2019.1681124.
Teece, G. (1993). *In Defence of Theme Teaching in Religious Education*. Birmingham: Westhill RE Centre.
Teece, G. (2017). Religious Education Needs a Rebrand—It Should Be Fascinating, Challenging and Hard. TES. Retrieved from https://www.tes.com/news/religious-education-needs-rebrand-it-should-be-fascinating-challenging-and-hard.
ter Avest, I., Bertraam-Troost, G. D., & Miedema, S. (2011). Religious Education in a Pillarised and Postsecular Age in the Netherlands. In L. Franken & P. Loobuyck (Eds.), *Religious Education in a Plural, Secularised Society: A Paradigm Shift* (pp. 85–98). Münster: Waxmann.
Woodhead, L. (2012). Introduction. In L. Woodhead & R. Catto (Eds.), *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*. London and New York: Routledge.
Woodhead, L. (2016, January 19). Why No Religion Is the New Religion. Talk Given at the British Academy. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hPLsuW-TCtA.

9

World View Instead of Religion?

Peder Thalén

Introduction

It has been argued in different contexts that the concept of world view better suits the aims of education than that of religion. A plea has been made in the Netherlands that the term "world view" should replace "religion" (Miedema 2018) when focusing on the aims of education in schools. In a similar way, the Commission on Religious Education (hereafter referred to as CoRE 2018) in Britain has brought forward the idea that religious education in state-funded schools should be renamed "Religion and Worldviews" (2018). It has also been suggested that "world view" is a useful generic term in intercultural education. In *Signposts—policy and practice for teaching about religions and non-religious world views in intercultural education*, the term "world view" is presented as "potentially workable for covering both religious ways of life and non-religious convictions" (Jackson 2014, 75).

P. Thalén (✉)
University of Gävle, Gävle, Sweden
e-mail: ptn@hig.se

O. Franck, P. Thalén (eds.), *Religious Education in a Post-Secular Age*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47503-1_9

A major reason for this proposed change of terminology is that the notion of world view appears more inclusive and seems to better reflect the diversity of contemporary society. There is a need for an encompassing concept that covers the whole spectrum of attitudes to life. According to Miedema, the term "religion" is too narrow (Miedema 2018, 137). He also emphasizes that today people's meaning-making increasingly "take(s) place without a direct and strong connection with established churches and without connection to a God-concept" (Miedema 2018, 137). The Commission points to the fact that today young people "are growing up in a world where there is a growing awareness of religious and non-religious worldviews" (CoRE 2018, 3) and that pupils encounter this diversity "both in their locality and in the media" (CoRE 2018, Foreword).

Other factors also justify a change in the terminology. The Finnish theologian Tage Kurtén stresses that one condition for being able to establish a strict non-confessional religious education in Sweden in the 1960s that was not controlled by the Church and its power apparatus was that a language—the talk about "world views" or "life views" [livsåskådningar]—was found that was not tied to the church tradition (Kurtén 2013). Kurtén argues that this linguistic reorientation contributed to a wider cultural process, or a kind of secularization of religious life, through which people could form their own outlooks on life without reference to church authorities.

What is striking about the CoRE report, which also applies to *Signposts* and Miedema's article, is that no attempts are made to discern the limitations and pitfalls associated with the individualistic and plural use of the term "world view" that is common in an educational context. Even though there is a need for a generic term that encompasses the numerous attitudes to life in contemporary society, "world view" may not be the most appropriate. In fact, there are many reasons for resisting this terminology, or at least treating it with caution. The aim of this chapter is therefore to show what kinds of problems are involved in choosing "world view" as a new approach to non-confessional religious education.

Varieties of "World View"

There are many different uses of the word "world view" in ordinary life, popular culture, education in school and academic circles.[1] In ordinary life, the word sometimes simply refers to a personal insight: "After meeting a lot of youngsters in my job as a train conductor I have revised my world view. They are so much more polite and well behaved than I imagined." In other contexts, it can refer to a slow cultural change, or a new collective consciousness: "The climate crisis has changed our way of looking at society, a new world view is emerging among people." In the history of ideas, replacing the old geocentric cosmology with a scientifically based understanding of the universe is frequently described as the emergence of a new world view. Elsewhere—for instance intellectual debates in public spaces—the term mostly refers to a general outlook on life (the religions of the world, including new religious movements, theism, atheism, existentialism, secular humanism, secularism etc.). A fifth meaning that is partly related to this is common—for example—in empirical research projects: "The aim of my project is to study the world views of young Muslims in Brighton."

The differences between these uses become clear if we focus on the possibilities of freedom of choice. In the first three examples very little or no choice is involved. We cannot change a personal insight just because we want to. A changed consciousness as the result of a cultural crisis is something we have whether we want it or not—we cannot escape from it. Returning to a pre-modern cosmology is not a real choice. The last two examples reflect an individualistic way of thinking and involve making a choice, although these choices differ from each other in the sense that one is unlimited (fourth meaning) and the other limited (fifth meaning). By "limited" I mean that there is an interplay between a fixed cultural/religious background and personal choice, for example, that certain norms and ethical principles can be renegotiated by the individual. In the following I primarily discuss the fourth meaning—a general outlook on life subject to unlimited choice. When talking about world views in the plural in an educational context the fourth meaning is usually intended,

especially in religious education in Sweden where the word "livsåskådning" plays a key role.

It would seem that the idea of a world view as a general outlook on life that is subject to an unlimited intellectual choice in popular culture is connected to a root system of linked ideas. This portrays contemporary Western society as a "smorgasbord" of different world views, a multitude of alternatives and endless possibilities. Part of this picture is that the choice of a world view has (or should have) a major impact on how we live our lives and that an important choice that precedes others is one between a secular and a religious world view.

Regardless of whether this individualistic idea of a world view as a general outlook on life is found in popular culture, in schools or in university courses, it poses intellectual difficulties, some of which are outlined briefly in the following section. Some of these difficulties are quite well-known, while others are rarely addressed.

Reinforcing a Relativistic Spirit

The idea of a world view as a general outlook on life subject to an unlimited intellectual choice is problematic in a late modern cultural situation. Today no-one could credibly claim to have access to universal criteria (timeless, ahistorical) guiding the choice of a particular world view in this particular sense. However, without such criteria all choices tend to become equal and, in the end, pointless: there is no "high" or "low" or "better" or "worse". Serious discussion loses its meaning. Based on such a conceptual foundation, the entire project of non-confessional religious education would be undermined. If everything is equal, tolerance might be promoted in the classroom, but in a way that does not acknowledge any boundaries whatsoever.

In the 1950s and 1960s in Sweden, a number of books were published about choosing a life view with the aim of guiding people's choices. This genre has now more or less completely died out. The whole discourse became unattractive, which reflected a new cultural situation in which such choices no longer appeared to be important. One reason for this could be that a secular lifestyle gradually became more obvious and no

longer needed to be justified. Another probable explanation is the emergence of a relativistic, late modern consciousness that affected the whole of society. It was only at universities, in the form of courses and specially designed course literature that this discourse of choosing a life view persisted.

A negative consequence of sanctioning the individualistic and plural use of "world view" is that the relativistic spirit of our age is nourished in at least two ways. Firstly, the idea of a "smorgasbord" of general theories about life to choose between in itself carries a latent relativistic understanding of truth. In a late modern context, this latent relativism becomes manifest and is reinforced. Increasing the use of the term "world view" in education, under these cultural circumstances, is therefore inappropriate. The timing would seem even more way out if the discussion about "post-truth" and similar expressions that have emerged over the past four to five years is taken into account; a discussion that is closely linked to populism as a growing problem in society.

Secondly, using this individualistic and plural understanding of world view as a filter when approaching contemporary culture, it becomes "natural" in the classroom to interpret religious diversity and the plurality of lifestyles as a state of radical relativism in society. Relativism as a vague feeling amongst pupils is given intellectual support and, by the logic of this interpretation, appears as something self-evident. (As exemplified in the previous section, there are non-relativistic uses of the term "world view" when there is no opportunity for choice.)

To conclude, launching a concept formation that reflects and embraces diversity in an inclusive way is in itself a good thing, but if it misrepresents diversity, for example by giving it a relativistic interpretation that strengthens a nihilistic spirit in society, it should be handled with care in an educational context.

An Illusion of Intellectual Freedom

The individualistic and plural use of "world view" discussed above—in principle each individual can have their own freely chosen worldview—fosters an incorrect idea of unlimited freedom for the individual

regarding so-called existential questions. Creating their own world view thus emerges as a meaningful project: "It is one of the core tasks of education to enable each pupil to understand, reflect on and develop their own personal world view" (CoRE 2018, 5).

What is neglected here is that this freedom is severely limited by history, tradition and language. They all have an over-individual character, are greater than the individual and partly operate at an unconscious level. This is not a new insight, but is commonplace in, for instance, the hermeneutic tradition: we are historical beings and our thinking and living reflect the cultural context and are to a large extent a product of it. A sociologist would give the social context similar status. Some philosophers would give language a similar status and, in any case, would all agree that language has an important role to play in transmitting values and functions in ways that reproduce the tradition. Other limits, as highlighted by Katarina Westerlund, are the organization of society and interpersonal interactions in everyday life (Westerlund 2013).

If we choose a strict historical perspective, a sixth meaning of the term "world view" emerges: the invisible matrix of the historical setting in which our lives are embedded (see Stenlund 1988, 17–19). This matrix might contain norms, values, pictures and conceptions of the world, all of which play a fundamental role. Such a matrix is not a general theory of the world, but is rather a "historical form" and has an almost opposite function compared to abstract theory:

> But I did not get my picture of the world [Weltbild] by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false. (Wittgenstein 1988[1975], § 94)

We can partly become aware of the content of a world view in this sixth sense, although it is a highly complex task. It is possible to talk about world views in the plural in this sixth meaning, but then we are referring to different cultures or historical eras and not individual choice. (People living in a specific historical milieu do not have the freedom to choose a different cultural identity.)

This historical concept of world view has various problems attached to it. For example, if it is absolutized in the manner of Dilthey (historicism), that is, treated as more fundamental than other perspectives on human life, a relativistic spirit is nourished. It is not useful in an educational context if the aim is to find a concept that makes diversity visible and does justice to individual variation. The concept is also too complicated to function as a starting point or platform for classroom discussions. Unlike "religion", there is no equivalent to "world views" in this sixth sense in popular culture that could provide a pre-understanding—good or bad—of the matter. For most pupils, this non-individualistic plural form of "world view" is therefore more or less incomprehensible.

A Superficial View of Critical Thinking

Closely related to the previous section is the concept of critical thinking connected to the idea of unlimited intellectual freedom. Being critical of a phenomenon, such as religion, is the same as criticizing it at a general level. The target of criticism is then some very general truths, such as the existence of God, on which *all* (in an ahistorical sense) religion is assumed to rest. A supposed unity beneath the numerous historical variations, rather than actual manifestations of religion, is thus at the centre of the discussion. Thus, criticizing the particularities of established religions becomes uninteresting and somewhat unnecessary. Pupils are trained to become critical in a way that make close contact with empirical expressions of religion in society superfluous (other than as a starting point for discussion). Intellectual distance is the same as taking a position from nowhere.

I regard this type of critical discourse as a legacy from an earlier, outdated rationalist thought tradition, which in a diluted form also permeates popular culture. The idea of a unity (accessible to reason) beneath all the historical variations is an intellectual construction, or a preconception without empirical support. The concept of God that figures in popular debates, as demonstrated by Gavin Hyman (2010) among others, is a fairly recent conceptual invention that can be traced back to the collapse of the medieval world view.

I would recommend a reversed model of critical thinking in upper secondary schools, because in my opinion a critical discussion of religious phenomena is only meaningful if the target is the manifestation of actual religions (and their secular counterparts) that we find in society and that everyone in one way or another is personally acquainted with. The centre of discussion cannot be religion itself, as an abstract entity. Rather, we need to try to discern what is obsolete (wrong, outgrown) and what might still be relevant or valuable in a particular tradition or movement. The point is that meaningful critical thinking must be internally related to a historical context and be a critique from "within". Criticism that is general in character and takes a position from nowhere tends to be empty, result in slogans and create conflict.

Creating Inclusiveness by Adopting General Terms

The fourth meaning of "world view" discussed in this chapter relates to abstractions, or general outlooks on life. Here there is a well-known tension between abstract reasoning and personal relevance. In this case the tension is highly visible. The individualistic and plural use of "world view" is a late offspring of a rationalist tradition in which reasoning takes place above human life in an ahistorical realm of thought. Here, speculative (non-scientific) theories of life are the subject of discussion, not life as we know it from personal experience in everyday situations. If the teaching is modelled in this way and such general theories are taken seriously, there is a risk that *no-one* will be included if the teaching does not meet the students' needs for a personal understanding. The teaching may sound existentially relevant in name, but in practice there is a risk that it will not be experienced in that way.

Using the term "world view" as a heading for an entire subject area does not compel teachers to interpret the subject content in a rationalistic way. Instead, we are likely to end up in the strange situation in which the selected headings in all instructions to teachers have to be qualified in such a way (be provided with a warning text) that they do not adopt the

interpretation that is most common in popular culture—the image of a large "smorgasbord" of world views to choose from. Teachers' work might also be hampered by a concept formation that affects thinking in an abstract direction of this kind.

There are also other problems connected to highly general terms. The purpose of giving "world view" a central role in education is to create a common ground that includes everyone and blurs the differences. But this common ground is itself an abstraction and contains contradictory elements. What is common is not "being human" or some other fundamental aspect of life, but a particular theory of being human, namely the idea that everyone is equipped with a more or less coherent world view: "everyone has a worldview" (CoRE 2018, 72).

The logic of this language of world views involves absolute differences: the differences between different world views, for example, the dichotomy between religious and secular world views is often treated as absolute (timeless and ahistorical). In a dialectic way, inclusiveness can tip over to a situation in which people are divided into groups that are separated by absolute boundaries. The talk about "world views" is easily polarized and the cost of adopting "world view" as a common platform is the reinforcement of differences rather than a softening up of them.

Viewed from a historical point of view there are, to take one example, many similarities between Marxism and Christianity. Both stress social justice and also share other values. Marxism has taken over eschatological notions from Christianity, but given them a non-religious (godless) interpretation. Both provide all-encompassing explanations of the direction of history. If we dig a little deeper, we will probably find that they work with similar conceptions of God, inherited from the theological tradition. But such similarities, which provide the grounds for real dialogue, are suppressed or rendered invisible when the absolute difference between "the religious" and "the secular" is used as a starting point.

The Commission acknowledges that "worldviews develop in interaction with each other, have some shared beliefs and …" (CoRE 2018, 12). However, this does not take into account that the language of world views in itself is inappropriate for describing such interaction due to the inherent tendency in this language to reify boundaries. There is an inner

tension in the CoRE report between concept formation and the aims of the proposed new subject of "Religion and Worldviews".

To conclude, the inclusiveness of general terms such as "world view" tends to lead to the opposite, that is, that no-one is really included and a discourse of absolute differences that make dialogue difficult is easily established. According to the Commission, the term "world view" is the "best available catch-all-term to describe both religious and non-religious approaches to life" (CoRE 2018, 31). That might be the case, but the cultural baggage—a rationalist philosophical tradition—in which the term is embedded is counterproductive in a multicultural educational context, where the purpose is to facilitate intercultural dialogue, bridge differences and to some extent overcome conflicting approaches to life.

A Parochial Term

The inclusiveness of the term "world view" can also be challenged from other angles. Pupils belonging to a Buddhist or other tradition might not recognize themselves when their way of life is described as a world view. One reason for this is that a cognitivist bias persists in the understanding of "world view" as expressed in the material discussed in this chapter. The Commission gives propositional beliefs a prominent role in religious education, although the importance of emotional, affiliative and behavioural dimensions are also emphasized in the report (CoRE 2018, 72). Miedema prefers to talk about "views" (implicit and explicit) and adds feelings and attitudes to life as central components of a world view. Such "views" provide answers to existential questions, for instance concerning the nature of human beings and what happens after death (Miedema 2018).

However, talking about "beliefs" or "views" in this sense—general truths about life—reflects a Western way of thinking. This has recently been emphasized by John Gray in his book *Seven Types of Atheism*:

> The idea that religion is a matter of belief is parochial. // The notion that religions are creeds—lists of propositions or doctrines that everyone must accept or reject—emerged only with Christianity. // In most religions, debates about belief are unimportant. Belief was irrelevant in pagan religion

> and continues to be unimportant in the religions of India and China. When they declare themselves unbelievers, atheists are invoking an understanding of religion that has been unthinkingly inherited from monotheism. (Gray 2018, 4–5)

According to Gray, this inheritance has two aspects to it: the tendency to talk about belief, and the tendency to think in theistic terms: "Atheism simply excludes the idea that the world is the work of a creator-god, which is not found in most religions" (Gray 2018, 4). Since the concept of world view is fraught with the same difficulties as the Western understanding of religion—due to the central role of beliefs/views in the definitions of world view outlined above—it means that, for instance, the religions of India and China would be systematically misrepresented if the concept world view was allowed to form a basis for their understanding. This is a risk that the Commission does not take into account: "More still needs to be done to ensure that a wider range of institutional worldviews is taught, particularly Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism …" (CoRE, p. 6).

There is also an imminent risk that atheism, when discussing so-called secular world views in school, is portrayed in such a way that it becomes unclear as to whether it is only relevant in an Abrahamitic context.

Even if it is true that the idea that religion is a matter of belief emerged with Christianity, much as a result of Hellenization, this description of Christianity needs to be qualified. According to the well-known comparative historian of religion, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, belief does not appear to play a significant role in Christianity: "Belief, in the modern meaning of the word, has had no place in the history of Christian thought. *The concept is not in the Bible*" (Smith 1985, original italics, p. 78).

The modern meaning of the word "belief" may be even more parochial than Gray suggests. Understanding religion as a system of beliefs, something that rests on a foundation of general truths about life, first became prominent in intellectual circles during the Enlightenment. Only later has this new conception of religious faith become part of culture as a whole. Thus, talking about Christianity as a world view or as a religion reflects an Enlightenment perspective that is only a few hundred years old in the West, even if the seed was sown far earlier.

Framing Christianity as a world view (or a religion for that matter) means that it is the ideology of Enlightenment that is conveyed, not a historically neutral version of the Christian tradition. To select "Religion and Worldviews" as a new heading for religious education does not address the internal difficulties with the concept of religion, which are today widely acknowledged in Religious Studies, but rather reinforces them by introducing a new term—"worldview"—where "belief" has an even greater and more prominent role.

Does Everyone Have a Personal World View?

The Commission states that "everyone has a worldview" when referring to "the individual process of making sense of life" in contrast to institutional systems (CoRE 2018, 72). The word "everyone" in this context may refer to all human beings in a timeless sense. However, from a historical perspective, it would be more correct to say that the idea of everyone having a personal world view is an offspring of the Enlightenment. This idea presupposes, to mention the most important stages of the evolution of this figure of thought, the following historical ingredients: the reinterpretation of religion as a uniform set of metaphysical propositions in the seventeenth century, the emergence of non-religious alternatives in the eighteenth century, the rise of a historical consciousness in the nineteenth century (with the beginning of cultural relativism) and the rapid growth of individualism in the twentieth century.

If, for the sake of discussion, we apply this recent idea of a personal world view to the historical past, it would be possible to say that in the eighteenth century a few individuals (those belonging to the intellectual elite) claimed to have a personal world view, for example, the atheism of Diderot. However, if we do that, we are at the same time saying that most people in France at that time, farmers and city dwellers, did not have a personal world view in this sense and were not involved in an individual process of making sense of life or searching for an "overarching conceptual structure" (CoRE 2018, 72). We would have to assume that they were simply living in an unquestioned tradition that determined what kind of meaning could be found in a particular event. If a sociologist

(traveling with a time machine) had asked some of them about their personal world views it is likely that they would not have even understood the question.

If the statement "everyone has a [personal] world view" is interpreted as a description of social and historical reality, past and present, it must be rejected as obviously false. In the debates about world views in Sweden in the 1950s and 1960s, to highlight further examples, some intellectuals claimed not to have a world view, but took a more sceptical stance. In the light of recent empirical research, Caroline Gustavsson states that it is not correct to attribute a world view [philosophy of life] to young people (Gustavsson 2013, 144.).

A more reasonable interpretation of the statement "everyone has a world view" would be to say that it is a normative statement that states how we *should* view reality, an a priori construction and not an empirical description of facts. At the same time, it is clear that the Commission does not consider this statement merely as an a priori construction, but rather as a general truth about life, which is because they project the content of this a priori construction on reality.

If this criticism is correct, it means that the new concept for religious education promoted by the Commission—"religion and worldviews"—rests on a somewhat shaky foundation. Everyone is included by using the term "worldview" in the heading of the subject, but only at a theoretical level as an intellectual construct.

Do World Views Exist?

Earlier in this chapter the local character of the individualistic and plural concept of world view was exposed. But we have not yet questioned the idea of a world view itself. Do world views in this sense exist, or are they some kind of intellectual fiction? This question is parallel to the quite recent discussion in Religious Studies (the research field critical religion) as to whether religion exists or not (cf. Thurfjell 2016), and is also parallel to the critique of metaphysics in post-structuralism. In a trivial sense it can be said that world views exist. They are the subject of heated debates in the media and on websites. At universities they are analysed in

academic seminars. However, we can still ask the question: Is this specific idea of a world view solid and one that proves to be viable on closer, critical examination?

The concept of world view as defined by the Commission—"… an overarching conceptual structure, … which structures how a person understands the nature of the world and their place in it" (CoRE 2018, 72)—shares many features with what are called grand narratives or metanarratives in continental philosophy. They are characterized by their totalizing nature and a striving to explain and understand human existence in its entirety, which is ultimately about mastering reality or, in many cases, legitimizing the design of the present society with reference to an imagined future that has not yet been realized. Examples of such grand narratives are Hegel's philosophy of history, Marx's dialectical materialism, theological representations of salvation history, Comte's positivistic interpretation of the evolution of history and the "classical" secularization thesis. They are all attempts at formulating the meaning and end of history from a position of nowhere and claim, in several cases, to provide an infallible answer to some major questions of life.

In the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, philosophers and social scientists could still consider it a meaningful activity to formulate all-encompassing perspectives on the world (Hegel is a paradigmatic example, but the metaphysical impulse survives in other garments). But today all such attempts at a great synthesis are regarded with suspicion, no matter what tradition you belong to. In continental philosophy, world views in this sense are not the subject of choice, but objects for deconstruction. Against this background, it therefore seems rather strange to try to re-establish in schools the tradition of talking about world views as large-scale perspectives on reality.

A central theme in postmodernism (post-structuralism) is the collapse of Western metaphysics. This collapse is not just about the disintegration of the speculative systems of thought since Plato, but also involves a growing mistrust towards the tendency to operate with absolute dichotomies: appearance vs reality, mental vs physical, language vs reality etc. By "absolute dichotomies" means that it is assumed that there is a meaning in these conceptual opposites that is valid completely independent of whatever context—science, everyday life, art—we are in (Wilhelmi 1995).

These dichotomies also appear in slightly transformed variants within Religious studies: empirical reality vs non-empirical reality, religious vs non-religious, spiritual vs material etc. The dichotomy between religious and non-religious worldviews, which plays a major role in both the CoRE report and *Signposts*, appears to be yet another variation of all these attempts to say something absolute.

It is now often emphasized that trying to draw a firm boundary between "the religious" and "the non-religious" is difficult. Many phenomena simply do not fit into such a division, but are somewhere in-between. This is also noted by Robert Jackson: "And are there organized world views that straddle both the religious and-non religious, such as 'ecological holism', which might be seen perhaps as an emerging world view?" (Jackson 2014, 71) However, it is not enough to notice such fluidity. As long as such phenomena are interpreted in a language that supports the use of absolute divisions, they cannot be properly understood in their own right. On the contrary, there is evidence to suggest that such dichotomies hamper the understanding of everything that does not easily fit: Buddhism, Jainism, New Age-influenced practices (e.g. mindfulness, yoga), individual expressions of spirituality, indigenous cultures where there is no separation between a transcendent realm and a material one, the silent majority of a-religious people who do not identify with agnosticism or atheism; semi-secular people who oscillate from one day to another between different views of the opposite kind (for this latter group, see Burén 2015).

The talk about world views in popular culture, and to some extent in the texts discussed in this chapter, conveys a picture of a great diversity that extends into the innermost core of culture, a state of cultural relativism that seems incurable. From a postmodern perspective, it is true that Western metaphysical thinking permeates culture (and has spread to the rest of the world), even if it is on its way to dissolution. But at the same time, it means that the diversity that Reason created by producing different metanarratives is not a permanent state, but is perhaps a transient one, if we find ways of detaching ourselves from the metaphysical inheritance.

While diversity is inevitable in contemporary society, the type of diversity that consists of the spread of metanarratives, organized/institutional

or fragmented ones encompassed by individuals, cannot be considered as something inevitable, but will continue to be part of the culture for a long time to come. It should be important for religious education to contain instruments that help us to navigate between inevitable diversity in a multicultural society and diversity which, from a principle point of view, is merely a construction. Such tools are absent in the CoRE report, in Miedema's article and in *Signposts*.

As already hinted, the adherence to the individualistic and plural use of "world view" perceived as something that is subject to unlimited choice is itself an example of a world view (in the sixth sense discussed earlier). It belongs to a Western narrative and is based on an exaggerated belief in the possibilities of reason to penetrate the ultimate truth about man, the universe and the goal of history. The results of such efforts are not deep insights into reality, but rather "houses of cards" (to borrow a familiar expression from the later Wittgenstein philosophy). The plural, individualistic use of "world view" may be a good starting point for critically discussing phenomena in contemporary society, but is less suitable for approaching an entire subject area.

Religion and Science

An entirely different problem area concerns the relationship between religion and science. By using the language of world views as a framework for discussing "existential questions", a fundamental similarity is created between religion and science: it seems that both of these distinct spheres of human life share a basic similarity, namely providing a world view (Thalén 2015). Once this fundamental similarity is established, the possibility of treating religion and science as comparable objects is opened up. This comparison is always to the disadvantage of religion: science is about testable knowledge obtained by reliable methods, while religion is about so-called supernatural knowledge based on theological speculation and revelation. If the choice between world views is rigged in this way, there is only one possible outcome, which is the creation and maintenance of a myth about the general intellectual inferiority of religion inherited from the Enlightenment.

Portraying the relation between religion and science as a question of choice is deceptive, even though this idea is common in popular culture. Being a world view is an artificial similarity between religion and science. As mentioned earlier, it is doubtful whether religion can be called a world view. The same goes for science. The idea that science conveys a world view is related to an older conception that scientific theories depict an underlying physical reality that science is uncovering. What this picture overlooks is that natural science creates its own languages or representational techniques. In scientific activities, these techniques are then applied to nature and become part of the method of investigation.

Formulations like "man is an animal", "love consists ultimately of chemical processes", "religious experience consists of neurological processes in the brain" or "the brain acts as an advanced computer programme" do not express deep truths about reality—although it may sound as though they do. Rather, they only indicate which method of inquiry is used in a particular research branch. The impression that something more is going on—that these formulations also constitute elements of a possible world view—arises when the method of inquiry is conflated or merges with the object of research, that is, when the content of the method of research is projected onto man or nature.

A "scientific world view" thus arises when formulations of this type are separated from their scientific contexts and begin to flow freely. They then turn into general truths about life. This frequently happens in popular culture, but sometimes also in popular science.

Naturalism and materialism are two general outlooks on life that are often associated with a "scientific world view" and from a historical point of view have been closely connected. However, natural science cannot support (or the opposite) general outlooks of this kind. That would be a misuse of the authority of natural science. The belief that materialism/naturalism can be supported by scientific evidence is related to the picture of scientific language as an "esoteric language" that depicts a hidden, underlying reality. Once the flaws of this picture are exposed, the credibility of the claims to be able to say something absolute about reality is also lost.

RE as Facilitating a Spiritual Journey?

According to Miedema, who is inspired by Charles Taylor's description of secularity as a new context of understanding where belief in God is one option among others, what is characteristic of our secular age is that " most people are looking and longing for meaning in life" (Miedema 2018, 139). This means that people are on a spiritual journey and that it is important to develop an approach that "encourage(s) them to pursue their search to the end and facilitate their journey, while also taking into account the plurality of spiritual choices people make" (Miedema 2018, 139). Therefore, Miedema is saying that religious education should correspond to this new cultural context:

> It is my conviction that this approach is also valuable for schools dealing with and facilitating the spiritual journey of children and youngsters via world view education. (Miedema 2018, 139)

Most people would agree that religious education should be designed in a way that is relevant to contemporary society. However, the built-in problems that exist in our culture can be given different diagnoses, which means that there are different interpretations of how the "spiritual journey" is to be understood. The postmodern account of these things is more pessimistic: we live today in a state detached from the great traditions that once gave meaning and purpose to our lives, in a kind of cultural vacuum where it is difficult to find any authentic choices at all. Individual world views can be seen as remaining pieces of the grand narratives and what is left after the collapse of metaphysics. Our spiritual journey is more like wandering in a desert, and not like the chaotic situation that arises when we have to choose from a wide variety of world views.

That many people are looking and longing for meaning in life is probably true, although not everyone experiences an inner emptiness. However, it is unclear what kind of role religious education should play here, particularly if the postmodern diagnosis is correct. If the so-called world view education does not provide any tools with which to critically examine the necessity of worldviews, it can be questioned whether this teaching really facilitates the spiritual journey of young people.

The same criticism applies to the content of the CoRE report:

> It is one of the core tasks of education to enable each pupil to understand, reflect on and develop their own personal worldview. This is a whole-school responsibility and the explicit, academic study of worldviews is an essential part of it. (CoRE 2018, 5)

It is difficult to see how enabling "each pupil to understand, reflect on and develop their own personal worldview" could be a "whole school-responsibility". If developing a personal world view is equated with developing " an overarching conceptual structure, … which structures how a person understands the nature of the world and their place in it", it can be questioned whether this is a meaningful activity at all. It would be much better to introduce a thinking that resists such an endeavour, or at least teaches an ability to discern when the talk about world views is meaningful and when it is appropriate to be sceptical of the whole enterprise.

On the other hand, the CoRE report expresses the important pedagogical ideas behind this educational project of strengthening and supporting individual responsibility. One version of such pedagogical ideas is neatly summarized by Miedema, who is influenced by the Dutch pedagogue Martinus Johannes Langevald: "… the aim of all education is the self-responsible self-determination, the autonomy of the child and the youngster" (Miedema 2018, 144). This is a noble pedagogical principle that I can align with. However, this ideal of autonomy tends to be distorted when the individualistic and plural concept of world view become part of the conceptual foundation for such pedagogical endeavours. Choosing between world views in this plural sense, if this choice is about general beliefs about reality, is not a real choice. To me, it seems more like an intellectual game.

A Route for the Renewal of Religious Education?

Where do the arguments in this chapter lead? It is obvious that the concept of religion that is presupposed in the designation "religious education" has become problematic in many senses. The use of the term "religion" creates mental barriers and functions in a non-inclusive way.

However, what should have become clear, to switch to the individualistic and plural use of "world view", does not solve these problems. It is only more inclusive on the surface. If we scratch the surface there is an opposite tendency, namely to reason in absolute terms—to bring forth absolute dichotomies and boundaries—which tend to create differences instead of dissolving them. The internal difficulties that the concept of religion carries with it are further reinforced by the plural understanding of "world view", in that elements such as "belief" or "view" take on an even more central role. A sense of having to choose between a large range of world views is reinforced; a choice that is simultaneously impossible to rationally conduct. Overall, it can be debated whether young people are given adequate conceptual tools to deal with the challenges posed by social and cultural diversity, or whether they simply become more confused.

To conclude, introducing the terminology of world views as interpreted in an individualistic and plural sense does not mean any real progress compared to a teaching in which the concept of religion constitutes the framework. What is valuable in these attempts to reform the teaching of religion in schools and make it more inclusive is that the concept of religion is assigned a less prominent role. But this strategy would be more meaningful if we do not simultaneously introduce a new concept to be the bearer of similar difficulties.

There is no doubt that religious education needs to disassociate itself from the concept of religion. A new conceptual repertoire is needed and probably a new heading. The proposed new subject area of "Religion and Worldviews" and Miedema's vision of religious education as a spiritual journey focused on world views can be seen as a first step in such a process of disassociation. However, as has already been pointed out several times, little is accomplished by this step. The challenges facing religious education are far greater.

Note

1. This enumeration of different uses of "world view" is not exhaustive, and I think it is impossible to catch all possible uses that exist today. While writing this chapter I stumbled upon on further uses not reported here.

References

Burén, A. (2015). *Living Simultaneity: On Religion Among Semi-Secular Swedes*. Diss. Göteborg: Göteborgs universitet.

CoRE (Commission on Religious Education). (2018). *Final Report: Religion and Worldviews, The Way Forward: A National Plan for Re*. London: RE Council.

Gray, J. (2018). *Seven Types of Atheism*. London: Allen Lane an imprint of Penguin Books.

Gustavsson, C. (2013). *Existentiella konfigurationer: om hur förståelsen av livet tar gestalt i ett socialt sammanhang* [*Existential Configurations: A Way to Conceptualize People's Meaning-Making*]. Diss. Stockholm: Stockholms universitet

Hyman, G. (2010). *A Short History of Atheism*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Jackson, R. (2014). *Signposts—Policy and Practice for Teaching about Religions and Non-Religious Worldviews in Intercultural Education*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.

Kurtén, T. (2013). Livstro, teologi och livsåskådningsvetenskap [Belief in Life, Theology and the Science of Life Views]. In C.-R. Bråkenhielm, M. Essunger, & K. Westerlund (Eds.), *Livet enligt människan: om livsåskådningsforskning* [*Life According to Humanity: About Research in Life Views*]. Nora: Nya Doxa.

Miedema, S. (2018). Personal World View, Existential Questions and Inclusive Pedagogy. Theological and Pedagogical Underpinnings. In J. Ristinemi, G. Skeie, & K. Sporre (Eds.), *Challenging Life: Existential Questions as a Resource for Education* (pp. 137–156). Münster: Waxmann.

Smith, W. C. (1985). *Belief and History*. Virginia: Virginia University Press.

Stenlund, S. (1988). *Undersökningar i matematikens filosofi* [*Studies in the Philosophy of Mathematics*]. Stockholm: Thales.

Thalén, P. (2015). Religion and Science: A New Old Theme in RE at High School. In D. Carlsson & P. Thalén (Eds.), *Det postsekulära klassrummet. Mot ett vidgat religionskunskapsbegrepp* [*The Postsecular Classroom. Towards an Expanded Concept of Religious Education*]. Uppsala: Swedish Science Press.

Thurfjell, D. (Ed.). (2016). *Varför finns religion?* [*Why Does Religion Exist?*]. Stockholm: Molin & Sorgenfrei.

Westerlund, K. (2013). Livsåskådningar, ambivalens och skuld—ett empiriskt exempel [Life Views, Ambivalence and Guilt—An Empirical Example]. In C.-R. Bråkenhielm, M. Essunger, & K. Westerlund (Eds.), *Livet enligt människan: om livsåskådningsforskning* [*Life According to Humanity: About Research in Life Views*]. Nora: Nya Doxa.

Wilhelmi, J. (1995). *Språk och mänsklig förståelse: En kritisk undersökning av några samhällsfilosofiska tolkningar av den senare Wittgenstein [Language and Human Understanding: A Critical Examination of a few Socio-Philosophical Interpretations of the Later Wittgenstein]*. Nora: Nya Doxa.

Wittgenstein, L. (1988[1975]). *On certainty: Über Gewissheit*. Repr. Oxford: Blackwell

10

A Study-of-Religion(s) Based RE: A Must for All Times—Post-modern, Post-secular or Not!

Tim Jensen

Unframing the Editorial Framework

In the invitation to contribute to this volume on "religious education in a post-secular age", the editors, with reference to the introduction in Sweden in the 1960s of a non-confessional and in that way 'secular' religious education (RE), express the opinion that the then 'intellectual space', 'cultural situation' and 'intellectual fundament' has been, as good as, totally eroded.

According to the editors (or at least to -isms and views on religion, RE, and the study of religion(s) which the editors seem to see as highly influential if not dominant), post-modernism, post-secularism, the

T. Jensen (✉)
Department of History, University of Southern Denmark, Odense, Denmark

Institut für Theologie und Institut für Religionswissenschaft, Leibniz University Hannover, Hanover, Germany

Ural Federal University, Yekaterinburg, Russia
e-mail: t.jensen@sdu.dk

O. Franck, P. Thalén (eds.), *Religious Education in a Post-Secular Age*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47503-1_10

post-secular state, linked philosophy and recent studies of religion(s) have "undermined the intellectual fundament of non-confessional religious education". The idea of "any kind of absolute neutrality can no longer be sustained", the very 'concept' or 'image' of religion has been 'questioned' and [the then dominant notion] shown to be "distinctively Western (and also Lutheran)", as well as reflecting 'thoughts of the Enlightenment'. In a 'post-secular state' it has, the editors state, "become increasingly difficult to make sharp distinctions between what is religious and non-religious, confessional and non-confessional, teaching about religion and learning in (from) religion". An 'idea about neutrality', a "belief in the possibility of conveying knowledge of religion entirely unaffected by the views of the teacher and the surrounding society", a "larger secular liberation process in society from the inherited religion" (the then established Lutheran-Protestant Christian religion embodied in the Church of Sweden), a growing 'pluralism in society', as well as the notion of (and law on) "religious freedom, all paved the way for the introduction of a non-confessional RE with teaching *about* religion, with RE in public school conveying 'knowledge *about* religion'".

The editors, nevertheless, also think that "[t]he subject of religion, based on diversity, has never been more relevant", and the second half of the invitation is an invitation to "think through and find a new foundation for the model for religious education", a new "intellectual platform to match the post-secular situation".

Given this starting point and discursive framework, my first response to the invitation and my first suggestion for an "intellectual platform to match the post-secular situation" is to ask loud and clearly: is it really necessary 'to buy into' the ideas, thoughts and opinions expressed by the editors (or by those voices or discourses they refer to)?

No, it is not. At least so I think. Neither as a scholar nor as a citizen do I consider myself obliged to buy into the arguments and views of the '-isms' or 'movements', be it 'modernism', 'late or post-modernism' or 'post-secularism', and I do not think they denote a well-defined 'age' or the most dominant characteristics of contemporary (Western, European, Danish, Swedish etc.) 'society', 'culture', 'religious situation', 'intellectual climate' or the like.

Moreover, and more important than the question about the 'truth' of those views and discourses and my opinion on them: I do not think that thinking about, nor re-thinking, RE should take place within a discursive framework as the one outlined by the editors, *and* I certainly cannot see why (discourses on) post-modernism, post-modernity, post-secularism, the post-secular state, linked philosophy (of science) and studies of religion(s) should have "undermined the intellectual fundament of non-confessional religious education".

Even if the mentioned -isms, the changes in regard to scholarly or popular notions about 'religion' and 'religions', *and* factual changes 'on the ground' as regards transformations or reconfigurations of the 'secular' and 'religious', of religion and politics, and of religion and state(s) can be empirically proven to exist and be of importance, then that does not mean a thing in regard to arguments in favor of having a secular, non-confessional RE with teaching about religion in public schools in ways that are as 'neutral' or 'objective' as possible.

On the contrary: I think arguments in favor of a secular, non-confessional, state-funded, totally normal, study-of-religions based compulsory and time-tabled RE in public schools as well as arguments in favor of the *importance* of it, are identical to what they have been for decades,[1] and that these arguments (and also more refined arguments) can and must be put forward with as much fervor and nerve today as 'back then'. Within or without a framework of (discourses on, proponents of) so-called post-modernism/post-modernity or post-secularism/post-secularity.

Why a Study-of-Religions Based (Secular, Non-religious, Non-confessional) RE?

Space prevents me from repeating or spelling out in any detail all my former and current arguments,[2] but here comes some of the most important 'fundamentals': if scientifically based knowledge in general is considered valuable and a must for a state (and I do find it a valuable must, not least in 'post-factual' times, and also despite whatever moral and political

shortcomings of some scientific endeavors), then scientifically based knowledge also about what is commonly (as well as by most scholars even in today's world) called religion necessarily must also be considered valuable, and scientific studies of religion(s)[3] ought thus also be financed by the state and located at public (state-) universities together with other human, social and natural sciences.

If scientifically produced knowledge of humankind, nature and culture, including religion, is considered of such a scientific and cultural value as to be funded by the state, then this state-funded research and the knowledge must be shared with the public at large and not kept as a 'professional secret' within the academia. I think. An easy and fairly sound way to do so is for the state to provide public education with school subjects that reflect and communicate the knowledge produced at the universities.

Though knowledge of religion(s) can and must be sought and produced by a series of sciences and also taught and touched upon in school subjects like history, literature, and natural and social sciences, specific study-of-religion(s) departments at the public universities are, in my opinion, not the worst thing that has happened in order to further a scientific study also of religion.[4] Likewise, a specific time-tabled compulsory and totally normal school subject, religion education (RE), taught by teachers educated at the study-of-religions departments also ought to be established. Only in this way can the state make sure that teaching about religion(s) in school is as scientifically based as is the teaching about all the other school subjects.[5]

By way of providing for the scientific study of religion at public universities and a study-of-religion(s) based RE in public schools, the state, moreover, provides for a second-order analytical-critical discourse on religion, a second-order discourse that may, arguably, be seen as crucial to the well-being and well-functioning of an open, secular (not 'secularist'), pluralist and democratic society. Moreover, the RE thus offered can help provide citizens at large as well as particular professional and civil servants with both 'general education' ('Allgemeinbildung'), important elements of what is today called 'citizenship education', and with skills, competences and knowledge that may prove useful for a qualified execution of particular professions in civil society. The contents of the public school

RE are to reflect—pedagogically and didactically tailored to the various age groups—the public university scientific study-of-religions programs and contents.[6] It is to be a 'mini'—or 'school'—study of religions.

So much for the 'fundamentals' in my suggestion for an up-to-date and viable 'intellectual fundament' for a study-of-religion(s) based RE. Let, me, however, be a bit more detailed as regards the importance of religion and 'religion', as well as of knowledge of and about religion, *and* knowledge of and about *discourses* or *notions* of religion, that is 'religion'.

What most (not all but *most*) scholars of religion still—despite all ever so valuable and necessary critical approaches to the term and concept[7] as well as to specific 'study of religion(s)/religious studies' departments (cf. above and the linked note 4)—write about, analyze and discuss in terms of 'religion' and 'religions', are (whatever theories or definitions applied) 'something' that has been and still is of importance in the past and present history of the world, humankind, cultures and societies. What may be termed religious (or maybe also 'proto-religious') ways of thinking and acting have, according also to the most recent theories of cognition and evolution, been with humankind for a long, long time and played various and not unimportant roles in the evolution of humankind, societies and cultures. When scholarship on the history of religion (understood as the study of the history of religion(s)) can detect more 'institutionalized', for example, so-called post-axial, modalities of religion(s), the same (study of the) history of religion can show that various religions (or 'religious traditions' if this sounds a bit less of 'reification' or 'essentialism') have exercised, at least at times, considerable, influence on histories, societies and cultures throughout the world.[8]

Religion(s)—whether as what Frenchmen (also with regard to the teaching thereof in school) call the 'fait(s) religieux', as what may be called "the naming of something as 'religion'", as what may be called "giving something status of 'religion'", or as 'religious' and non-religious discourses on religion and 'religion'—today as before, simply is/are important aspects of (factors and 'markers' in) humankind, of culture, of social formation, of meaning making, and of identity construction, including past and present 'politics of identity'.[9]

Knowledge of 'religion-related discourses' (including practices), then, is important knowledge if 'we' want to have (and if states want their

citizens to have), qualified knowledge of the world, of 'world-making', humankind, social formation, identity construction etc.—and knowledge of all of this is important if we want to have qualified knowledge of religion. As well as of study-of-religion(s) theories, definitions and discussions about religion, religions, and the notion thereof, including the notion of 'world religions'.[10]

My (rhetorical) question now is this very simple one: has this part, the importance of religion(s), discourses on religion(s), 'out there' and within the academic study of religion(s), of the 'intellectual fundament' for RE been shattered or even eroded to such a degree that it cannot serve as an 'intellectual platform' for a contemporary and future RE? The answer is equally simple: No, of course it has not.

Neither have, thus, my arguments in favor of a secular and scientific study of religion and a RE based on it. Admittedly, I cannot provide a full-fledged definition (or defense) of 'science', nor a detailed overview of the scientific (philosophical) discussions about such a task (defining 'science'), whether the task is about defining science 'as such' or science as in 'natural', 'social' and 'human' science. It is not the place, either, for fleshing out in any detail suggestions for key constituent characteristics of the secular, scientific study of religion.

The following must suffice. I start quoting Armin W. Geertz from his contribution to *Secular Theories on Religion*, edited by T. Jensen and M. Rothstein in 2000:

> The secular study of religion is understood […] to mean the non-sectarian, non-religious study of religion. It is not necessarily an atheistic approach. It simply chooses to interpret, understand and explain religion in non-religious terms. It confines itself to analytical models grounded in a view of the world based on the insights and achievements of the natural sciences. The study of religion, obviously, is not a natural science. It applies methods, theories and models developed in the human and social sciences: history, sociology, linguistics, psychology, anthropology, ethnography and philosophy. It is further characterized by a comparative interest in all religions throughout human history. But its view of the world is secular and humanistic. (Geertz 2000, 21)

In the light of the discourse on 'post-modernism', I hasten to add that even the most up to date and in that way 'post-modern' scholars of religion do not think that 'anything goes' within a scientific study of religion(s).[11]

Allow me to also add that only a small minority of scholars of religion(s) consider so-called alternative (alternative to scientific knowledge) kinds of knowledge, including what may be called religiously based or 'esoteric' knowledges, equal or superior to the knowledge produced by science.

Donald Wiebe, in an article where he is, by the way, also arguing against such claims of a plurality of (postulated) equally valid and valuable 'knowledges' about religion, writes that 'fields of study' within the 'modern research university' which are 'beyond the range of the natural and social sciences' […] 'present no significant challenge to the overall scientific ethos of the modern university which is predominantly concerned to discover and disseminate public (i.e. objective) knowledge about public (i.e. inter-subjectively available) facts concerning states of affairs in the natural and social worlds' (Wiebe 2016, 191).

Such 'fields of study', including the study of religion(s), ought not and must not, and I agree with Wiebe also in this (ibid.), 'present no significant challenge' to the overall 'scientific ethos' of the modern (or 'post-modern') universities where departments for the scientific study of religion(s) are located.

Though such departments in some places are located together with theology, and though much research done within theology by theologians are unmistakably scientific in both theory, method, and aim, *other* kinds of theology, for example, within systematic or practical theology, are not equally evidently so. And, as said by many a scholar of religion over the years: some kinds of theology and some theologians are not colleagues but study objects to the scholar of religion(s). Besides, most theologians study but one religion, most often, moreover, the one they themselves adhere to and believe in as the true and best religion, and many theologians study their religion not just to gain more knowledge of religion or of humankind but in order to do what they can to make their religion relevant to their contemporaries.

In a secular, scientific study of religion(s), on the contrary, the scholar of religion (apart from often specializing in one religion or one region or

one period of one region and one religion) 'masters' an encyclopedic knowledge of the world's religions past and present, and he has been educated, furthermore, in practicing cross-cultural comparison in a skilled way as a *sine qua non* for a study of religion(s).

Moreover, the scholar of religion(s) traditionally brackets the 'truth claims' of religion(s) in order to study religion in a scientific way as a human, social and cultural phenomenon and 'fact'. This is why the study of religion(s) approach to religion is often said to be methodologically 'agnostic' and 'impartial', trying its best to be 'neutral', and 'objective'. Moreover, a significant number of scholars of religion continuously wrestle with past and present epistemological and methodological issues, inter alia issues linked to efforts to emancipate the secular study and scholar of religion from religious notions on religion in order to hopefully approach religion(s) in a more scientific, neutral and impartial way.

There is, thus, as I see it, something that qualifies as science and can be seen as different from non-science, and there is something that qualifies as (more or less) scientific studies of religion(s) to be distinguished from other kind of approaches, including religious and some theological approaches, to religion. And the differences and distinctions *do* matter. And they can be seen and documented. By more than one scholar.

The same goes for telling and spotting the difference(s) and distinctions between what is religious and non-religious (secular) RE, between confessional and non-confessional RE, between, on the one hand, teaching *about* religion and learning from the study of religion(s), and, on the other, instruction in/teaching religion and learning from religion.

This author (see e.g. Jensen 2017a, b), as well as several others (see e.g. Alberts 2019; Kjeldsen 2019b), have so far had no problem when overlooking the situation in Europe and elsewhere with identifying confessional RE over against non-confessional RE and/or to see that many kinds of so-called non-confessional RE in fact is what I have called "small 'c' confessional" RE, or, as it has recently been adopted with a slight difference by Wanda Alberts, "small 'i' religious instruction/indoctrination".[12]

True, as also documented and discussed (see inter alia Jensen and Kjeldsen 2014b; Jensen 2017a, b) in recent analyses of, for example, RE in a German context: some formally, legally and in reality confessional

kinds of RE no doubt are supposed to deliver (and most likely deliver even if I do not have classroom observations to back this claim) objective, informative and neutral information about religion on top of what else they are supposed to also deliver, for example, morally and spiritually edifying knowledge of the 'confession' (religion) in question, knowledge supposed to be central in the formation of the identity of the pupil and future citizen.

And equally true: some formally and legally non-confessional kinds of RE, like the one in primary school in Denmark, are not at all secular and non-religious but what I and Kjeldsen (cf. above) have termed "small 'c' confessional", something that is not always obvious to everybody but something that is always obvious and observable to the trained and critical study-of-religion(s) based scholar of RE (e.g. Kjeldsen 2019b; Alberts 2019).

Now what about the claims that philosophy (of science) has long ago shot dead the belief in the 'neutrality' of the (religion) scholar and the (RE) teacher? My short answer is this: none of my now late professors or current colleagues within the academic, scientific study of religion(s) or within RE in school never ever 'believed' in something close to what the editors talk about as 'absolute neutrality' or the 'possibility of conveying knowledge of religion *entirely* unaffected by the views of the teacher and the surrounding society.' (my emphasis). I also honestly do not know of one single colleague ever putting forward in private or in public, in writing or speech, such a point of view. Just like very few scientists as well as few scholars of religion actually believe in Truth with a capital T. Claiming that there once was such an unshattered belief in or claim about 'absolute neutrality' among for example scholars of religion(s) and teachers of RE (and that this postulated claim disqualifies the study of religion(s) and a study of religions based RE because such a 'positivistic' view is totally outdated and wrong) is but a 'straw man', and I have nothing more to say about it until I see documentation as to such claims made by scholars of religion(s) and RE teachers.

What quite a few scholars and colleagues, past and present, *have* claimed is that it is of paramount importance that they and all other scholars (on religion) try their very best, in their scientific research as well as in the communication of the results thereof, to proceed in as impartial,

neutral, objective, informative, and balanced way as at all possible for a scientist, scholar and RE teacher who is also a human being and a citizen with extra-scientific emotions, values, aspirations and so on. But I must ask, is this disciplined effort really so bad, so naive, so ridiculous? Is it an aim and a methodic procedure that they ought to kiss goodbye because some philosophers or so-called post-modernists teach and preach that *absolute* neutrality, something they never believed in, nor claimed to practice, is impossible? Is it so bad that scholars of religion, often educated and working within specific departments for the study of religion(s) have, as indicated already, wrestled for years with the notion of religion, struggled to deconstruct an inherited Protestant notion of religion, kicked and yelled to free themselves of religious ways of looking at religion, trying to pave the way for as neutral and impartial way to study religion as at all possible?

I have, time and again, alluded to discussions (within the global community of scholars of religion(s)) about religion, religions, world religions, including popular and scholarly *notion(s)* thereof. Discussions sometimes, though not always, linked to discussions about 'secular' (over against something non-secular or religious), and at times, thus, also to discussions about 'secularization', 'secularity', the 'secular state'—as well as to 'de-secularization' and 'post-secularity'.

Space prevents me from entering into any discussion about secularization (secularization theories or 'secularization paradigm') and (some kind of) de-secularization (and theories thereof). Here, I only want to address, in a very matter-of-fact way, the idea about a 'post-secular age'. Not in general and not by way of arguing against the arguments of particular scholars. But by way of a look at the situation in the Kingdom of Denmark. My context, the immediate context for RE in Denmark.

First ever so briefly about 'secularity' and 'post-secularity': The Kingdom of Denmark is not a secular state! At least not according to the common definitions of a secular state.[13] It is not 'post-secular' either. The Constitution as of 1849 and 1953[14] is totally clear as to the establishment of the Evangelical-Lutheran kind of Christian denomination ('Folkekirken') as the religion to be supported by the state. Though there is freedom of religion for the individual citizens (except for the king, the head of state), there is no equality of religion(s), and the Ministry of

Ecclesiastical Affairs as well as the Minister thereof is not a Ministry and Minister of Religion.[15]

A landmark Supreme Court case in 2007[16] made it equally clear that in Denmark one cannot clearly separate state and religion. But this is not something new! On the contrary. The established religion, as the ruling quite correctly states, handles, so the court rules, tasks that otherwise the state should handle (and the court 'judges' them 'non-religious' or secular), and the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs also handles what the court also rules to be 'non-religious' tasks, inter alia burials (sic!)

All citizens, also those who are not members of the established religion, contribute via the income tax to the payment of part of the salaries of bishops and ministers, and to the maintenance of the buildings belonging to the established religion. Buildings, though, defined in this ruling as 'cultural' rather than 'religious'. Of course. And it is as the ruling says, a tax paid only 'indirectly', via the normal income tax. No problems with the right to freedom of religion (as defined in international Human Rights conventions) of the plaintiff, thus, and also no violation of the Danish Constitution either.

Moreover, the perfectly (?) secular Danish Parliament celebrates and marks the beginning of each parliamentary year with a service in the nearby church; the calendar is full of Christian holidays; the Danish EU passports have as their marker (of Danish identity) an image of the crucified Christ (called the 'birth certificate' of Denmark). Religion: a matter of privacy? Citizenship and state separated from religion? No, but also nothing new. Not much 'post-secularity' in this regard.[17]

The elementary state school has a kind of RE that is called 'Kristendomskundskab' and despite being formally non-confessional as of 1975, it serves—today as in the past—primarily to familiarize the pupils with the majority religious tradition and what is considered the main cultural and ethical values that tradition is said to have provided to help make Danish culture and society so wonderfully democratic and civilized as it is often said to be. The year most pupils 'go to church' in order to receive, as part of their preparation for confirmation, religious instruction by the local minister, RE in elementary school is suspended for that whole year! Not a particularly secular school and RE, but also not a particularly 'post-secular' school or RE![18]

Moving from a state (or meso-) level to more of a micro-level, I also want to ever so question claims and notions about Danes and the country of Denmark as being extremely 'secularized' or visibly 'post-, or de- secularized'.[19]

First of all, on the micro- and meso-level, one cannot escape the fact that what I consider an impressive number (74.7%) of Danes, even anno 2019/2020, are still paying members of the established religion, that an equally fairly large number of Danes actively do practice the religious 'rites of passage' (a very normal and universally well-known way of 'having' religion), that is, via baptism of their newborn babies (of those born in 2017 59% in total), confirmation (in 2018 69.9% in total of the annual batch), and burials (in 2018 82.6% in total of those who passed away),[20] everything with a strong and highly visible bond to the established religion, all in or in the vicinity of visible spaces and places that are evidently seen as religious and not as secular. But again: this is not something new or recent, and it does not differ (except that the numbers of members and practicing members after all has decreased somewhat for various reasons) from what was the case in, for example, 1975 when a formally and legally non-confessional RE was introduced into the public school.

To me, then, it does not make much sense to discuss this picture in terms of neither 'post-modern' nor 'post-secular', and it definitely makes no sense at all with regard to a framework for *re*-thinking about RE. It is much rather the *continued* importance of the established religion (with the usual differences between countryside and big cities), and the accompanying ways of having and thinking about religion that matters. Some of the ways of having and thinking religion may very well have changed and may even be characterized as 'post-modern', but they may equally well be seen as indicative of a very old 'obsession' (shared by a continuously fairly large part of Danes *and* a fairly large part of other people around the world) with constructing individual and family identities with the use of the traditional religion. An 'obsession' to be 'normal', to baptize your child and celebrate confirmation and to thus have the opportunity to gather the family, have a party, mark the transitions of life etc. A quite normal way of having religion. Maybe what religion is (almost) all about!

Of interest too, also for any argument about the need for a study-of-religion(s) based RE, are the normative and religious notions (stereotypes, prejudices), that are shared by quite a few Danes as regards 'mature' religion, that is, a 'modern', progressive and civilized way of having religion. From my analyses of the ways journalists, politicians, as well as official documents about RE in elementary school, discuss the majority Christian religion as well as minority religion(s), especially today Islam and Muslims, earlier on the 'new religious movements, I dare say that a widespread essentialist notion is that religion has a 'core', and that 'core', and thus 'religion when it is best or true', is something that begins in the 'heart' of the individual human being. It is a 'belief' or a 'faith', and it is about 'meaning', that is, about (occupation with and answers to) the so-called big questions of life (existential questions of life and death, suffering etc.), and about morals ('love your neighbor', pro et contra abortion etc.). Religion, 'truly' understood and practiced, as by the majority of Danes, is a 'matter of privacy', something 'of the heart', and 'not-going-to-church' (apart from the above-mentioned rites-de-passage visits which are normally neglected in discussions about practicing religion or not among Christian secular Danes) on a regular basis is but the very best way of being religious (and a good Christian) (Jensen 1994, 1998).

At the same time, seen from another point of view, the same Danes, or equally large parts of them, seem to not care about religion or Christianity at all, or at least not in their daily lives. Moreover: they most likely simply do not see what I see as 'religion'. Yes, they get confirmed, married or buried in a church, but they do not define it as religion but as 'tradition' and as a 'cultural' and festive background, and celebrating Christmas is of course not a religion or something religious but a 'tradition'. Muslims, on the other hand, most likely are mostly seen as celebrating Ramadan as a religion and not as a tradition. Danes are 'culture' Christians ('kulturkristne') while Muslims (also Danish Muslims) are religious (and often fanatically so) Muslims. Muslims by and large have religion in a 'premodern' way, in an 'old-fashioned' backward way. They show their religion in their clothes and in what they eat and do not eat. They have, as one Danish pastor once wrote with reference to Muslim rules on purity, religion in a childish way. (Jensen 1994; cf. Andreassen 2014).

The conclusion to this quick look at the Danish situation: Danish society cannot easily be classified or characterized neither as secularized nor as de-secularized, nor can the majority population of religious (or secular?) 'irreligious Lutherans'. This author at least sees a lot of religion and a lot of deep-seated religious (Protestant) notions of religion in Denmark and among the Danes, and he thinks that Danes may be seen not at all as very 'secular' or 'secularized' but as highly dedicated Lutheran-Protestants, 'practicing' their religion in what they consider a perfect and perfectly Christian way. However, he also thinks that they may be seen also as being neither secular nor post-secular, neither secularized nor de-secularized, neither in their 'belonging' nor in their 'behavior', neither in their views on religion and Christianity nor in their ways of 'having' religion.[21]

As regards the state, though, I find it much more easy to say that the Danish state, with its past and present in 'handling' of religion(s), most definitely never entered any kind of 'post-secular age', and my analyses elsewhere (e.g. Jensen 2011b) of a few court cases (as well as of the Muhammad case that never made it to the courts) related to religion and freedom of religion also seem to indicate that Danish courts are not eager to let secular law accommodate or give much (more) space to religion or ways of having religion (e.g. manifesting your religion by wearing a kirpan) in a public sphere held to be secular.

When a former Minister of Education not so long ago publicly declared that he did not want the Danish public school to be or become secular,[22] he simply meant to protect it from being bereft of the possibility to celebrate Christian festivals and holidays, to have the pupils sing Christian songs and psalms and the like. His claims that he wanted it to be and stay 'multi-religious' was but rhetoric. The Danish public school never was anything close to multi-religious. Only Lutheran-Protestant religious. So: not much 'post-secularity', neither in the courtrooms nor in the schoolyard and classrooms.

Swedish scholar Jenny Berglund (2013) wrote that the famous Swedish 'secular' RE actually was 'marinated' in Lutheran-Protestant Christianity. This can most certainly also be said about Danish society, the ways Danes practice and think of religion, and the ways in which the state handles religion. Including, as already indicated above, the way religion and RE

in Danish primary school is handled. RE in Danish public (or 'state') school never emancipated itself from the support of the state to the established religion, and despite the nominal introduction in 1975 of a formally non-confessional RE, RE in the Danish elementary school (in contrast to what is the case in upper-secondary school) has remained crypto-confessional, a kind of "small 'c' confessional RE".

To conclude: if this brief look at the Danish situation somehow supports the claims of the editorial invitation as regards difficulties distinguishing religious from secular (or vice versa), then this author claims that this, nevertheless, does not support the linked claim, namely that this difficulty is particular to this moment in Danish history. More important: there is nothing about this situation that erodes the intellectual foundation for a secular, non-confessional RE and teaching about religion, at least not in Danish state schools. And I think not elsewhere either:

The job for the scholar of religion and study-of-religion(s) based RE teacher is the same today as it was (supposed to be) decades ago: to study, teach and question all of what is happening, including all that scholars (this one too), other pundits, and the public at large write, say and think about religion, past and present. RE now as then has to teach about religious changes and transformations, including those that take place in the contemporary 'history of religion(s)', and it has to do so in line with the ways in which religion scholars and the study of religion(s) see and discuss it. This ought to be as obvious to everybody else as it is to me. This is what a study-of-religion(s) based RE is good for, and what a RE teacher educated at a study of religion(s) department is good at. A study-of-religion(s) based RE furthermore is, thinking about the issue of 'neutrality', the only kind of RE that can live up to the by now well-known 'legal', European as well as US, criteria for a compulsory, normal, timetabled RE for all pupils, irrespective of their religious or secular family background and 'belonging', namely that it must be 'objective, critical, and pluralistic'.[23]

That scholars of religion arguing in favor of a secular, non-confessional study-of-religion(s) based RE in public schools are up against powerful resistance goes without saying. The resistance comes from religious people, from other RE scholars, from theologians (within religions and also

some of those employed at universities), from governments, from politicians, from a part of the public that simply has no idea about what a study-of-religion(s) based RE might be, from another part that simply cannot think of religion and RE except in religious terms (terms strongly influenced by the dominant religion and religious discourse on religion) and then, of course, from a lot of people who do not care about religion to such a degree that they can see any point in dedicating a school subject to teaching it.

Resistance is also linked to age-old as well as contemporary ways of conceiving of the implications of the ultimate aims of the public elementary school (educating the pupils into becoming 'good' citizens), and corresponding aims of promoting the majority religion in school and RE. It is intimately linked, now as before, to religion-related 'identity construction' and 'nation-building', to age-old normative perceptions of 'religion' and how best to 'understand' it.

Establishing, practicing and developing an academic, scientific, study of religion(s) may be uphill. Some scholars even argue that it will never happen! Establishing, practicing and developing a study-of-religion(s) based RE in public schools, especially in the elementary school, is, beyond a doubt, not just uphill, but as I have written in other articles: uphill, uphill, and uphill! No matter if one counts in or counts out whatever opposition that may be characterized as (linked to) 'post-modernism' and 'post-secularity'.[24]

Core Contents for RE 2020

How, the reader finally may very well ask, does this author then see the outlines of the core contents of the kind of RE he recommends, that is, totally normal, compulsory, time-tabled school subject taught by teachers educated for to do so at study-of-religions departments at the public universities?

In a nutshell: as a study-of-religion(s) program in a mini-format, tailored, didactically and pedagogically to the various age groups and levels, of first primary, then secondary and then upper-secondary school.

A first obligation, however, for a study-of-religion(s) RE (and maybe not always equally so for the program at the university) is to teach about religion and religions, past and present, majority and minority, collective and individual, as something that actually do exist, one way or the other, 'out there', in the world, in society, in the world of today and of the past, in the (ongoing) history of humankind, culture(s), societies etc. Because there *is* something out there, I insist,[25] that can, despite whatever theoretical and methodological issues and complexities implied, be identified, classified and studied as religion(s) and not just as another kind of cultural, classificatory, social etc. 'system', way of living, way of seeing, way of life.

RE has to teach about, one way or the other, religions of the past, whether indigenous religion or the religions of, for example, ancient Greece. And, even if the ancient Greeks or the Maoris did not have religion (neither a term for religion)[26] that matches dominant Western, Christian or whatever ways of having and seeing religion, they certainly did have something that can beyond a doubt be studied and taught about as religion. Take the first song of the Iliad: there is a lot of religion, and to deny that it makes sense of talking about the divine beings, the prayers, the sacrifices and the notion of honor too in terms of 'religion', is simply 'over the top'. Much more could be said about this, but space prevents from doing so.

But RE also has to find time, of course, for teaching about today's religion(s) and contemporary developments and transformations of religion(s), and whatever relations between religion and politics, religion and non-religion, religion and the secular, religion and human rights and so on in the country in question and in the world at large. It must teach about, for example, in Denmark, all that I have discussed above as regards religion and non-religion in Denmark, and it must provide the pupils with skills, knowledge and competences to critically analyze such themselves. As skilled, critical and competent RE pupils and as critical and competent citizens.

RE, beyond a doubt, also has to provide teaching about those religions which for a long time, by a lot of people, scholars, teachers et al. have been labeled 'world religions'. Of course. In Europe and in the Western part of the world in general, RE, in my opinion, also has to give the

majority Christian religion, and the local variant thereof, more time and more attention than any other single religion. To teach in school, in a study-of-religion(s) based historical and comparative, critical-analytical way, about this majority religion is a *sine qua non*. Not only because it is the largest religion in the world and in most of the countries in the Western part of the world. It is a *sine qua non* in order to deconstruct dominant 'folk categories', dominant, normative, stereotypical ways of thinking about religion. It is a must in order to make students familiar with a study-of-religion(s) approach and to de-familiarize them with religion, not least 'their own'. And this is one of the most prominent tasks of RE in school. (cf. Jensen 1997).

RE must, in my humble opinion, teach not just about religions past and present, at 'home' or around the world. It must also teach about that which for decennia was called (cross-cultural) 'religious phenomena', that is, (religious) 'myth', (religious) 'ritual', 'divine beings', (religious) 'sacrifice', (religious) 'divination' and so on. This is one way to teach about religion, not 'as such', not as a 'sui generis' phenomenon or platonic 'idea', but about religion in general. It is, furthermore, the royal road to make pupils familiar with an important part of a study-of-religion(s) based analytical toolbox with the mentioned phenomena constituting some of the most important analytical concepts and terms.

It has to do all of this (and more than that), as a matter of course, today as before, in a self-reflective and self-critical way (there are other ways of approaching and 'understanding' and teaching religion), in a way that reflects, moreover, current, up-to-date theories, methods, approaches, methodological issues and debates within the academic study of religion(s). Including discussions about 'religion' (the notion of it and the term), about religion 'as such', about 'world religions', about essentialisms, reifications, stereo- and prototypical ways of thinking about religion(s), Christo-centric ways of thinking about religion, and (e.g.) ways (first maybe Western now maybe almost global) of thinking about religion in Human Rights articles, and, needless to say, discussions about the very notion of 'world religions'. And, also needless to say, the 'phenomenology of religion' recommended is not the one of say Otto, Eliade, van der Leeuw but an up-to-date kind of comparative studies of religion and religious 'phenomena', among which today something like (religious) 'rhetoric', (religious) 'legitimization' and 'gender' may be added.[27]

An up-to-date RE certainly must also make room for teaching about some aspects of cognitivist and evolutionary approaches and perspectives. The 'big questions' in RE nowadays ought not be the so-called existential questions (where do 'we' come from, who are 'we', and where do 'we' go to when we die). Those questions to a large degree are (religious, philosophical) questions formulated within a religious rather than a scholarly framework, and they pertain to a kind of RE that aims at having the students learn from religion rather than from the study of religion. No, the big questions of an up-to-date RE ought be the questions about the origin, coming into being, function and use of religious ideas, practices and institutions. Why do humans and human societies have religion? This is not a question that science has answered yet, and it is of utmost importance to a study-of-religions based RE that the questions asked by the scientific study of religion be asked and dealt with in RE.

Since I can go into no detail in regard to what is said above, I shall end encouraging readers to look up some recently produced electronic materials for a study-of-religions teaching about religion(s) (see references: IESR) and (most recently) materials from a linked project that focused on (how to hopefully) countering stereotypes and prejudices about religion(s) with reference to a study-of- religion(s) approach (see references: SORAPS).

Hopefully, the reader can thus see that the RE recommended here is not at all some kind of lofty 'academic' enterprise but something of social, cultural and political relevance, in general and to the pupils. Something that can be implemented in curricula, textbooks and teaching. Something pupils will be fascinated to 'have' in school, something they will engage in with interest and enthusiasm.

Notes

1. As can be glanced from the references, I, for one, have produced numerous articles over the past 30 or so years trying to promote a study-of-religion(s) based RE. Though, hopefully, some arguments have been added, and some refined and qualified, by and large they are the same because I think the raison d'être is the same.

2. There at limits as to my ingenuity in terms of trying to say the same but in other words. Consequently, some redundancy cannot be avoided. In this contríbution the following pages render almost verbatim my most recent effort (Jensen 2019) to give a 'programmatic summary' of what I find the fundamentals in regard to the propagation of a study-of-religion(s) RE.
3. I use, indiscriminately 'scientific (academic, secular) study of religion(s)' or just 'study of religion(s)' as umbrella term for what the International Association for the History of Religion (IAHR) (despite its name) sees as the kind of the academic studies of religion(s) that it promotes, namely a wide range of historical, comparative, critical-analytical, sociological, psychological etc approaches to religion, as a human phenomenon (and theoretical object), and to religions as more or less observable historical, social and cultural traditions.
4. I have argued elsewhere (e.g. Jensen 2019, 39–41) in favour of distinctive departments for the study of religion(s), but let me repeat with special regard to the theme of this article: hundred years or more of focused historical and comparative research and reflection on religion and how to study it has taken place at departments for precisely that kind of studies. That has produced a valuable reservoir of knowledge, theories, methods, including self-criticism, including sincere efforts to constructively deconstruct the notion of religion and thus emancipate the study of religion from e.g. religious notions of religion(s). Scholars of religion working at these departments, have managed to move forward and change the scientific study of religion(s); some have been first movers in critically rethinking religion *and* the study of religion(s). True, there are no doubt more to be done, a lot to improve, and I agree with part of the criticism aimed at certain study-of-religion(s) department by e.g. Luther Martin and Donald Wiebe (2012a, b). There are, no doubt, departments around the world with 'religion appreciation' and the promotion of social cohesion, peace and understanding may have taken the place of teaching about and practicing a scientific study of religion. And, cognitive constraints may, as claimed by the two, add to the difficulties linked to emancipation from religious and theological ways of thinking. But, there are, as also written by e.g. Hubert Seiwert (2012) more to the story about the state of art at study-of-religions departments. There is no alternative to study-of-religion(s) departments when it comes to the education of RE teachers and the secular, scientific basis for RE.

5. I have also argued elsewhere (most recently ever so briefly in Jensen 2019, 43) in favor of having a distinctive RE school subject rather than, as is the case in France, having teaching about religion taking place within the framework of subjects like History, Literature, et al. A key argument for this is the fact that teachers who are not educated in the study of religion(s) generally simply do not master teaching about religion(s) in as qualified a way as those who are. Besides: when was a teacher educated within Literature supposed to also master History, or vice versa?
6. I do, of course, know that study programs in study-of-religion(s) departments differ from each other, and that the study programs at Danish universities, including my own, at the University of Denmark cannot be seen as neither exemplifying what is going on all over the world in departments that carry that or a similar name, nor as exemplary. However, I actually think that the programs in place in Denmark may serve as sort of good examples not least because they have, for almost a century, served as the place for the education of Upper-Secondary school RE teachers, and their programs strike a balance between what is needed for 'production' of future scholars and future RE teachers. See Jensen (1994, 2008, 2009, 2013, 2015), Jensen and Geertz (2015), Jensen and Kjeldsen (2014a).
7. I cannot list all works of all relevant scholars who have been key movers in regard to discussions and deconstructions of religion and 'religion'. Readers are referred here only to the works listed in the references by Fitzgerald and McCutcheon, especially their most recent works where readers can find references to earlier work and most other relevant literature.
8. See the (very) few titles by Armin W. Geertz (2013, 2016) as well as the Festschrift edited in his honour by Anders Klostergaard Petersen et al. (2019) for introductions and references to the massive output of important scholarly works on religion, cognition and evolution, including e.g.recent theories linking evolution and history of religion to the so-called 'axial age'.
9. For theories and analyses of religion(s) and 'religion' as a dimension/marker/classifier of e.g. social formation, authorisation, hierarchy and power, identity construction, etc. readers are referred to, apart from classical works of e.g. Durkheim (and his Paris 'equipe'), to more recent and highly influential books and articles by religion scholars like e.g. Burton Mack, Jonathan Z. Smith, Bruce Lincoln, Russell T. McCutcheon, Timothy Fitzgerald, to mention but a few. In this article explicit references are not given to all relevant works of these or other authors.

McCutcheon (2019) is highly recommended as it revisits and updates earlier work of McCutcheon as well as provides the reader with most if not all relevant references to other scholars of religion and earlier works of McCutcheon himself.

10. As for criticism of 'world religions', see works by Masuzawa (2005), Owen (2013), Cotter and Robertson (2016).
11. Göran Larsson, in a highly recommendable 'pixi-like' book on Human Science as yet another of the sciences, pages 21–22, lists several basic criteria for what it takes for something to be scientific rather than 'commonsensical', and Larsson, in an very down to earth way thus also distances himself from any 'anything goes' approach to the academic study of religion(s) (Larsson 2019).
12. See Alberts (2019, 57). T. Jensen & K. Kjeldsen first introduced the category 'small "c" confessional' (drawing on Donald Wiebe's classifications of differents kinds of theology) in an article in *Temenos* in 2013.
13. I adhere to the definition given by D.E. Smith: "The secular state is a state which guarantees individual and corporative freedom of religion, deals with the individual as a citizen irrespective of his religion, is not constitutionally connected to a particular religion nor does it seek either to promote or interfere with religion" (Smith 1963, 4).
14. See https://www.ft.dk/da/dokumenter/bestil-publikationer/publikationer/grundloven/danmarks-riges-grundlov. In particular §§ 4, 6, 66–70. (Last accessed February 1, 2020)
15. Apart from my own work, readers are adviced to consult other scholars and their (different) approaches and views asregards what has been called the 'religion model'. See e.g. Christoffersen et al. (2012).
16. See http://www.hoejesteret.dk/hoejesteret/nyheder/pressemeddelelser/Pages/Foedselsregistreringogstatstilskudtilfolkekirken.aspx (Last accessed February 1, 2020)
17. The editors (W. Sullivan et al. 2011) of *After Secular Law*, did not chose the image of the crucified Christ inserted in the late 1990s in the passports of alle Danish citizens for the cover of their book in order to give an example of something 'post-secular' but in order to indicate the entanglement of the secular and not-secular in a state and country they and others otherwise looked at as exemplary in regard to secularization and secularity. And, of course, to 'shock' American readers used to a discourse about a 'wall of separation'.
18. See the articles by Jensen (2013, 2016, 2017a), Jensen and Kjeldsen (2013, 2014a), and Kjeldsen (2019a) for critical analyses of RE in the Danish elementary school.

19. Phil Zuckerman's work (see e.g. Zuckerman 2008, 2009) has been influential in 'promoting' this view but the same notions about the Danes and Denmark as utterly secularized and secular, have been extremely influential in Danish politics and in the Danish public as well.
20. See statistics at http://www.km.dk/folkekirken/kirkestatistik/. (Last accessed February 1, 2020). As for weddings and blessings numbers are not equally impressive, and I do not have a percentage. As for the decrease in membership over the past decades, see same statistics showing that in 1990 the percentage of paying members was 89.3%.
21. The summary of my analysis here presented in all haste still owes a lot to my past analyses, e.g. Jensen (1998, 115–159). On Christianity in Denmark, with special regard to elementary-school RE representations, curricula and textbooks see Kjeldsen (2019a), and for a study-of-religion(s) based textbook for upper-secondary school, see Hvithamar (2007).
22. See my 'response' to Bertel Haarder, the Minister in question, in my essay (kronik) in the Danish newspaper *Politiken* as of March 10. 2005: https://politiken.dk/debat/kroniken/art5694509/Religion-p%C3%A5-skemaet (Last accessed February 1, 2020)
23. See Andreassen (2013), Haynes and Oliver (2007), Jensen (2005).
24. Most of my articles also deal with the reasons why a secular study-of-religion(s) based RE is not just embraced by everybody and every country. One reason, of course, is that politicians and the public at large cannot conceive of religion and 'religion' in a secular, non-religious way. I have argued that one ought consider adding to the list of criteria for a 'secular state' the criterium of having a non-religious RE in public schools. Alberts (2019) also notes that most European states have a problem with being secular when it comes to RE.
25. Again: space prevents me from giving a detailed argument. Suffice it to say that I contend that there are good reasons for why why some buildings, actions, people, thoughts, some ways of eating and being together, some ways of having sex, dressing etc. may 'stand out' as not just or only profane, non-religious (they are of course always also that) but as something that may be termed 'religious'. I tend to subscribe to (operational) definitions of religion as a cultural (sub-)system that differs from other such by way of a reference to a postulated more than human and more than natural something (′power, 'being', 'scripture', etc.). My favorite more detailed definition, and pupils should be told about the one guid-

ing the teacher, is the one by Bruce Lincoln, briefly rendered in Lincoln (2000b), later explicated in greater detail in Lincoln (2003). Lincoln (2003) develops, moreover, the useful notions of 'minimalist', respectively 'maximalist' stances among insiders.

26. Nongbri (2013) in my opinion is somewhat overestimated. It was a matter of course back in the 70s when I was student of the history of religions in Copenhagen that the Greeks as well as indigenous people did not have religion (or morals for that matter) as 'we' had it. I also want to refer readers to the interview I with others conducted with late JZ Smith (Smith et al. 2014). During the interview Smith is asked about what has almost become his most famos 'dictum' (from *Imagining Religion*) that there is 'no data for religion'. Smith replies: "If I had a nickel for every time that sentence has been quoted I could have retired forty years ago. But i have to say that sometimes the way the quote is used is de-familiar tio me." (p. 67). Later on the doorbell rings. Smith gets up and walks to look out the window but does not open the door but comes back exclaiming: "Hah! It's Jehovah's Witnesses. That's our data at the door." (p. 72). There is data for religion. Sometimes, as said, also theologians are data for religion and for the scholar of religion.
27. See for one of the most important arguments in favor of comparative religigion, Sinding Jensen (2003). For a more modest up-date on a post-Eliadean 'phenomenology' or comparatrive study of religion, see Jensen and Podemann Sørensen (2015).

References

Alberts, W. (2019). Religious Education as Small 'i' Indoctrination: How European Countries Struggle with a Secular Approach to Religion in Schools. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal, 9*(4), 73–90.

Andreassen, B.-O. (2013). Religion Education in Norway: Tension or Harmony between Human Rights and Christian Cultural Heritage? *Temenos, 49*(2), 137–164.

Andreassen, B.-O. (2014). Christianity as Culture and Religions as Religions. An Analysis of the Core Curriculum as Framework for Norwegian RE. *British Journal of Religious Education, 36*(3), 265–281.

Berglund, J. (2013). Swedish Religion Education: Objective but Marinated in Lutheran Protestantism? *Temenos, 49*(2), 165–184.

Christoffersen, L. et al. (red.) (2012) *Fremtidens danske religionsmodel*. København: Anis.

Cotter, C. R., & Robertson, D. G. (Eds.). (2016). *After World Religions. Reconstructing Religious Studies*. London: Routledge.

Geertz, A. W. (2000). Analytical Theorizing in the Secular Study of Religion. In T. Jensen & M. Rothstein (Eds.), *Secular Theories on Religion. Current Perspectives* (pp. 21–31). Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press.

Geertz, A. W. (Ed.). (2013). *Origins of Religion, Cognition and Culture*. Durham: Acumen.

Geertz, A. W. (2016). Conceptions of Religion in the Cognitive Science of Religion. In P. Antes, A. W. Geertz, & M. Rothstein (Eds.), *Contemporary Views on Comparative Religion in Celebration of Tim Jensen's 65th Birthday* (pp. 129–141). Sheffield/Bristol: Equinox.

Haynes, C., & Oliver, T. (2007). *A First Amendment Guide to Religion and Public Schools*. Nashville: First Amendment Center. Retrieved from https://www.freedomforuminstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/FCGcomplete.pdf.

Hvithamar, A. (2007). *Danske Verdensreligioner*. København: Gyldendal.

IESR: *Intercultural Education Though Religious Studies*. Retrieved February 1, 2020, from https://iers.unive.it/digital-modules/

Jensen, J. S. (2003). *The Study of Religion in a New Key: Theoretical and Philosophical Soundings in the Comparative and General Study of Religion*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press.

Jensen, T. (1994). Islam i bestemmelserne for religionsfaget i folkeskolen, gymnasieskolen og på HF. In: T. Jensen (ed.), *Islam i skolen* (pp. 21–80). Københavnerstudier i to-sprogethed bind 20, Center for Multikulturelle studier, Institut for Dansk, Fremmedsprog og Religion. København: Danmarks Lærerhøjskole.

Jensen, T. (1997). Familiar and Unfamiliar Challenges to the Study and Teaching of Religions in an Increasingly Religious and Multireligious Context. In N. G. Holm (Ed.), *The Familiar and the Unfamiliar in the World Religions. Challenges for Religious Education Today* (pp. 199–223). Åbo: Åbo Akademi University.

Jensen, T. (1998). Kristendom. In M. Müller (Ed.), *Politikens bog om religioner og religiøse bevægelser* (pp. 84–159). København: Politikens Forlag.

Jensen, T. (2005). European and Danish Religious Education: Human Rights, the Secular State, and 'Rethinking Religious Education and Plurality'. *Journal of Religion & Education, 32*(1), 60–78.

Jensen, T. (2008). RS Based RE in Public Schools—A Must for a Secular State. *NVMEN, 55*(2–3), 33–60.

Jensen, T. (2009). Hvordan bliver man religionslærer i Danmark? ('How to become a teacher of RE in Denmark?'). *DIN*, *Religionsvitenskapelig tidsskrift*, (1), 72–105.

Jensen, T. (2011a). Why Religion Education, as a Matter of Course Ought to be Part of the Public School Curriculum. In L. Franken & P. Loobuyck (Eds.), *Religious Education in a Plural, Secularised Society. A Paradigm Shift* (pp. 131–150). Münster: Waxmann.

Jensen, T. (2011b). When is Religion, Religion, and a Knife, a Knife—and Who Decides. In W. F. Sullivan, R. A. Yelle, & M. Taussig-Rubbo (Eds.), *After Secular Law* (pp. 341–362). Stanford: Stanford Law Books.

Jensen, T. (2013). A Battlefield in the Culture Wars: Religious Education in Danish Elementary School 1989–2011. In A. Jödicke (Ed.), *Religious Education Politics, the State, and Society* (pp. 25–49). Würzburg: ERGON.

Jensen, T. (2015). The Basic Course for the Study of Religions at the University of Southern Denmark. *Teaching Theology and Religion, 18*(3), 248–251.

Jensen, T. (2016). Folkeskolens religionsfag 1814–2016. *UNGE PÆDAGOGER, 2*, 36–48.

Jensen, T. (2017a). Religious Education in Public Schools: The Most Important Tendencies (with Special Focus on Scandinavia). *Gosudarstvo, Religiya, Tserkov' v Rossii i za Rubezhom, 35*(4), 46–71.

Jensen, T. (2017b). RS-Based RE—Uphill, Uphill, and Uphill! In S. Führding (Ed.), *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion: Working Papers from Hannover* (pp. 199–231). Leiden: Brill (Method & Theory in the Study of Religion. Supplements Bind 8).

Jensen, T. (2019). Jensen's Scientific Approach' to Religion Education. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal, 9*(4), 31–51.

Jensen, T., & Geertz, A. W. (2015). Fra religionshistorie til religionsvidenskab i Danmark: en introduktion. In T. Jensen & A. W. Geertz (Eds.), *Religionsforskningen før og nu. II: Nyere tid* (pp. 11–42). København: Gyldendal.

Jensen, T., & Kjeldsen, K. (2013). RE in Denmark—Political and Professional Discourses and Debates, Past and Present. *Temenos, 49*(2), 185–223.

Jensen, T., & Kjeldsen, K. (2014a). *Baseline Study. Religious Education in Denmark.* EU, Lifelong Learning Programme: Intercultural Education through Religious Studies (IERS). Retrieved February 1, 2020, from http://iers.unive.it/about/research/.

Jensen, T., & Kjeldsen, K. (2014b). *Baseline Study. Religious Education in Germany*. EU, Lifelong Learning Programme: Intercultural Education through Religious Studies (IERS). Retrieved February 1, 2020, from http://iers.unive.it/about/research/.

Jensen, T., & Podemann Sørensen, J. (2015). Nyere religionsfænomenologi. In T. Jensen & A. W. Geertz (Eds.), *Religionsforskningen før og nu. II: Nyere tid* (pp. 339–372). København: Gyldendal.

Kjeldsen, K. (2019a). *Et kristent funderet religionsfag. En undersøgelse af kristendoms særlige status i skolen*. København: UNGE PÆDAGOGER.

Kjeldsen, K. (2019b). A Study-of-Religion(s) Based Religion Education: Skills, Knowledge, and Aims. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal, 9*(4), 11–29.

Larsson, G. (2019). *Humaniora—en vetenskap som andra*. Timbro Förlag.

Lincoln, B. (2000a). Culture. In W. Braun & R. T. McCutcheon (Eds.), *Guide to the Study of Religion* (pp. 409–422). London & New York: Cassell.

Lincoln, B. (2000b). Reflections on 'Theses on Method'. In T. Jensen & M. Rothstein (Eds.), *Secular Theories on Religion. Current Perspectives* (pp. 117–121). Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press.

Lincoln, B. (2003). *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Martin, L. H., & Wiebe, D. (2012a). Religious Studies as a Scientific Discipline: The Persistence of a Delusion. *Revue Pro Religionistiku, 1*, 9–18.

Martin, L. H., & Wiebe, D. (2012b). Why the Possible is not Impossible but is Unlikely: A Response to Our Colleagues. *Revue Pro Religionistiku, 1*, 63–71.

Masuzawa, T. (2005). *The Invention of World Religions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

McCutcheon, R. T. (2019). *Fabricating Religion. Fanfare for the Common E.G.* Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter.

Nongbri, B. (2013). *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.

Owen, S. (2013). The World Religions Paradigm. Time for a Change. *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education, 10*(3), 253–268.

Petersen, K. A., et al. (2019). *Evolution, Cognition, and the History of Religion: A New Synthesis. Festschrift in Honour of Armin W. Geertz*. Leiden: Brill.

Seiwert, H. (2012). The Study of Religion as a Scientific Discipline: A Comment on Luther Martin's and Donald Wiebe's Paper. *Revue Pro Religionistiku, 1*, 27–37.

Smith, D. E. (1963). *India As a Secular State*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Smith, J. Z., Pearson, T., Gallagher, E., Jensen, T., & Fujiwara, S. (2014). The Devil in Mr. Smith: A Conversation with Jonathan Z. Smith. *Teaching Theology and Religion, 17*(1), 61–77.

SORAPS: *Study of Religions against Prejudices and Stereotypes*. Retrieved from https://soraps.unive.it/

Sullivan, W. F., Yelle, R. A., & Taussig-Rubbo, M. (Eds.). (2011). *After Secular Law*. Stanford, California: Stanford Law Books.

Wiebe, D. (2016). Claims for a Plurality of Knowledges in the Comparative Study of Religions. In P. Antes, A. W. Geertz, & M. Rothstein (Eds.), *Contemporary Views on Comparative Religion. in Celebration of Tim Jensen's 65th Birthday* (pp. 183–194). Sheffield/Bristol: Equinox.

Zuckerman, P. (2008). *Society Without God*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Zuckerman, P. (2009). Why Are the Danes and Swedes so Irreligious? *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society, 22*(1), 55–69.

11

Autonomy and Shared Citizenship: A 'Neutral' Justification for RE?

Leni Franken

RE in Post-secular Societies: From Confessional to Non-confessional

Until the 1960s, Christianity was the major religion in most European nation states and society was largely influenced by this religion. Today, this Christian dominance belongs to the past and most European nation states are characterized by secularization, but also by ethnic and religious diversity. Although the number of believers in western-Europe decreased substantially and even though the overall impact of religion on public life diminished, the famous secularization thesis (Berger 1967; Bruce 2002, 2011) does not persist in its original form. Rather than saying that religion will *disappear*, it seems to be more correct to say that religion *transformed* into a less institutionalized and more individualized and spiritual phenomenon (cf. Davie 1990; Heelas and Woodhead 2005; see also the concept of secularization as a "return of religion in society" in the introduction of this book, pp. 9–12). Besides, nation states worldwide are

L. Franken (✉)
Centre Pieter Gillis, University of Antwerp, Antwerp, Belgium
e-mail: Leni.franken@uantwerpen.be

O. Franck, P. Thalén (eds.), *Religious Education in a Post-Secular Age*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47503-1_11

increasingly confronted with religious terrorism, which is often related to fundamentalist interpretations of Islam.

These societal changes have, among other things, led to national and international discussions about Religious Education (RE) and to several initiatives designed to cope with religious diversity in education (e.g. OSCE 2007; Jackson 2014. See also Franken 2017a). One of the major issues in this regard is the shift from confessional, theology based and denominational RE to non-confessional, religious studies based and non-denominational RE. Although this shift is often considered necessary in order to "cultivate reciprocity, sensitivity and empathy and to combat prejudice, intolerance, bigotry and racism" (Jackson 2014, 137) and is from a legal perspective "most compliant with the state's human rights obligations" (Evans 2008, 471), non-confessional RE is not without any controversy, in particular with regard to its "neutral" or "impartial" approach (cf. Franken and Loobuyck 2017). Indeed, a "view from nowhere" (Nagel 1986) is considered impossible and accordingly also non-confessional RE is in this sense never neutral.

There is, however, an important difference in RE between a *religious studies based perspective* and *non-confessional view* on the one hand, and a *theology based perspective* and *confessional view* on the other. The former enables all students to learn in an empirical, critical and objective way about different religious traditions, without a (dogmatic) priority position for one particular tradition. Besides, this "outsider perspective" (cf. McCutcheon 1999), which no longer aims at socialization in one tradition, but at knowledge of and dialogue between different traditions, makes it possible for the *state* to design a core curriculum for RE, aiming at religious literacy for all the students. Given the separation of church and state, this is impossible when RE is organized in a denominational and confessional way.[1]

In spite of its merits, non-confessional RE has been criticized for several reasons, for instance because its content would not be neutral, but rather *secularist and anti-religious*; and because it would lead to *reductionism* and *relativism*. Leaving aside these criticisms and the stance of methodological agnosticism I elaborated on elsewhere (cf. Franken 2018), the main focus of this chapter will be the "secular" or "neutral" *ground* or *justification* for non-confessional RE, which is often misunderstood in

the debates surrounding RE, but which seems to be of utter importance if we want to "create a space for discussion where the pupils do not need to identify with one of the opposite poles of the dichotomy 'religious/non-religious'" (cf. introduction, pp. 7–9). In order to illustrate this, I will first frame the common debate about non-confessional RE and its 'secular' stance (2). Subsequently, I will elaborate on the core principles of liberal-democratic societies (3) and its implications for education in general and for RE in particular (4–5). Before I come to a general conclusion (7), I will address some common critiques concerning liberal education and its implications for RE (6).

Framing the Debate: The Atheist and Anti-religious Confession of Non-confessional RE

In Europe, RE is presently organized in many different ways (cf. Franken 2017a; Rothgangel et al. 2014a, b, 2016), the main models being (1) no RE as a separate school subject, (2) (multi-)confessional and separative RE or education into religion and (3) non-confessional and integrative RE or education about religion.[2] As a result of growing religious diversity and secularization, and taking into account human rights as well as the aims of education in liberal-democratic and secular states, confessional and denominational RE has been replaced by non-confessional, non-denominational RE in the UK, Sweden, Norway, Québec and in most Swiss cantons. Notwithstanding its benefits, however, this kind of RE is often criticized, mainly (but not exclusively) by religious stakeholders,[3] which in many European states still have a substantial and powerful role with regard to RE in public schools. Not surprisingly, these stakeholders, who do not want to lose this historically inherited power, often make a caricature of non-confessional RE, which is framed as a hidden state ideology, supported by radical atheists only.

In Flanders (Belgium), for instance, there is since 2008 a discussion going on about the introduction of non-confessional RE (LEF—*Levensbeschouwing, Ethiek, Filosofie* [Worldviews, Ethics, Philosophy]; see

for example Loobuyck and Franken 2011; Franken and Loobuyck 2013) in public (i.e. state-funded and state-recognized) schools,[4] but several religious stakeholders (mainly Catholics, but also representatives/defenders of other recognized religions and worldviews) are opposed to this idea. In order to contest this idea of non-confessional RE for all, one of their strategies is the framing of this kind of RE as an epitome of atheism and anti-religious fundamentalism:

> The problem is that [the defender of nonconfessional RE] is blind for his own ideological presuppositions, which are driven by an *atheist worldview* that starts from the premise that all religions and worldviews can be reduced to alternative, purely human, even fictive constructions. (Torfs et al. 2015—emphasis mine)

> This kind of *anti-religious fundamentalism*, sympathising with [nonconfessional RE] is perfectly possible in our society (as long as it does not lead to violence and respects the law), but it is a position among other positions and therefore not neutral. (Pollefeyt and Lamberigts 2015—emphasis mine)

This criticism is incorrect for at least two reasons. First, a distinction has not been made here between the *personal worldview* or *comprehensive doctrine* of some protagonists (including the present author) of non-confessional RE on the one hand, and the *neutral* or *politically secular justification* for this kind of RE on the other. Second, and in relation to this, *political liberalism or political secularism*, which is the normative framework for non-confessional RE (and for liberal or autonomy-facilitating education in general) is wrongly equated with atheism and anti-religious fundamentalism. In the following paragraphs, a thorough elaboration on the core principles of liberal-democratic societies and the need for liberal education in these societies will make clear why both assumptions are wrong.

Before doing this, however, the *scope* of this article should be made clear: when education and RE are addressed, I will be talking about (religious) education in governmental or state schools, that is, schools established and financed by the state. In relation to this, the scope of this article is education and RE in *liberal democracies*. These are fair systems of

social cooperation between free and equal citizens, which are considered to be *reasonable* in a Rawlsian sense. This means that citizens are prepared to accept the basic structure of liberal democracy at the *political level*, which guarantees in the most fair way that citizens can live a life according to their personal concept of the good life, without infringing on the right of co-citizens to do so as well. In order to enable this, the state should not promote any particular comprehensive (e.g. religious or metaphysical) doctrine, but political decisions should always be legitimated in 'neutral' terms, that is, without any reference to the intrinsic value of particular conceptions of the good life. Accordingly, political decisions and laws regarding RE should never be based on the personal beliefs/worldviews of policy makers, but should be justified by *reasonable* arguments: only if the reasons given for political action (e.g. organizing RE in state schools) may reasonably be accepted by other citizens as a justification for those actions, is political power proper or legitimate (cf. Rawls 2005 [1993], 217).

In order to enable citizens to lead a life according to their conceptions of the good life, the liberal-democratic state should not only protect our basic rights and freedoms, but it should also guarantee free and equal access to *primary goods*, that is, "things that every rational man is presumed to want" or goods that "normally have a use whatever a person's rational plan of life" (Rawls 1971, 62). Even though our rational plans of life are different, "they nevertheless all require for their execution certain primary goods" (Rawls 1971, 93), such as rights and liberties, opportunities and powers, income and wealth, health and vigour, intelligence and imagination. In order to assure these primary goods, sometimes the state will be required to actively support *public goods*. Public health care for instance is a public good that is required to guarantee health (a primary good), and legal institutions are public goods required to protect our basic rights and liberties (primary goods). In a similar vein, *education* is a public good, which should actively be supported by the state in order to guarantee that all citizens have "the same opportunity to structure their lives authentically and autonomously" (Levinson 1999, 152). Moreover, one could even argue that education is the *main* public good in liberal societies because it prepares future citizens for a life in these societies: "Education lies at the heart of the liberal project; it is upon the realization

of liberal educational goals that the success of liberalism itself depends" (Levinson 1999, 5). But what kind of education is required in order to guarantee the success of liberalism and the realization of 'equal opportunities' for all? It is to this question we will turn in the next paragraph.

Autonomy, Citizenship and Education

In liberal-democratic states, one of the core normative principles is the idea that all individuals should be treated as free and equal citizens, with the opportunity "to form, to revise, and rationally to pursue a conception of one's rational advantage or good" (Rawls 2005 [1993], 19). Different from other mammals, human beings are not merely conditioned by their instincts, but they are able "to rationally […] assess [their] conceptions of the good in the light of new information or experiences, and to revise them if they are not worthy of our continued allegiance" (Kymlicka 1995, 81). At this point, liberal democracies are not value-neutral: their basic structure is based on the idea that what makes human beings truly human is their capacity for autonomy. Whatever one's personal worldview may be, the core idea of liberalism is that all citizens in liberal-democratic states should at least have the *opportunity* to form, to revise and rationally to pursue their conception of their rational advantage or good, and it is up to the state to facilitate this. Hereto, *liberal or autonomy-facilitating education* is required. As said by Gutmann (1999 [1987], 30), "[t]he same principle that requires a state to grant adults personal and political freedom also commits it to assuring children an education that makes those freedoms both possible and meaningful in the future." In a similar vein, Levinson (1999, 144, emphasis mine) states that "[t]o educate for autonomy, is taken to be the *primary educational aim* of all schools in the liberal state."

But there is more. In addition to providing children's "right to an open future" (Feinberg 2007), schools also have a "civic mission". Since people are not born as autonomous and democratic citizens, they have to learn to become citizens, "who have a sense of justice, are law-abiding, can form critical judgments about politics, are willing to participate in civic associational life and politics (…) and can display the civic virtues of

reasonableness, tolerance, and respectful deliberation with citizens embracing different viewpoints" (Boucher 2018, 600; also Callan 1997). This education for citizenship is not only required "for individuals' exercise of autonomy" (Levinson 1999, 104), but it is at the same time "a precondition for the maintenance of a healthy liberal democracy" (Levinson 1999, 104). Moreover, if too many citizens (voluntarily) choose to live separately, without even knowing how democracy works and without being informed about diversity in society, the stability of a liberal-democratic society may be endangered. This idea is related to what Gordon Allport (1954) labels as the "social contact hypothesis". According to Allport, sustained contact between members of different groups in educational settings is recommended in order to forge durable mutual understanding between social, religious and cultural groups. And this, in its turn, is a prerequisite for the survival of liberal democracies. In a similar vein, Callan (1997, 177) argues for "dialogical contexts" in education: in order to prepare students for a future life in diverse societies, which is a prerequisite for the continued existence of these societies, schools should create dialogical settings where students can discuss with others and where they learn, through dialogue, the practice of reciprocity and reasonableness.

School Curriculum and RE

If we agree that education in liberal-democratic states should aim at the development of individual autonomy and foster citizenship and mutual understanding, this has its repercussions for the school curriculum and for the organization of RE in state schools. According to Levinson (1999, Ch. 5), three core aims of education are (1) economic competitiveness, (2) democratic self-reflection and (3) equality of opportunity. Even though Levinson does not focus on the implications of these aims for the general school curriculum (which is always context-dependent), one could nevertheless design some *general curricular outlines* for education in liberal societies, taking into account the above-mentioned educational aims. First, the curriculum should contain 'general knowledge', based on the most accurate scientific and academic knowledge (e.g. geography,

history, biology, chemistry and so on). This implies that the elimination of essential knowledge (e.g. the theory of evolution; correct and useful information about contraception; education about the Shoah and about the Palestine conflict) from the curriculum is unacceptable. In addition, students should be able to cultivate their mental, physical and creative capabilities (e.g. in sports; drawing lessons; music lessons); learn specific skills that are required for an active life in the future society (e.g. counting; writing; informatics; rules of politeness; basic economical skills) and become familiar with different options in society. Finally, and as an all-covering aim, students should learn to reflect in a critical way on their conception of the good life and on their future role in society.

This view on education has not only repercussions for faith-based schools,[5] but also for the organization of RE. As a result of persisting church-state structures and related privileges for religions, RE is in many state schools not organized as an ordinary school subject that is controlled by the state, but as a 'special' and therefore often non-compulsory (but regular) school subject, organized and controlled by one or more religious communities. This is for instance the case in Austria, Belgium, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia and Spain. In these European nations, RE is still embedded in old institutional structures and its core aim (socialization in a particular *religious* tradition) is different from the general aim of liberal education (socialization in a *civic* or political liberal tradition, based on the idea of autonomy and reciprocity). Moreover, since the religious communities—and not the state—are responsible for confessional RE, there are often tensions between the general aims, content and values of confessional and denominational RE on the one hand, and the general aims, content and values of liberal education on the other. Probably the most well-known example is the tension between Darwinism and creationism, but also the religious and often dogmatic stance towards God's existence, revelation and other religious/metaphysical truth-claims, as well as on ethical issues such as homosexuality, abortion, euthanasia and the status of women, are sometimes in conflict with the aims, content and values of liberal education.

Habermas, Reflexive Religion and RE

In order to avoid the above-mentioned tensions, religious worldviews should be approached in the same manner (i.e. following the rules of scientific inquiry and rational reason) as other worldviews, ideas and theories (cf. Doyon 2016, 70–71). Needless to say, this has important implications for the way RE teachers should deal with religion in general, and with religious truth-claims in particular. For instance the idea that God has created the earth in six days should be critically scrutinized: from an empirical and scientific point of view (the liberal pedagogical paradigm), this view is incorrect and it is up to the (RE) teacher to make students aware of this scientific incorrectness.

This, however, does not mean that religious narratives such as the story of Genesis should be seen as unimportant and outdated. As said by Habermas (2006, 10), religious traditions "have a special power to articulate moral intuitions, especially with regard to vulnerable forms of communal life". Accordingly, religion still has a potential of meaning (especially where science fails in the search for meaning) in post-secular societies, not only for religious persons, but also for non-religious persons. Taking this into consideration, one of the tasks of post-secular RE is to make students aware of this 'semantic potential' and of the related role of religion in the present society. Religion can, however, only be beneficial for society if there is a shift "from the traditional to a more reflexive form of religious consciousness" (Habermas 2008, 28), which requires religious persons to accept: (1) the fact of religious pluralism and of religious freedom; (2) the authority of science and (3) the existence of a profane ground for ethics, the secular character of the constitution and the separation of church and state (Habermas 2002, 66, 2006, 14).

Needless to say, this 'reflexive religion' is not always taken for granted and seems to disadvantage religious persons, especially if they adhere to a literal interpretation of their religion. According to Habermas, however, the same can be said about "secular" citizens, especially those who are very critical towards religion, but are nevertheless expected to open their mind to different world religions, which bear semantic potential "that unleashes an inspiring energy for *all* of society" (Habermas 2006, 17).

Hence the required process of mutual understanding and reflexivity is not uni-directional, but is "a cooperative task in which the non-religious citizens must likewise participate". For the non-believer, too, the learning process thus requires a change in mentality that is "no less cognitively exacting than the adaptation of religious awareness to the challenges of an ever more secularised environment" (Habermas 2006, 15). From both sides—religious and secular—a change in epistemic attitudes is required: while the religious consciousness becomes 'reflexive', the secular consciousness transcends its secular and rational limitations. In an educational context, non-denominational, non-confessional, integrative and religious studies based RE can and should play an important role in this process.

No Privileged Status for RE

In confessional RE models, religions are not only accommodated but also actively *promoted* by the state. Although under certain conditions, facilitating RE as an *optional school subject* in state schools can be legitimate (cf. Franken 2016, Ch. 10, 2017b), the organization of confessional and denominational RE as a *regular school subject* in state schools is, from a liberal perspective, problematic—even if there is a possibility to opt out. A first problem is that, according to this policy, RE is the norm, while exemption is the exception. As a result, students with exemption are often seen as outsiders who are separated when other students get RE. As said by Temperman (2010, 279), "though opt out classes may remedy the compulsion element, such safeguards cannot prevent possible ostracization of those children that avail of these exemption schemes." Moreover, since the state decides that RE—organized in a confessional and denominational way—is a *regular* school subject, it principally assumes that this kind of education is a common good which benefits all pupils. However, in an increasingly pluralized and secularized school context, where a sharp distinction between "the religious" and "the secular" cannot always be drawn (cf. introduction, pp. 7–9), this is no longer taken for granted.

Besides, confessional RE has, different from other school subjects, a *special*, *privileged* status: in contrast to other school subjects, it is not

organized and controlled by the state, but by the religious community and it is not based on an objective and critical approach, but on a subjective and therefore often also uncritical approach. But why, one might wonder, is this kind of education taken for granted with regard to religion and not for instance with regard to politics? Imagine a history or citizenship class where the teacher is a delegate of a particular political party, who is supposed to 'witness' from his/her ideology; and imagine that this same political party controls the content of the school subject. Without any doubt, this kind of political propaganda should not be part of the curriculum in state schools since it conflicts with the principle of state neutrality. In a similar vein, teaching into religion in a confessional and denominational way should not be on the regular curriculum in state schools.

Autonomy, Citizenship and Non-confessional RE

This rejection of confessional RE, however, does not imply that RE should be abandoned from the curriculum altogether. Indeed, in liberal educational settings, there are convincing arguments for knowledge about and reflection on different religious traditions, provided this happens in a non-confessional, non-denominational and state-controlled way. In addition to the above-mentioned *semantic potential* of religious narratives, there is an *autonomy-based justification* for education about different—as opposed to education into one—religious and non-religious traditions. As said by Joseph Raz (1986, 398), autonomy not only requires negative freedom and liberal education, but it also requires real and valuable options to choose among: "[i]f all the choices in a life are like the choice between two identical-looking cherries from a fruit bowl, then that life is not autonomous" (Raz 1986, 398). Accordingly, a school wherein students only have RE in *one* religious tradition (which is most likely the religion of the parents) is doing a less good job with regard to autonomy than a school which informs its students about different religious and non-religious worldviews as potential 'valuable options'.

In addition, there is an important link between education about religion on the one hand, and education for *citizenship* on the other hand. This link has been widely discussed in academic literature (e.g. Jackson 2003, 2004; Miedema and Bertram-Troost 2008; Miedema 2012; O'Grady 2019) as well as in European policy documents (e.g. OSCE 2007; Pépin 2009; Jackson 2014) and is emphasized in several RE curricula. A clear example in this regard is the Québec Ethics and Religious Culture (ERC) programme that has been introduced in 2008 as a non-confessional substitute for confessional RE and ethics. Different from the previous RE programme, students in ERC are no longer segregated according to their religion, but students with different religious and non-religious convictions are present in the same classroom, where the teacher offers them the necessary tools for a better comprehension of Québec society and its cultural and religious heritage and for engaging in (critical) dialogue:

> Students are encouraged to open themselves to the world and to develop their ability to act with others. By grouping all the students together, rather than dividing them into groups according to their beliefs, and by promoting the development of attitudes of tolerance, respect and openness, we are preparing them to live in a pluralist and democratic society. (MELS 2008, preamble)

The aim of RE in Québec is thus no longer to convert students or to educate or socialize them in their own religious tradition, but rather to understand the phenomenon of religion, to engage in critical reflection on ethical questions and to foster dialogue. Hence, the subject's two main objectives: "*recognition of the others*" and the "*pursuit of the common good*" (MELS 2008, 2). As stated in the programme (MELS 2008, 1),

> [l]iving together in today's society requires that we collectively learn to build on this diversity [of values and beliefs]. It is therefore important to develop an awareness of this diversity and to reflect upon and take actions that foster community life. The Ethics and Religious Culture program endeavours to contribute to this learning. […] Students will be encouraged to engage in critical reflection on ethical questions and to understand the

> phenomenon of religion by practicing, in a spirit of openness, dialogue that is oriented toward contributing to community life.

With this new programme, schools take into account the fact that the school population today is religiously diversified and to a large extent also secularized, without losing sight of the fact that religion still plays an important role in public and private life and in Québec history and culture. Hence the need for *religious literacy*, but also for ethical and dialogical competencies: they are all required today in order to learn to live together or to cultivate citizenship, which is a prerequisite for the maintenance of liberal-democratic societies.

In sum, there are good arguments (facilitating autonomy; fostering democratic citizenship) for non-confessional RE on the regular curriculum in state schools. Usually, this kind of RE can be implemented in two different ways. First, one could, as in France since 1905 and in Luxembourg since 2017, opt for a school curriculum without RE. In line with the principle of *laïcité*, RE is not organized as a separate school subject in French state schools,[6] but since 2004, education about "*le fait religieux*" is integrated in regular school subjects (e.g. history, geography and literature) in order to increase the students' religious literacy. In addition, the French education system strongly emphasizes the idea of French citizenship, for instance in the classes of Citizenship and of Philosophy (cf. Gaudin 2014). In 2017, Luxembourg followed this French model and abolished its confessional (mainly Roman-Catholic) RE classes. Alternatively (and in addition to the already existing subject "Citizenship Education"), the new school subject "Life and Society" was introduced, the main aims of which are (1) the encouragement of tolerance, (2) learning to think in a critical and reflexive way and (3) exploring the big questions of life and society.[7] In order to reach these aims, knowledge of different religious traditions is part of the curricula of this new school subject.

Another possibility is the organization of an integrative and non-confessional RE subject, which is for instance the case in the UK, Sweden, Norway and Québec. Based on a religious studies based approach, students get information about diverse religious and philosophical traditions and dialogue between these traditions is stimulated. Different from

confessional and denominational models, RE is not organized by the religious communities or denominations, but by the state. Accordingly, RE is no longer seen as education into one's own religion, but as a regular, non-confessional subject that contributes to democratic citizenship and to the students' religious literacy as part of their *Allgemeine Bildung* (cf. Jensen 2008, 2011).

Paternalism, Neutrality and the Right to Dissent

Thus far, I argued that the organization of confessional RE in state schools, organized and controlled by religious communities, is not in accordance with the principle of neutrality and the liberal aims of education. Therefore, confessional RE should not be organized as a regular subject in state schools. I also argued that non-confessional RE, based on the academic study of religions and organized by the state, is highly recommended in liberal educational settings: in order to foster children's *autonomy*, students should be informed in an impartial and critical way about different ways of life, including religious ways of life. In addition, knowledge of different traditions, as well as interaction and dialogue with adherents of different traditions, is a prerequisite for mutual understanding and reciprocity (cf. Callan 1997) and thus for the *continued existence of stable liberal democracies*.

As the alert reader might notice, my argument is based on the principle of *autonomy* and the related need for shared citizenship. However, the concept of autonomy is not uncontested and has been extensively criticized, for instance by libertarian and communitarian philosophers.[8] Although an exploration of these discussions will lead us too far away from the present topic, some points of discussion are worth consideration because they touch directly at the core of my argument.

First, some critics complain that liberal education is a form of *paternalism* wherein children are forced to critically assess their conceptions of the good life and to decide freely the course of their own lives, even if this is not in line with the conceptions of the good life of their parents and/or

(religious) community. Why, then, should the liberal state have the right to impose upon its citizens the capacity of autonomy, even if some (religious) groups consciously reject this conception of the good life?[9]

At this point, it is important to make a distinction between autonomy as *a conception of the good life* on the one hand, and as a *valuable tool for living well* on the other. As said by Levinson (1999, 21), liberalism is not necessarily "a strong comprehensive theory" (Levinson 1999, 21), but a form of *weak perfectionism*, wherein the value of citizens' exercise of autonomy is promoted, without discriminating against those who do not exercise autonomy in their own lives (Levinson 1999, 22–23). Autonomy-based liberalism is not committed to the strong (comprehensive) claim that autonomy is essential for any good life, but it only claims that autonomy is a *valuable tool* for living well. Accordingly, autonomy-based liberalism does not deny the moral commitments of those people who do not value autonomy, as long as their moral views do not deny and/or oppose the instrumental value of autonomy for others: "What matters, after all, is that all individuals have the same opportunity to structure their lives authentically and autonomously; according to weakly perfectionist principles, it is not up to the liberal state to ensure that all individuals equally do so" (Levinson 1999, 142).

In a liberal society, citizens should thus be able to enter into a monastery or a nunnery (and thus to lead a non- autonomous life), as long as they are able to autonomously choose this particular way of life, as long as this way of life does not impede co-citizens to make their own autonomous choices, and as long as they have a real possibility to exit. Autonomy thus only provides the *form* or the *minimal conditions* for the good life, regardless of whatever else that may consist of (cf. Kelly 2002, 8) and the cost of excluding children from this minimal condition would be too high:

> In response to the charge that mandatory education for autonomy is unfair to certain traditional ways of life that are incompatible with autonomy, liberals must insist that the inability to make rational judgments about one's way of life is simply too high a cost to allow parents to impose on a child in order that she should be raised in the traditional culture, especially when one remembers that autonomous persons can and often will exercise

> their autonomy to endorse the substantive values and beliefs with which they were raised. (MacMullen 2007, 9)

Not surprisingly, some people also complain that the concept of liberal education is *not neutral* at all, but is a product of Enlightenment, with a strong emphasis on individual autonomy. As mentioned before and argued elsewhere (Franken 2016), this is indeed correct: liberalism is *not* value-neutral, but assumes that all citizens should have at least the capacity to rationally form and revise their conceptions of the good life. This, in its turn, is related to a particular view on humanity, wherein the human capacity for autonomy is essential. Accordingly, liberal states and their educational structures are not neutral, but "weakly perfectionist" (Levinson 1999, 22) or "liberal paternalist" (MacMullen 2007, 88). However, different from 'strong perfectionist' states (e.g. totalitarian and/or theocratic states), wherein one conception of the good life is imposed on citizens, the weakly perfectionist emphasis on autonomy allows citizens to live a life according to the values they endorse and is, accordingly, a prerequisite for the treatment of citizens as free and equal.

This brings us, finally, to the treatment of 'illiberal' groups in liberal societies. In order to guarantee that also these groups can live according to *their* concepts of the good life, these groups have the right to 'dissent', which implies that they are in principle free to organize their own schools, with their *own* curriculum and their *own* RE classes.[10,11] This, however, does not undermine my argument for non-confessional RE in state schools: as institutions established and financed by the state, these schools are based in common liberal values and serve a common liberal aim. This has implications for the general curriculum and thus also for RE, which should not be treated different from other school subjects.

Conclusion

More than fifty years ago, Ninian Smart (1968, 96–97) noticed that the aim of RE is not to evangelize or to convert, but to *understand* religious phenomena, to discuss religious claims, to see connections between religion and society and to develop capacities in order to understand religion

and reflect on it. Education should not aim at religious propaganda, but at the formation of young people into future citizens, who can, in an independent and autonomous way, criticize different (religious) doctrines and views.

Ever since, more and more nations in Europe and elsewhere took these words into consideration and abolished confessional RE from the regular school curriculum, without abolishing the need for religious literacy as a prerequisite for autonomy and citizenship. However, notwithstanding this tendency, in many (European) nation states, confessional RE is, as a result of persisting and archaic church-state regulations, still on the regular curriculum in state schools. A common critique of religious stakeholders is that non-confessional RE is not neutral, but is in fact an attempt to enforce an atheist and secularist worldview upon all citizens in a uniform and paternalist way.

In this paper, I have argued that this is incorrect: the plea for non-confessional RE in state schools is, like the plea for liberal education in general, based on secular or reasonable arguments: it is grounded in the concept of autonomy seen as the possibility to make autonomous choices regarding the good life and to be able to reflect upon these choices and revise them at any time. Different from other—strong perfectionist—conceptions of the good life, this principle of autonomy opens a lot of opportunities, including the choice to live according to a particular (religious) tradition:

> Secular schools, properly conceived, do not preach an atheistic religion: rather, they equip and encourage children to make their own reflective ethical choices among options that include traditional religious doctrines. (MacMullen 2007, 141)

In order to enable these reflective choices in a post-secular context, non-confessional and integrative RE, wherein students with diverse religious backgrounds learn about different religious traditions, is, in Rawlsian terms, a genuine *reasonable* option.

Notes

1. For the difference between denominational and confessional RE, see Bråten 2013, 22–23.
2. Noteworthy exemptions in this classification are Finland, which has a combination of separative, non-denominational and 'semi'-confessional RE; and the German states Hamburg and Bremen, where RE is integrative, denominational and inter-confessional.
3. Non-confessional RE is, like confessional RE, sometimes also criticized by 'secular' stakeholders (e.g. humanists), promoting a general ban of religion – and thus also of all kinds of RE – in public schools.
4. In Belgium, about 30% of the public schools are state schools or governmental schools, i.e. schools funded and established by the state. Most schools (70%) are public, non-governmental schools, i.e. schools funded by the state, but established by a private organization. 99% of these non-governmental schools are Catholic. They are funded on an equal basis as state schools and open for all the students, provided they/their parents agree with the school's Catholic mission statement.
5. We will not go into further detail here, but it is obvious that my argument has also implications for faith-based schools, especially if they are recognized (and subsidized) by the state.
6. This policy is, for historical reasons, not applied in the region Alsace-Moselle and in the French transoceanic territories.
7. http://www.men.public.lu/fr/actualites/grands-dossiers/systeme-educatif/vie-societe/index.html (accessed 30 January 2020)
8. One example is the libertarian position of Chandran Kukathas. According to Kukathas (2001, 2003), a state's policy should not be based on the principle of autonomy, but on freedom of conscience and freedom of association. As a consequence, there is no need for an educational system wherein the capacity to act and think in a critical way is developed. Moreover, because every educational system is based on a specific concept of the good life, Kukathas rejects all kinds of compulsory education: "[t]he last thing a liberal state should offer its subjects is education – even if that should be a liberal education" (Kukathas 2001, 323). However, since Kukathas also defends the right to exit, which is in practice impossible without liberal (autonomy-facilitating) autonomy, his view is considered inconsistent at this point.

9. Probably the most well-known court case in this regard is the Wisconsin v. Yoder Supreme Court case (1972, 406, US. 205), wherein the American Supreme Court decided, referring to the freedom of religion, that Amish-children can be exempted from compulsory education from the age of 14 onwards. However, one of the consequences of this decision is that Amish children may not be able to substantially develop the required capacities in order to make autonomous choices. A decision in the other direction – preferring the right to liberal education which gives children "the opportunity to participate in 'normal' society" over home-schooling in a 'symbiotic' family system – was made by the ECHR Great Chamber in 2019 in the case of Wunderlich v. Germany (appl.18925/15).
10. A common idea among liberal educational philosophers (e.g. Boucher, Callan, Levinson, MacMullen) is that faith-based schools should not and cannot be forbidden in liberal societies (since this would infringe with the core principle of liberty itself), but that state schools are, due to their 'neutral' and open character, to be preferred over faith-based schools.
11. For a discussion about Jewish orthodox schools and their refusal to teach in a 'liberal' way (e.g. by means of refusing 'controversial issues' and avoiding critical dialogue and reflection), see Franken & Levrau 2020 (forthcoming).

References

Allport, G. (1954 [1979]). *The Nature of Prejudice*. New York: Perseus Books.

Berger, P. (1967). *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. New York: Anchor Books.

Boucher, F. (2018). Should Liberal States Subsidize Religious Schooling? *Studies in Philosophy and Education, 37*(2). https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-018-9620-9.

Bråten, O. M. H. (2013). *Towards a Methodology for Comparative Studies in Religious Education. A Study of England and Norway*. Münster: Waxmann.

Bruce, S. (2002). *God is Dead: Secularization in the West*. New York: Wiley-Blackwell.

Bruce, S. (2011). *Secularization: In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Callan, E. (1997). *Creating Citizens. Political Education and Liberal Democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Davie, G. (1990). Believing without Belonging: Is This the Future of Religion in Britain? *Social Compass, 37*(4), 455–469.

Doyon, F. (2016). Les vertus antiphilosophiquess du cours ECR. In D. Baril & N. Baillargeon (Eds.), *La face cachée du cours Ethique et culture religieuse* (pp. 67–87). Montréal: Leméac.

Evans, C. (2008). Religious Education in Public Schools: An International Human Rights Perspective. *Human Rights Law Review, 8*(3), 449–473.

Feinberg, J. (2007). The Child's Right to an Open Future. In W. Aiken & H. La Follette (Eds.), *Whose Child? Children's Rights, Parental Authority, and State Power* (pp. 124–153). Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield.

Franken, L., & Levrau, F. (2020—forthcoming). Rejecting 'Controversial' Issues in Education: A Case Study of Ultra-orthodox Jewish Schools in Belgium. *Religions 11*(4), 214.

Franken, L. (2016). *Liberal Neutrality and State Support for Religion*. Zürich: Springer.

Franken, L. (2017a). Coping with Diversity in Religious Education: An Overview. *Journal of Beliefs and Values, 38*(1), 105–120. https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2016.1270504.

Franken, L. (2017b). State Support for Religion in Belgium: A Critical Evaluation. *Journal of Church and State, 59*(1), 59–80.

Franken, L. (2018). Religious Studies and Non-confessional RE: Countering the Debates. *Religion & Education, 45*(2), 155–172. https://doi.org/10.1080/15507394.2018.1452519.

Franken, L., & Loobuyck, P. (2013). The Future of Religious Education on the Flemish School Curriculum. A Plea for Integrative Religious Education for All. *Religious Education, 108*(5), 482–498.

Franken, L., & Loobuyck, P. (Eds.). (2017). Neutrality and Impartiality in RE: An Impossible Aim? *Special Issue of British Journal of Religious Education, 39*(1), 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2016.1218219.

Gaudin, P. (2014). Neutrality and Impartiality in Public Education: The French Investment in Philosophy, Teaching about Religions, and Moral and Civic Education. *British Journal of Religious Education, 39*(1), 93–106. https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2016.1218221.

Gutmann, A. (1987). *Democratic Education*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Habermas, J. (2002). Glauben und Wissen. *Dialog, 1*(1), 63–74.

Habermas, J. (2006). Religion in the Public Sphere. *European Journal of Philosophy, 14*(1), 1–25.

Habermas, J. (2008). Secularism's Crisis of Faith. *New Perspectives Quarterly, 25*(4), 16–29.

Heelas, P., & Woodhead, L. (Eds.). (2005). *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality*. New York: Blackwell.

Jackson, R. (Ed.). (2003). *International Perspectives on Citizenship, Education and Religious Diversity*. London: Routledge Falmer.

Jackson, R. (2004). *Rethinking Religious Education and Plurality*. New York: Routledge.

Jackson, R. (2014). *Signposts—Policy and Practice for Teaching about Religions and Non-religious Worldviews in Intercultural Education*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.

Jensen, T. (2008). RS Based RE in Public Schools: A Must for a Secular State. *Numen, 55*(2–3), 123–150.

Jensen, T. (2011). Why Religion Education, as a Matter of Course, Ought to be Part of the Public School Curriculum. In L. Franken & P. Loobuyck (Eds.), *Religious Education in a Plural, Secularised Society. A Paradigm Shift* (pp. 131–149). Münster: Waxmann.

Kelly, P. (2002). Introduction: Between Culture and Equality. In P. Kelly (Ed.), *Multiculturalism Reconsidered. Culture and Equality and its Critics* (pp. 1–17). Cambridge: Polity Press.

Kukathas, C. (2001). Education and Citizenship in Diverse Societies. *International Journal of Educational Research, 35*, 319–330.

Kukathas, C. (2003). *The Liberal Archipelago. A Theory of Diversity and Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kymlicka, W. (1995). *Multicultural Citizenship. A Theory of Minority Rights*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Levinson, M. (1999). *The Demands of Liberal Education*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Loobuyck, P., & Franken, L. (2011). Toward Integrative Religious Education in Belgium and Flanders. Challenges and Opportunities. *British Journal of Religious Education, 33*(1), 17–30.

MacMullen, I. (2007). *Faith in Schools. Autonomy, Citizenship and Religious Education*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

McCutcheon, R. T. (Ed.). (1999). *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion*. London/New York: Cassell.

MELS. (2008). *Ethics and Religious Culture Program, Secondary Education Cycles One and Two*. Québec, QC, Canada: Gouvernement du Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport. Retrieved January 30, 2020, from

http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/dpse/formation_jeunes/ecr_secondary.pdf.
Miedema, S. (2012). Maximal Citizenship Education and Interreligious Education in Common Schools. In H. A. Alexander & A. A. Agbaria (Eds.), *Religious Schooling in Liberal Democracies: Commitment, Character, and Citizenship* (pp. 96–102). New York: Routledge.
Miedema, S., & Bertram-Troost, G. (2008). Democratic Citizenship and Religious Education: Challenges and Perspectives for Schools in the Netherlands. *British Journal of Religious Education, 30*(2), 123–132.
Nagel, T. (1986). *The View from Nowhere*. New York: Oxford University Press.
O'Grady, K. (2019). *Religious Education as a Dialogue with Difference. Fostering Democratic Citizenship through the Study of Religions in Schools*. New York: Routledge.
OSCE. (2007). *The Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religion or Belief*. Warsaw: Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights [ODIHR].
Pépin, L. (2009). *Teaching about Religions in European School Systems. Policy Issues and Trends*. London: Alliance Publishing.
Pollefeyt, D., & Lamberigts, M. (2015). De mythe van de neutraliteit. *De Standaard*, January 13. Retrieved from http://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20150317_01584537
Rawls, J. (1971). *A Theory of Justice*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
Rawls, J. (2005 [1993]). *Political Liberalism.* New York: Columbia University Press.
Raz, J. (1986). *The Morality of Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Rothgangel, M., Jackson, R., & Jäggle, M. (Eds.). (2014b). *Religious Education at Schools in Europe. Part 2: Western Europe*. Vienna: Vienna University Press.
Rothgangel, M., Jäggle, M., & Schlag, T. (Eds.). (2016). *Religious Education at Schools in Europe. Part 1: Central Europe*. Vienna: Vienna University Press.
Rothgangel, M., Skeie, G., & Jäggle, M. (Eds.). (2014a). *Religious Education at Schools in Europe. Part 3: Northern Europe*. Vienna: Vienna University Press.
Smart, N. (1968). *Secular Education and the Logic of Religion*. London: Faber and Faber.
Temperman, J. (2010). *State–Religion Relationships and Human Rights Law: Toward a Right to Religiously Neutral Governance*. Leiden/Boston: Martinus Nijhoff.
Torfs, R., Pollefeyt, D., & Lamberigts, M. (2015). Het lef om de andere echt te Ontmoeten. *De Standaard*, January 9. Retrieved March 2, 2018, from http://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20150118_01480480.

12

Facing Religious Ethical Claims in Post-secular Ethics Education: Challenges and Contributions

Olof Franck

Introduction

We live in a time that has often been described as post-secular. What is more specifically meant by this is, however, unclear. There are plenty of possible meanings that are highlighted by writers and debaters. Does it mean that a "post-secular era" is an era where religion, having played an obscure role in society, has become increasingly visible in public discussion and in social and political processes? Although the secularization theorist Peter Berger once predicted the death of religion (Berger 1979), might it be that religion has been breathing more intensely in silence, and has thereby been formed and reformed in ways that support what many want to see in the present time, namely not the return of traditional religious expression but rather a growth of different religious traditions and expressions (Taylor 2007)? Are the more visible roles of religion in the public arena, which Berger also acknowledges (Berger 1999), parallel to a

O. Franck (✉)
University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden
e-mail: Olof.Franck@gu.se

O. Franck, P. Thalén (eds.), *Religious Education in a Post-Secular Age*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47503-1_12

deconstruction of traditional religious concepts and a construction of new forms of human needs and the desire to provide a metaphysical or spiritual basis for opinions?

When Jürgen Habermas focuses on the concept of post-secularity, he raises the idea that religious voices must be heard in a democratic society, but that, when speaking from constitutionally influential positions, they need to adapt to the language use of secular society (Habermas 2006). The Swedish religious sociologist Anders Bäckström has argued that one can ask whether Habermas really believes that religious voices have an intrinsic value (Bäckström 2012). In the work mentioned, Habermas discusses John Rawls' concept of an impartial position with reference to which disagreement should be analyzed and assessed, and this position is certainly a secularly defined position. Habermas emphasizes that religious people's voices have something to add to the social dialogue about values, but at the same time argues that a religiously defined basis for constitutionally anchoring democratic values is not possible, because it would be exclusive in relation to the diversity of voices entitled to be heard in the public conversation.

At the end of his "Notes on Post-Secular Society", Habermas claims that:

> [T]he state's neutrality does not preclude the permissibility of religious utterances within the political public sphere, as long as the institutionalized decision-making process at the parliamentary, court, governmental and administrative levels remains clearly separated from the informal flows of political communication and opinion formation among the broader public of citizens. (Habermas 2008, 28)

This means that religious voices are welcome to take part in the "informal flows" mentioned, even when they prefer to use a religious language. This constitutes, according to Habermas, a challenge to secularists, namely in form of an "expectation that secular citizens in civil society and the political public sphere must be able to meet their religious fellow citizens as equals" (ibid., 29). And he announces that "Secular citizens are expected not to exclude *a fortiori* that they may discover, even in religious

utterances, semantic contents and covert personal intuitions that can be translated and introduced into a secular discourse" (ibid., 29).

It is from this particular point that the discussion in this article starts. In a time when many researchers find signs of the return of religion, and of how the distinction between "secular" and "religious" views of life appears to breakdown, not least as a result of a greater freedom to make choices about ethical and existential matters, beyond what are perceived as formally designed and too strictly defined alternatives, it is important to investigate how ethics teaching that provides space for diversity at the same time protects fundamental democratic values.

Fundamentalist ethical attitudes are found in and outside of religion, but what may make religiously motivated ethical positions difficult to handle is, above all, that it does not seem to be possible to examine arguments about right and wrong, good and evil, referring to divine and transcendental authorities, by means of ordinary epistemological criteria. This constitutes a well-known and classic challenge, but when the epistemological and ontological borders between secular and spiritual dimensions in life, in a post-secular era, seem to be threatened, the way may seem wide open for a demand according to which religious claims, in principle, have to be accepted as no less complicated to justify than any alternatives. Such a demand is especially interesting and acute in the arenas of ethics, be it issues regarding gay rights, abortion, euthanasia—or more broadly defined ones regarding social, economic and environmental sustainability.

The question I want to examine is the way in which post-secular religious education allows for religious ethical claims, without giving them an exclusive position in which they can escape criticism. I think that Anders Bäckström's reservation that Habermas's claim that religious people should formulate arguments and positions in secular terms may be interpreted as an argument that their contribution to such discussions would not have any intrinsic value. Due to the quoted text sequences above, this interpretation seems to be too drastic. On the other hand, I share Habermas's attitude that respect for religious contributions to discussions about values cannot be cultivated at the expense of a democratic principle that does not confer any claim to absolute legitimacy (Habermas 2006, 2008).

Religious Ethical Claims as Situated Democratic Iterations in Post-secular Contexts

In the following, I use the concept of post-secularity as a reference to a social relationship where religious beliefs and expressions are relatively visible in people's linguistic and social relationships, and where the boundaries between what is perceived as "religious" and "secular" are not clearly defined (Carlsson and Thalén 2015). This is a categorization that would need to be clarified in a more fully developed analysis, but for the reasoning given in this chapter it is sufficient.

I will also assume that in order to investigate the roles that religious ethical claims can and should be assigned in post-secular religious education, it is essential not to stay at a general level. *Someone* is making such claims and *someone* agrees with or rejects them. Advocates' and critics' own voices express more than theoretical beliefs that can be investigated separately from the voices that formulate them.

I agree with the philosopher Seyla Benhabib in her criticism that Habermas is too abstract in his analysis of how social discussions about values and democracy are being, and should be, conducted (Benhabib 1992). We need to anchor the analysis of such discussions in the everyday conversation that brings people together and try to see how our beliefs and the linguistic costumes we give them are born and characterized in concrete everyday life where there is a more or less transparent desire for meaning, and perhaps also truth, that drives us to ask fundamental existential issues relevant to ethics and religion, politics and democracy.

With reference to a concept derived from Benhabib's philosophical thinking, I have, in a former publication, argued that religious ethical claims can be perceived as *democratic iterations* (Franck 2017), that is to say "complex processes of public argument, deliberation, and exchange through which universalist rights claims are contested and contextualized, invoked and revoked, posited and positioned throughout legal and political institutions, as well as in the associations of civil society" (Benhabib 2011, 129). I will, in this chapter, keep and develop some aspects of such an interpretation, although leaving Benhabib's conceptual approach aside.

In the present context I will assume that at least many religious ethical claims may be understood in line with a use of concepts, or the carrying out of actions, which are seen as challenging the values, the structure or the borders that are apprehended as being essential in order for a community to be democratic. Religious adherents may put forth a variety of ethical claims—as everyone knows, religion is a complex concept which covers a huge range of beliefs, convictions, standpoints and opinions. Religious ethical claims may, according to an interpretation adopted in the present context, be characterized by being defended with reference to a supposed metaphysical and/or divine authority. Such a reference may be shaped in lots of different ways. What seems to unite them all is, however, that this authority is assumed to be absolute in the sense that it constitutes the last step in a sanctioning process beyond which it is not possible for human reasoning to reach.

This certainly does not mean that all religious ethical claims by believers are thought to be infallibly right or true. When such claims are put forth by specific individuals or groups as absolutely true and non-negotiable, this could lead to a misinterpretation of religious claims in certain secular contexts, according to which all religious claims are, and perhaps must be, thought infallible in the eyes of those who propose them. This seems, however, to be a more or less unsupported interpretation of what is generally going on when believers engage in ethical debates and discussions.

Two things have to be emphasized here, however, especially with reference to a context where ethics education is performed. First, such an education has to involve strategies for handling absolute religious ethical claims *if* and *when* they are expressed. Here Habermas's standpoint, according to which religious positionings and arguments have to respect basic democratic principles, can offer guidelines that may prevent various kinds of exclusivist approaches. Second, such strategies also have to hold for cases where non-religious—secular—exclusivist claims are presented in the discussions going on regarding, for example, ethical issues.

It is a mistake to presume that it is only religious ethical positions and arguments that attempt to establish claims that are infallible and non-negotiable. In secular contexts, several candidates for the establishment of an absolute authority may play a role in and outside classroom

discussions on ethical subjects. *Science* seems to be a candidate that often comes to mind in such discussions.

Two recent studies by Swedish researchers have shown how a secularist-atheist positioning may play an exclusivist role in classrooms where students discuss existential and ethical matters. Here students with a religious faith may be excluded from a fair and democratically justified position as being one valuable voice among others, exercising the right to partake in the discussions on the same, universal conditions (Kittelmann-Flensner 2015; Holmqvist-Lidh 2016). There is no guarantee that non-religious ethical claims are vaccinated against exclusivism. In this sense, one could say that there is a symmetry between religious and secular ethical claims: usually their proponents are open to considering arguments for and against them, but both run the risk of being used for exclusivist purposes.

Thus, when religious ethical claims are categorized as challenging the values, or the borders, apprehended as being essential in order for a community to be democratic, this is not simply because of their latent risk of exploitation for exclusive purposes. In a religious or post-secular context, the same applies to secular ethical claims, which could also be considered to challenge the boundaries of democracy.

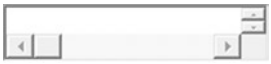
What seems to be specific for religious ethical claims is their sometimes more, sometimes less, transparent reference to a metaphysical religious authority that appears to be beyond ordinary epistemological identificatory methods. I have pointed out that such reference should not mean that religious representatives perceive their ethical requirements as non-negotiable or even infallible. Religious people who believe in a divine or spiritual authority may also find themselves unsure of what might be a response that shows what is right or good to do in relation to a particular question.

In post-secular classrooms, interesting challenges can present themselves. There it is not only religious but also secular, ethical claims that may serve as challenging democratic values. In the following, however, it is the former type of claim that interests us. Although religious sociologists sometimes point out that the strong secularization in the West, especially in the Nordic countries, may have been exaggerated or at least unilaterally depicted in literature (Davie 2002), this does not mean that religion necessarily plays a crucial, or even big, role in public social life. Rather, it seems that many people in the West do not let religion and

religious beliefs, at least in the traditional sense, govern their lives and actions. It is therefore interesting to consider how religious ethical claims should be dealt with in the post-secular classroom—which may, but does not have to, be permeated by a fully fledged barrier between what is perceived as "religious" and "secular".

Religious Versus Secular Ethical Authorities—In Symmetry or Asymmetry?

I would like to emphasize that important lessons may be learned by all participants in discussions about values by listening to and trying to understand what it means to claim values that are not relativized. Understanding what it may mean to rely on moral norms and values that are not merely instrumental but which are anchored in an absolute authority for what may be good and right, can show how an absolute and non-negotiable human worth can be justified and maintained in a society where relativization and instrumental values seem to have taken power.



Such an insight is less about supposed positions on concrete moral questions, than about an absolute and non-negotiable basis for the value of moral subjects. Here there is a challenge with regard to what can be perceived as the core and boundaries of democracy. In what way can religious ethical claims based on faith in an absolute divine moral authority be incorporated into a democratic conversation about social values?

In one sense, one might perhaps talk about a symmetry between religious and secular ethical claims regarding epistemological conditions in order to legitimize trusted authorities as the basis for these claims. One can think of a line of reasoning according to which it can be difficult to see how religious people try to justify ethical arguments and positions with reference to a spiritual or divine authority, but that in this regard, things do not differ greatly from the demands made with reference to secular authorities.

For example, take an authority that many seem to want to fall back on as a kind of ultimate foundation for moral positions, namely the UN Declaration of Human Rights. No one can prove that these rights have an authority that makes it impossible to question either those or the interpretations made in accordance with what they are deemed to prescribe. It can be argued that they are entirely human-designed constructions—just as the divine powers of religious faith are human creations, in order to establish a reliable moral compass that can show ways to act properly and do good in a world which in many ways seems uncertain and full of difficult ethical challenges. (cf. Harari 2015)

Here, however, it is important to point out that such a symmetry can be questioned. Nobody can doubt that the UN Declaration of Human Rights has come about through human interaction in order to create a document that can provide a common basis for how human dignity and good human relations are to be supported and maintained. In interaction with each other, with society and with the interpretations of the concepts of ethics and morals that are thought to create and shape the moral authorities regarded as legitimate, people establish the values and norms that act as a moral compass at both a social and an individual level.

From a secular point of view, of course, such interplay can be perceived to create and also form religious authorities. But this is hardly how religious believers think about the matter. Most people can probably see that in the moral arena, as in other contexts, they are involved in interpreting processes: few may wish to claim that they have full insight into the will and ordinances of their divine authorities. But from there to claiming that these authorities would also be created and shaped by people's imaginations is a long way to go. To the extent that religious people can be said to have conceptions of divine authorities that they perceive support the ethical claims they propose, it is probably about gods or spiritual beings that are thought to have an independent existence and which they perceive to have created and invoked values that serve as the basis for human ethical reflection and moral action (Franck 2016).

Thus, we are dealing with an asymmetry between religious and secular ethical claims, namely with regard to the perception of the authorities claimed.[1] Let's see what such an asymmetry can mean for the design and pursuit of ethics education!

Secular Ethics Education

I stated earlier that it is worthwhile for secular ethics teaching to pay attention to religious ethical claims, so that students have the opportunity to meet beliefs and reasoning that are thought to be founded in an absolute moral authority. I do not want to take too much time and space to argue against the voices that in an erroneous and misleading way claim that trust in such an authority would mean that religious people also, more or less without exception, believe that their ethical claims would be infallible. Of course, one cannot ignore the fact that when this does occur—not least in fundamentalist circles—it may apply to conservative values regarding family structure or sexuality, or the like, but it may also concern what could be perceived as progressive values concerning, for example, equality or social justice.

The point here is that secular ethics, which may not usually be associated with the sanctioning of absolute moral authority, has a lot to gain from showing that it is possible to argue that there is a fixed and non-negotiable fundament for what good morals, good judgment and good relationships between people are.

It should be noted here that Danish theologian Knud E. Løgstrup's reasoning about social norms, which plays an important role in keeping the social machinery together, and the absolute ethical requirement directed in relation to fellow human beings, the one for which a liability cannot be renounced at the same time as this person's freedom to act according to the way he or she finds the best, cannot be questioned. Such a responsibility, and such a freedom, is in Løgstrup' thought theologically anchored. (Løgstrup 1979) And similarly, religious beliefs in an absolute divine or spiritual moral authority are rooted in the notion that the responsibility and freedom cannot be withdrawn or made invisible.

Secular ethics can go a long way by focusing on socially rooted morals, the norms that exist or do not exist in society, and a critical analysis of why values and norms are produced and reproduced in the way they are. But an important step is missed, a step that gives the opportunity to express a dimension where what we call "morality" involves something more and deeper than just a negotiating position according to which

moral opinions, arguments and positions are weighed against each other in accordance with argumentative, logical and rational considerations.

The philosopher of religion Paul Tillich once highlighted the concept of "the Ground of Being" (Tillich 1951), referring to what is most important to people. This does not have to be religiously formulated—there are many ways for people to express what most closely concerns them. But in the moral field, this is close to thinking about what is behind concrete moral positions, what creates a basic meaning and contributes to the growth and development of the good in people's relationships and societies. Here, a religious foundation for ethics and morals has a powerful role to play. And it is important that it is given a place in the context of, in particular, secular ethics teaching, not with the purpose of first and foremost producing an existentially competing alternative to secular moral authorities, but rather to show a context in which the reason for morality is perceived and expressed in terms of a spiritual or divine dimension and will.

Post-secular Ethics Education

With regard to post-secular ethics education, it is important to emphasize that even if religious ethical claims may have a role in inspiring children and young people to reflect on what it would mean that human morality has an ultimate spiritual anchorage, this, of course, does not mean that these claims are given ethical or epistemological precedence over other claims. At a time when traditional boundaries between faith and knowledge, and between religion and science seem to be questioned in different arenas (Berger 1979, 1999; Bäckström 2012), it is important to maintain a critical philosophical discussion about how claims about what is good and right and true can be justified.

Religious people cannot, on good grounds, promote the idea that religious ethical claims have a precedence by referring to a presumably absolute divine or spiritual authority. If they argue in such a way, they do not maintain the distinction that most religious people seem to accept, namely that the reference to absolute moral authority does not mean that concrete ethical claims can be made about what is absolutely right or

true. As previously pointed out, Habermas has, in his way of developing the conditions for democratic conversations about values, pointed to the importance of religious people participating in such talks on an equal basis (cf Habermas and Taylor 2011). However, I previously pointed out that this does not have to mean that religious claims generally must be translated into secular terms.

This does not, however, on the other hand, mean that religious people can hide behind religious justifications for their ethical positions and arguments. It is not enough to refer to what is written in a sacred text or conveyed in a revelation or experience interpreted in religious terms in order to support a general moral claim. A critical reflection and critical analysis must exist, and the reflection and analysis need to be subject to conditions that govern conversations about values, ethics and morals in a democratic community.

There are many examples of issues that can illustrate this relationship—but it is not easy to find ways in which religious ethical claims and secular claims are equally respected. Take, for example, the question of whether female students in secular schools should be allowed to wear veils. In Sweden, for example, debaters, both in and outside of a Muslim context, have demanded a ban on young girls wearing veils, with the justification that the ability to make independent decisions on existentially, ethically, culturally and religiously relevant issues requires a maturity that younger children do not yet have. Reference is made to conditions in France, pointing to the importance of secular norms, norms that of course for older children may appear to support personal decisions not to wear as well as to wear veils.

The requirement for young girls to be allowed to wear veils in school may not be one that can easily be accepted in a secular, democratic society. It is important to bear in mind, however, that, in a society where many are unfamiliar with traditional religions, it is likely that people will misinterpret what different religions actually prohibit or invite—insofar as it is possible at all to find a collective ethical attitude in a particular religious tradition. More knowledge is then needed about divergent perceptions of right and wrong, good and evil within one and the same religious context (cf. Roos and Berglund 2009). In part, two questions must be raised regarding the agenda of a democratic ethical conversation:

(1) Is such a requirement in line with fundamental values, such as freedom, equality and personal integrity? (2) Whether or not a claim of this sort is considered to harmonize with such fundamental values, can it be shown that it doesn't clash with reasonable epistemological criteria?

I would like to emphasize, in line with what has been said in this article, that both of these criteria are not only relevant but also necessary when putting forward ethical claims, regardless of whether they are more traditional conservative moral perceptions or progressive arguments and positions where current arrangements are questioned from a religious position.

Let us take this line of reasoning further.

Epistemological and Moral Justification

I would like to refer back to what was stated earlier, namely that religious believers in the present context are thought to be justified in using a religious, and even theological, language when proposing and arguing for religious ethical claims. Habermas's demand for the translation of religious language is not generally accepted. At the same time, it must be emphasized that this certainly does not mean that a "linguistic spirituality", lacking a form and a content that relates to people's experiential and linguistic frames of references, will neither succeed in, nor be relevant to, a discussion about whether this or that religious ethical claim could be judged to be justified or not. If arguments for a certain position rest upon references to a divine prescription or a spiritual will or a supposedly transcendent law, the proponent in question has to be able to present semantically understandable and epistemologically explicable clues, which establish a dialogical platform with reference to which a meaningful discussion regarding reasons for and against specific claims could take place and be developed.

On the other hand, it does not seem evident that we would all understand why it is important for religious persons to try to show that specific claims, ethical or of other kinds, could be justified with reference to a divine or spiritual authority, or what such a reference in effect means. Neither does it seem uncontroversial to include apparently metaphysical

references in a dialogue, if the authorities to which they refer are thought to be absolute, serving as a kind of final justificatory step.

As was stated at the beginning of this article, most religious people do not seem to propose that specific ethical claims are absolutely right or true, even if they are arguing that a certain interpretation of their righteousness or truth is supported by a reference to a divine or spiritual absolute authority. There is still room for human misinterpretation due to limited knowledge and, perhaps, a limited moral ability.

Here, however, it is important that religious ethical claims, precisely as must be done regarding secular ones, are scrutinized and critically examined partly with a focus on the content of the claims, and partly by highlighting how this content is thought to be justified. Taking the challenges of climate change as an example, there are several examples of religious voices asking for acute action according to an ethical responsibility for the earth and its living creatures. Pope Francis is one of them, remembering his gift to President Trump on his visit to the Vatican in May 2017: a 192-page letter where the devastating environmental, social, economic and political consequences of a negligence of the climate challenges were seriously highlighted (Samphatkumar 2017). Supposing that the Pope, like other religious supporters of sustainability, in some way anchors his engagement in a religious view of the earth as the result of divine creation, two issues seem to require examination: (1) Is the content of the ethical claim epistemologically and morally justified?; (2) Is the reason given for the claim in question epistemologically and morally justified?

Regarding the first question, it could be said that much relevant research is being carried out regarding the environmental threats of our time, focusing not least on climate change, its mechanisms, possible ways to meet these challenges in successful ways and so on. "Climate deniers" have questioned scientific theories, hypotheses and conclusions—and here it is reasonable to talk about a clash between two opposed approaches. On the other hand, one may also emphasize that people engaged in sustainability issues do not constitute a wholly harmonious group: discussions involving a huge variety of positions and interests are continuously going on. This is, I believe, a preferable approach to ethical issues: in a democratic society communication must not fade away or stop. It has to be kept alive. That is what we can do in order to shoulder our

responsibility, whether this is thought to be anchored in a divine authority or not, a responsibility for contributing to making the world and people's relations better, deeper and more profound.

Regarding the second question, the same could be said to hold, but here it is important to add that when reasons for certain ethical claims are given, references to religious and secular authorities may both be given a justified role to play. It may, particularly in a time and a Western context when many people are not familiar with, nor knowledgeable about, religious belief in theory and practice, seem hard to argue for this or that claim by saying that "it is the will of God" or that "it can be read in the Bible or the Quran". If anyone wants to argue in this way, she has the right to do so—but of course, a reference to a divine being or a supposed support in a text thought to be divinely inspired does not in itself lay a ground for an acceptance of the claim in question. It has to be shown that this claim is morally justified, that is to say, that it satisfies fundamental democratic values. Claims which are opposed to such values by neglecting or denying men's and women's personal freedom and integrity, their right to develop personal life-views and positions on different issues, cannot be accepted.

Religious ethical claims must also, regarding their references to divine or spiritual authorities, be shown to be epistemologically justified. This does not, according to the approach accepted in the present context, mean that they have to be proved in a more or less conclusive sense. Such a demand would itself be unjustified. Since the days of logical positivism and verificationist strategies for excluding all metaphysical claims from the arena of what may be thought to be epistemologically acceptable, no one would seem to be prepared to take the "conclusivist position" in epistemological matters.

In a post-secular time, it is, however, fundamental that reasonable epistemological demands and criteria are allowed to play an active role when we are searching for truth and knowledge. When it comes to religious claims—and also many secular ones—the task will be, not to ask for evidence which make the claims appear as certain, but rather to examine whether there may be what could be called "non-ordinary" ways of obtaining knowledge about the world. One way to go might be to investigate "a widened concept of experience", where non-sensory experience

is analyzed with reference to reasonable criteria for truth and knowledge. Another one is a parallel investigation of a widened concept of knowledge, which broadens the scope of what it might be possible to know about the world and about ourselves (cf. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2011). A third one, perhaps the most common, would be to look at possible similarities between justifications of ethical claims with reference to religious and secular authorities (Franck 2017).

The Labor of Criticizing Religious Ethical Claims

A point of departure for the discussion in this article is that there are religious ethical claims that can be interpreted as potentially challenging democratic values, by the divine or spiritual references that are considered as justifications in ethical issues. Criteria for what may be judged "right" or "good", which usually provide an accepted basis for ethical discussions in secular democratic contexts, are questioned or neglected.

It should be noted that by challenging common criteriological prerequisites, these claims can inspire a recurring, hermeneutically critical analysis—both regarding the perception in secular debates of what can be regarded as a justified ethical claim, but also as regards interpretation and reconsideration of the claims themselves. When a democratically challenging statement is presented, something happens to it (cf. Benhabib 1992). In the critical process implemented, the reflection on this statement can offer new perspectives and previously unknown dimensions of understanding.

I have emphasized that religious ethical claims, although they can play a constructive and healthy developmental role for a critical discussion of ethics and morals, do not provide a secure path for a justification. A critical process is initiated for all parties involved when democratic iterations are on the agenda. Neither their defenders nor those who doubt the reasonableness of defending such challenging claims may consider themselves, without further explanation, to be able to formulate a final decision regarding the claims in question.

In a post-secular ethical arena, it is important, in particular in educational contexts, that emphasis is placed on the process that precedes the taking up of a position rather than on the standpoints themselves. It is of course important, not least in acute ethical issues, to formulate a stance that can lead to a vigorous internship that can help people in their moral life. But it is always worth the effort to take time to reflect on and analyze the basis, both ethical and epistemological, for different positions and options for action. In many ethical matters, religious and secular debates will be united with regard to reasons considered as ethical and epistemological justification. A religious believer who lives in a secular democratic community usually does just as others do: she trusts general everyday experiences, scientific achievements and tries to have a moral stance characterized by fundamental democratic values.

However, when she tries to find a way to take a position on certain questions, she can, unlike a person who lacks religious belief, refer to a divine or spiritual authority. It may often mean that, in practice, she comes to the same conclusion as people who also strive to practice democratically founded ethics, sometimes implying that she finds an alternative position defensible—perhaps with reference to a divine will or regulation conveyed by some text or some experience. In that situation, she has a job to do. She needs to develop an epistemologically based defense for her position and why this should be accepted by other people in the democratic community. As pointed out above, this does not mean that she gives conclusive evidence but that she can elaborate on the epistemological prerequisites for her position in a way that is seen as reasonable in this context. In other words, she cannot relax, either ethically or epistemologically, when she makes ethical claims for religious reasons.

It is important to emphasize here that someone who feels doubtful or unfamiliar with ethical claims made on religious grounds cannot relax either, if that the person wishes to participate in a conversation on the subject. It is a hard work to justify religious ethical claims—and it is hard work to formulate a vigorous criticism of them. I mentioned earlier a couple of Swedish studies that show how a secular and, in some cases, subtly anti-religious attitude can show up in classroom discussions about religion, and the cases reported there are more about expressing disapproval than going into an ethically and epistemologically relevant analysis

and argumentation. Such an attitude is not only disrespectful and therefore questionable in relation to the democratic principles that should apply to ethical discussions: it is also an attitude that collapses under its own weight because it neither examines the ethical claims made on religious grounds, nor examines the ethical and epistemological conditions for an analysis of its own position.

Bearing in mind, in particular, that religious literacy that includes knowledge of basic beliefs and religious ethical positions seems to be absent in many contemporary contexts (Prothero 2008; Moore 2007), it should be recalled how important it is that all participants in democratic discussions about ethics do what they can to intellectually and morally, epistemological and ethically, seriously contribute to a careful examination of the claims that are in focus.

Conclusion

I have argued that an interpretation of religious ethical claims as being potentially challenging democratic values helps to show the inspiration they can give by questioning present democratic moral and epistemological beliefs, norms and ideals. I have also shown why a treatment of such claims requires work, both ethically and epistemologically, by their advocates as well as their critics.

Habermas's position that religious people, in democratic talks about values, need to adapt the forms of their claims to a secular context seems to be acceptable in the sense that they must try to relate these claims (and the religiously formulated support for them) to the linguistic, epistemological and moral prerequisites that are sanctioned within the framework of the democratic community in which they are produced. But Habermas does not, according to the argument in this article, take the responsibility far enough when he lays the task of making religious claims comprehensible exclusively on their advocates. There is a significant responsibility here for those who do not want to accept or understand such claims. It is about striving to embrace what is claimed, and it is about critically examining the ethical and epistemological conditions for them—as well as

investigating and expressing the corresponding conditions for their own claims.

A post-secular ethics education requires something of both religious and secular-based debates. Ethical claims are, regardless of how they are supported, worth a careful, reflective and critical review. It is true for those who appear at least on the surface to agree with hegemonic social beliefs about how "right" and "good" and "true" can be understood, and it is also true for those who challenge such hegemonic apprehensions.

Note

1. I here ignore the question of how different forms of secular ethical objectivism relate to an ethical objectivism on religious grounds. It is important to implement a discussion of this issue, but only at a time when the survey in focus here has reached a result. There are several such forms that, at least initially, may seem to threaten the epistemological asymmetry believed to prevail between religious and secular ethical claims. On the other hand, there is reason to suspect that the arguments in support of how secular ethical objectivism anchors the intended entitlements of specific claims, may look different from those that are similarly believed to establish religious ethical claims. The question is complex and requires a separate space for treatment in a cautious manner.

References

Bäckström, A. (2012). Att leva i en postsekulär tid—vad menas med det? [Living in a Post-Secular Age—What Does This Mean?] *Svensk kyrkotidning, 23*, 434. Retrieved November 2, 2012.

Benhabib, S. (1992). *Situating the Self. Gender, Community, and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*. New York: Routledge.

Benhabib, S. (2011). *Dignity in Adversity: Human Rights in Troubled Times*. Oxford: Polity Press.

Berger, P. L. (1979). *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (1st ed.). Garden City, NY: Anchor Press.

Berger, P. L. (1999). The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview. In P. L. Berger (Ed.), *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (pp. 1–19). Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center.

Carlsson, D., & Thalén, P. (2015). Inledning [Introduction]. In D. Carlsson & P. Thalén (Eds.), *Det postsekulära klassrummet: Mot ett vidgat religionskunskapsbegrepp* [*The Post-Secular Classroom: Towards a Widened Concept of Religious Education*] (pp. 7–16). Gävle: Högskolan i Gävle and Swedish Science Press.

Davie, G. (2002). *Europe: The Exceptional Case: Parameters of Faith in the Modern World*. London: Darton, Longmann and Todd Ltd.

Franck, O. (2016) Critical Religious Education: Highlighting Religious Truth-Claims in Non-confessional Educational Contexts. In J. Arthur & L. P. Barnes (Eds.), *Education and Religion. Major Themes in Education, Vol. III, Religion, Diversity and Education*. London and New York: Routledge. Reprinted from *British Journal of Religious Education*, 2015, *37*(3), 225–239. London and New York: Routledge.

Franck, O. (2017). Challenging the Teaching of Global Ethical Unity: Religious Ethical Claims as Democratic Iterations Within Sustainability Didactics. *Journal of Education for Sustainable Development, 11*(1), 11–18.

Habermas, J. (2006). Religion in the Public Sphere. *European Journal of Philosophy, 14*(1), 1–25. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1468-0378.2006.00241.x (Retrieved 25 August 2019).

Habermas, J. (2008). Notes on Post-Secular Society. *New Perspective Quarterly, 25*(4), 17–29, Wiley Online Library, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1540-5842.2008.01017.x (Retrieved 25 August 2019).

Habermas, J., & Taylor, C. (2011). Dialogue: Jürgen Habermas and Charles Taylor. In E. Mendieta & J. Vanantwerpen (Eds.), *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (pp. 60–69). New York: Columbia University Press.

Harari, Y. N. (2015). *Sapiens. A Brief History of Humankind*. London: Vintage.

Holmqvist Lidh, C. (2016) *Representera och bli representerad. Elever med religiös positionering talar om skolans religionskunskapsundervisning* [*Representing and Being Represented. Students with Religious Positioning Speak about RE in School*] (p. 41). Karlstad University Studies.

Kittelmann-Flensner, K. (2015). *Religious Education in Contemporary Pluralistic Sweden*. Department of Literature, History of Ideas, and Religion, University of Gothenburg.

Løgstrup, K. E. (1979). *The Ethical Demand* (H. Fink, Ed.). University of Notre Dame Press.

Moore, D. L. (2007). *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy. A Cultural Studies Approach to the Study of Religion in Secondary Education*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
Prothero, S. (2008). *Religious Literacy. What Every American Needs to Know—And Doesn´t*. New York: HarperCollins.
Roos, L., & Berglund, J. (Eds.). (2009). *Your Heritage and Mine: Teaching in a Multi-religious Classroom*. Uppsala: Swedish Science Press.
Samphatkumar, M. (2017). The Pope Gave Donald Trump a 192-Page Letter He Wrote on Climate Change. Retrieved from http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/trump-pope-letter-climate-change-gift-encyclical-vatican-visit-present-a7754496.html.
Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. (2011). Religious Experience. Retrieved from https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/religious-experience/.
Taylor, C. (2007). *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
Tillich, P. (1951). *Systematic Theology* (Vol. 1). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Index

O. Franck, P. Thalén (eds.), *Religious Education in a Post-Secular Age*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47503-1