

Discourse

**Learning and Teaching in
Philosophical and
Religious Studies**



The Higher Education **Academy**

Discourse:

Learning and Teaching in Philosophical and Religious Studies

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Contents

Editorial	4
News and information	
The Higher Education Academy	6
The Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies	7
Conferences and upcoming events	8
Proceedings from the 2010 PRS Conference, 'Courting Controversy'	
Christian Triumphalism and the Hook-Nosed Elephant in the Corner Dan Cohn-Sherbok.....	17
'If Heaven is Such a Wonderful Place, Then Why Would White People Tell Black People About It?': Problematising Black Christian Confessional Belief in Postcolonial Britain Anthony Reddie.....	29
'Do They Really Believe That?': Experiential Learning Outside the Theology and Religious Studies Classroom Catherine Robinson and Denise Cush	55
The Exoteric-Esoteric Distinction in Theology and the Changing Interests of the State: Handling 'Diversity' in the Teaching of Theology and Ethics Carys Moseley.....	73
A Study of Pupil Understandings of 'Terrorism' in Pupil Conversations (aged 16-18) and Questionnaires from a Sample of Warwickshire Secondary Schools Angela Quartermaine.....	101
Other articles and reports	
Teaching Critical Thinking Beyond Philosophy Stuart Hanscomb.....	131
On Written Dialogue as Form of Assessment Marije Altorf.....	153
Gardner-Inspired Design of Teaching Materials: A Logical Illustration Laurence Goldstein and Martin Gough.....	173
Sustainability in Philosophy: a Survey of Education for Sustainable Development Teaching in Philosophy and History and Philosophy of Science James Garvey.....	203
Values and Aims of Higher Education: The Case of Ernst Jünger, 'Total Mobilisation', and Academic Philosophy Ian James Kidd.....	225
About <i>Discourse</i>	240

Editorial—the Future of Philosophical and Religious Studies

Dr Clare Saunders
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Subject Centre for Philosophical
and Religious Studies

The past few months have been eventful ones in UK (and especially English) higher education. Unprecedented cuts in direct public funding for teaching—including the complete withdrawal of funding for the humanities—coupled with the introduction of undergraduate tuition fees of up to £9,000 per year are likely to have substantial and unpredictable effects on the higher education experience of students and staff alike. Many universities and departments are facing stark questions about their future in this changing HE market, with growing attention focused on ‘key performance indicators’ such as student satisfaction, attainment and graduate employment. In this challenging climate, what is the future of philosophical and religious studies (PRS) in higher education?

Many of the papers in this issue of *Discourse* address

this issue explicitly or tangentially. This edition includes papers from two recent Subject Centre events which explored the nature and role of PRS subjects in 21st century higher education—‘Courting Controversy?’, which focused on the policy and practice of teaching Theology and Religious Studies (TRS) in a multi-faith and multi-cultural society (Cohn-Sherbok; Reddie; Cush & Robinson; Moseley; Quartermaine); and ‘Beyond Boundaries’, which discussed the (increasingly?) widespread practice of teaching PRS subjects outside of ‘core’ PRS departments and its distinctive challenges and opportunities (Hanscomb).

Several papers arising from Subject Centre-funded projects (Altorf; Gough and Goldstein; Garvey) also offer critical reflections on the place of PRS subjects in higher education and wider society—in particular Garvey’s analysis of philosophy’s engagement with the ‘sustainability’ agenda in education, and Altorf’s

exploration of the interaction between assessment forms and educational aims and 'learning outcomes'. Such fundamental questions about the nature of higher education also shape Kidd's paper, which offers a diagnosis of philosophical education. This theme is, however, but one strand in the diverse contributions to pedagogy in our disciplines to be found in this edition of *Discourse*.

The Subject Centre is not immune from the changes facing UK higher education—the Higher Education Academy (HEA), of which we are part, is being restructured in light of significantly reduced funding and changing sector needs, and as a result the current Subject Centre network will be closed during 2011/12, with future discipline level support for higher education being led by the HEA's central offices in York. (See our website for details: <http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/view.html/prsnews/123>.)

In the meantime, however, the Subject Centre continues to provide a range

of support for PRS learning and teaching, including our latest round of funding—a total of over £40,000 awarded to 15 new projects (see http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/grants/funded_projects.html)—and our forthcoming conference, 'Foundations for the Future' (13-14 July, London), (see page 8 of this publication for the provisional programme, and <http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/view.html/prsevents/482> for registration) which will draw on the fruits of the work we have undertaken over the past 10 years and celebrate the diverse strengths of PRS learning and teaching, as well as exploring new perspectives and future challenges. I hope that many of our readers will join us at this conference; and encourage all of you to stay in touch with the Subject Centre so that we can advise you of future developments in the HEA and UK higher education.

Best wishes, Clare.

The Higher Education Academy

The Higher Education Academy's mission is to help institutions, discipline groups and all staff to provide the best possible learning experience for their students.

Its aims and objectives are:

1. To be an authoritative and independent voice on policies that influence student learning experiences;
2. To support institutions in their strategies for improving the student learning experience;
3. To lead, support and inform the professional development and recognition of staff in higher education;
4. To promote good practice in all aspects of support for the student learning experience;
5. To lead the development of research and evaluation to improve the quality of the student learning experience;
6. To be a responsive, efficient and accountable organisation.

<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk>

The Subject Network

The Subject Network is a network of 24 subject centres based in higher education institutions throughout the UK. It is funded by the four HE funding bodies in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It aims to promote high quality learning and teaching through development and transfer of successful practice in all subject disciplines.

The Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies

The Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies is based at the University of Leeds and at a partner site at the University of Wales, Lampeter and covers the disciplines of Philosophy, Philosophy of Science, History of Science (including the History of Medicine and Technology), Theology, and Religious Studies.

Mission statement

Supporting teachers and learners in Philosophical and Religious Studies in higher education across the UK.

Strategic Aims

- To identify, develop and disseminate appropriate enhancements in higher education practice.
- To actively support, encourage and participate in the sharing of relevant, diverse and effective practice and research.
- To support individuals and departments in enabling and managing change; and promote their needs and strengths through that change.
- To provide and develop an accessible and flexible repository of relevant knowledge, resources and expertise that adds value to student learning.
- To work effectively and collaboratively across the Higher Education Academy and the sector to add value to our activities.

Visit our website at **<http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk>**

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Foundations for the Future: Subject Centre for PRS Conference 2011

University of Greenwich, 13-14 July 2011

Keynote speakers: Baroness Mary Warnock and Dr Adam Dinham

We are pleased to announce our 2011 conference, which will bring together colleagues in Philosophy, Theology, Religious Studies, History and Philosophy of Science, Technology and Medicine (HPSTM), Biblical Studies and Educational Development and provide an opportunity to explore the diverse approaches and challenges in these areas, and to share effective learning and teaching practices.

The Subject Centre for PRS has worked with colleagues in departments throughout the UK and internationally for more than a decade to build a strong community committed to the enhancement of learning and teaching in our disciplines. In that time we have organised over 100 events attended by more than 1,600 people, contributed to hundreds more, funded over 150 projects in learning and teaching in our disciplines, and published 14 books and guides, almost 200 articles in our journal, *Discourse*, and more than 500 other resources, case studies and project reports on our website.

In addition to inviting new perspectives in learning and teaching in our disciplines, this conference will draw together the range of work that we have undertaken and supported over the past 10 years; the wealth of knowledge and expertise that exists in learning and teaching across our disciplines; and the difference this work has made to the learning experience of students in theology, religious studies, philosophy and HPSTM across the UK. It will celebrate good teaching in our subjects, and the many successes of the Subject Centre for PRS working in collaboration with our academic communities.

The conference will consider how these foundations can be built upon as the Higher Education Academy moves to a new structure, and how you can be involved. It will also provide a forum to discuss the future of philosophical and religious studies education in these difficult times for UK higher education.

Programme

Day I

10:30 - 11:30 Registration and coffee

11:30 - 12:00 Welcome

12:00 - 13:00 Keynote 1: Baroness Mary Warnock

13:00 - 14:00 Lunch

14:00 - 15:00 Parallel 1

Session 1.1 Deirdre Burke: *Marking in Religious Studies: hyperlinks to learning resources*

Session 1.2 Melanie Prideaux: *Employability in Theology and Religious Studies**

Session 1.3 John Foster & Myfanwy Williams: *Why do Philosophy in schools—and after?*

15:00 - 16:00 Parallel 2

Session 2.1 Chiara Ambrosio & Catherine M. Jackson: *Undergraduate research goes digital: using open educational resources to develop teaching and research on the directed community model*

Session 2.2 Anne-Marie Gallagher & Frank J Harrington: *The impact on Religious Studies teachers of emotionality in the HE classroom*

Session 2.3 Keith Crome, Ruth Farrar, Patrick O'Connor & Lisa Clughen: *Learning habits and teaching techniques: Developing a handbook of practices*

16:00 - 17:00 Parallel 3

Session 3.1 Jessie Paterson: *The teaching and learning experience—a look back at the last ten years and the way ahead for the School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh*

Session 3.2 Marije Altorf: *Philosophy and the university: Socratic dialogue and education*

Session 3.3 Laurence Goldstein & Martin Gough: *Gardner-Inspired dog-legged design of teaching materials: a logical illustration*

17:00 - 18:30 Free time

18:30 - 19:30 Wine reception/poster session

19:30 Dinner

Day 2

09:30 - 10:30 Keynote 2: Dr Adam Dinham

10:30 - 10:45 Coffee

10:45 - 11:45 Parallel 4

Session 4.1 Stephanie Sinclair: *Blended learning and tuition in Religious Studies: an Open University perspective*

Session 4.2 Lynne Scholefield & Stephen E. Gregg: *The student learning experience in Religious Studies field trips and study tours: managing expectations and outcomes*

Session 4.3 Mahlet Getachew Zimeta: *Ethics at the edge: an innovative and interdisciplinary approach to teaching Practical Ethics*

11:45 - 12:45 Parallel 5

Session 5.1 Christina Welch: *Blended and distance learning in a TRS Masters programme**

Session 5.2 Denise Cush & Catherine Robinson: *Does Religious Studies work? Employability and experiential learning*

Session 5.3 Brendan Larvor: *Building on two projects in Philosophy**

12:45 - 13:45 Lunch

13:45 - 14:45 Parallel 6

Session 6.1 Sarah Honeychurch & Steve Draper: *The Development and implementation of a method of collaborative learning for first year Philosophy tutorials*

Session 6.2 Anja Finger: *Learning through research: students as participant observers of religion/s*

Session 6.3 Martin Gough: *Education as Philosophy and Philosophy as education: lessons for disciplinarity from running a Philosophy course within an academic development programme*

14:45 - 15:45 Parallel 7

Session 7.1 Dominic Corrywright & Tom Cosgrove: *Blending the student experience: e-learning, study visits and interdisciplinary links explanation and evaluation*

Session 7.2 Mark Addis & Helen Beebee: *Philosophy research training network*

Session 7.3 George MacDonald Ross: *What's the use of lectures? 40 years on*

15:45 - 16:30 Closing plenary

* The titles of these sessions are currently provisional.

Costs

Conference costs are as follows:

1 day (conference attendance on one day + tea/coffee + lunch): £30

2 days (same as above but on both days): £50

Full conference (2 days + overnight stay + conference dinner): £90

1 day + conference dinner: £50

For students and speakers the following discounted costs apply:

1 day: £20

2 days: £35

Full conference: £65

1 day plus dinner: £40

Some bursaries will be available to assist with speaker expenses in attending.

Registration

You can now register to attend the conference by visiting our website:

<http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/view.html/prsevents/482>.

Teaching Theology/Religious Studies and Gender

University of Leeds, 24 May 2011

Keynote speaker: Deborah Sawyer, Lancaster University.

Speakers include:

- Emma Tomalin, University of Leeds
- Tamsin Bradley, London Metropolitan University
- Rachel Muers, University of Leeds
- Kristin Aune, University of Derby
- Sonya Sharma, Durham University
- Dawn Llewellyn, University of Chester
- Lindsay Simmonds, London School of Economics

This workshop, organised by the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies, will explore issues involved in the teaching of theology and/or religious studies (T/RS) and gender within different disciplinary settings in UK higher education. It will bring together participants from a range of academic disciplines, including post-graduates involved in teaching, and facilitate a conversation between colleagues that will:

- Shed valuable light on the variety of learning and teaching approaches used by those teaching T/RS and gender;
- Provide a space for reflection on the learning and teaching issues and challenges encountered by this diverse academic group;
- Identify differences and commonalities in the experiences of those teaching gender in different academic disciplines and in the context of different religions and/or theologies;
- Allow colleagues to showcase and share examples of good practice and to network with others working in the field, often in disciplines other than their own

The deadline for registration is 10 May 2011.

Please see our website for further details:

<http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/view.html/prsevents/484>

Teaching the Green Humanities?

London, 25 May 2011

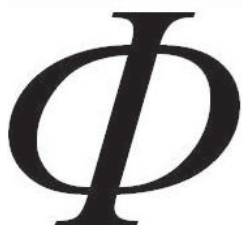
This workshop organised by the Higher Education Academy arts and humanities Subject Centres (English, History, Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies, PALATINE, Philosophical and Religious Studies), is about the relationship between teaching the arts and humanities in HE and student learning about environmental and social issues. It will debate the extent to which the pedagogy of the humanities is inherently 'green' and should be concerned with engaging its students in environmental and social issues. It will also create opportunities to share current practices in addressing these issues in (and outside) the classroom and demonstrate how pedagogical innovation in the arts and humanities might contribute to environmental and social awareness.

This workshop will be structured around four themes, the first two of which we see as being concerned primarily with theoretical debate, and the second two as concerned with practical aspects of teaching and curricula:

- What is 'green' about humanities pedagogy?
- Should the arts and humanities teach students to be 'green'?
- Arts and Humanities teaching and environmental engagement
- Arts and Humanities teaching and social engagement

Please see the English Subject Centre website for more details:

http://www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/events/event_detail.php?event_index=304



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Reports and Articles

Christian Triumphalism and the Hook-Nosed Elephant in the Corner

Dan Cohn-Sherbok

Professor Emeritus of Judaism
University of Wales Trinity St. David

This paper was originally given at the conference 'Courting Controversy' organised by the Subject Centre for PRS, 8th-9th July 2010.

I am most grateful to you for asking me to speak to your conference, Courting Controversy. I see from your programme that you will be exploring a number of issues around the policy and practice of teaching Theology and Religious Studies in higher education in a multi-faith and multi-cultural society. Now, it is my intention to confront what I believe to be a major problem in university and college departments and in the classroom. It is a dilemma and difficulty that I

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have personally faced during the thirty-four years I have been an academic in Britain. And so, much of what I will say will be autobiographical. But, of course, I want to use my experiences as a basis for reflecting about the subject more generally.

The title of this keynote address is: Christian Triumphalism and the Hooked-nose Elephant in the Corner. You will tell me that elephants don't have noses; they have trunks. That's true. But of course I mean this metaphorically. How do I go about explaining what I am referring to? Let me begin by telling you a secret: I have a disreputable distinction. A disgraceful distinction. A regrettable distinction. A troubling and puzzling distinction. It is this: In 1975 I was appointed a lecturer in theology at the University of Kent at Canterbury. I was to be the specialist in Jewish studies in a department of five. My other colleagues consisted of a Professor of Christian ethics, and three lecturers: one in Biblical studies, another in Church history and a third in religious studies. For over twenty years I was the Hebrew specialist, and in addition I taught a range of courses dealing with the history of Judaism from biblical to modern times. Students were interested in the subject, and I think I must have over the years had thousands of undergraduates in my classes. However, in 1997 I left Kent to become the Professor of Judaism at the University of Wales, Lampeter. On my departure, I was not replaced even though a number of appointments were subsequently made. Biblical Hebrew vanished from the curriculum, as did all the courses I ever taught. There is no course dealing exclusively with Judaism. Even though the University of Kent department of religious studies advertises itself as proud to offer modules in the world's religions, Judaism is totally absent as a separate subject. The Kent website declares:

Religion is a vital element in human culture, and today religious issues are everywhere—from current affairs and international events, to the history of ideas, art and literature, and our own immediate experience and environment. Religious studies at Kent involves investigating and discussing these ideas, experiences, practices and institutions, through texts, films, historical data and directly observing the world today.

Yet, despite such a claim, there are no courses devoted specifically and exclusively to Judaism as there were when I was a lecturer. Judaism has

vanished into a black hole.

At Lampeter I was the sole Jewish specialist in a department of what became over thirty members of staff. From 1997 until this past October I taught introductory, intermediate and advanced Biblical Hebrew as well as courses in Jewish history and thought, Jewish theology and philosophy, modern Jewish life, and the Israel-Palestine problem. For some years I was the sole teacher for a joint honours programme in Jewish studies. Yet, in October when I retired—as at Kent—I was not replaced and every undergraduate course I ever taught vanished. There is no Biblical Hebrew, nor are there any courses on Judaism (even though a course is now offered on the Druids). A line was drawn through all Judaism undergraduate modules. Although Lampeter describes itself as committed to exploring the world's major faiths, Judaism has evaporated.

You must admit, it is a dubious distinction to have taught in two universities for a total of thirty-four years, to find that not only is one not replaced when one leaves, but the subject I taught—Judaism—was abolished from the undergraduate curriculum immediately after I left.

In two departments that describe themselves as committed to the study of the world's faiths, Judaism has disappeared. My wife teases me about this. I have to admit it is a bit humiliating. After all, Judaism is a major world religion. It's been around for nearly 4,000 years. Christianity emerged out of Judaism. Jesus and his disciples were Jews. Paul was a Jew. Israel is constantly in the news. But at two places where I taught the subject, there is the pretence that Judaism doesn't exist. It's the elephant with a hooked nose in the corner that no-one wants to acknowledge.

I wonder if it's me. Now it could be. It may be that I have been such a disagreeable and difficult colleague that my fellow academics couldn't bear the thought of having another Jew in the department. Or, possibly my lectures were so disastrous that it was felt better to eliminate the subject of Judaism altogether. But, my classes were always full—they were the most popular both at Kent and Lampeter. So maybe my colleagues were jealous and wanted no further competition. Or there is the possibility that they thought I was corrupting the young.

It could have been a combination of all these factors. But I don't think so. It was something else. And that is what I want to explore with you this morning. For over three decades I have experienced in differ-

ent ways an assumption of Christian superiority *vis-a-vis* the world's faiths. It has been so amongst the few evangelical colleagues I have had as well as many of the most liberal. Nearly all my colleagues have been Christian—some deeply religious; others lukewarm; some indifferent. But almost without exception they have assumed that Christianity is normative, and that anything non-Christian is tangential. This, I believe, is a modern form of Christian triumphalism. I don't mean to suggest that Christian university academics in departments of theology and religious studies seek to convert their students. It is not that at all. Instead, there is the overwhelming feeling that the teaching about Christianity is of fundamental importance. From Aberdeen in the North to Kent in the South to Exeter in the West and Cambridge in the East, courses about all aspects of Christianity—theology, history, ethics—predominate.

Now, in one sense there are very good reasons why this is so. After all Britain is in origin a Christian country. Most of our students come from a Christian background. The students themselves are more interested in studying about Christianity than any other religion. And the government is anxious to inculcate values of citizenship that are indirectly shaped by the Christian tradition. There is nothing wrong in this. There is every reason why Christianity in its various forms should predominate on the syllabus. Yet, in my many years of experience I have repeatedly witnessed amongst my Christian colleagues an unpleasant attitude of condescension and derision.

You might think that what I am referring to is a subtle form of antisemitism. But that would be a mistake. The patronizing stance that I am describing is not directly against Jews or Judaism, but toward adherents of all non-Christian traditions. I shall give you an example of such an attitude. A number of years ago, one of my Christian colleagues formulated plans to establish a Centre for the Study of Religion. The aim was to attract scholars from other institutions to conferences, organize a series of research seminars and attract external funding for projects. However, this individual insisted that the Centre's activities should be confined solely to Christianity. At that stage Lampeter had just hired a professor of Islam. When he heard about the plans for this Centre, he was troubled about its title. If its aim were to study religion, then why were non-Christian religions excluded? He took this person to lunch at a local restaurant and explained his perplexity. Why, he

wondered, couldn't the Centre be renamed to reflect its Christian orientation? Couldn't it be called: The Centre for the Study of the Christian Religion? Then there would be no confusion. I too, as the Professor of Judaism, made the same point. Despite our objections, the department pressed ahead with its plans. Only Christians were asked to be fellows of the Centre, and staff members associated with the Centre were restricted to Christian members of the department. My Muslim colleague and I were cross. Our pleas had been totally ignored. When I told my wife (who had attended a girls' boarding school with a strong Christian tradition) about the situation, she wasn't surprised. 'What do you expect from these bigots?' she said. 'Is there anything I can do?' I asked. 'Well,' she replied. 'You can give the Director of this new Centre a little parody of a well-known Christian hymn.' The original goes like this:

The Church's one foundation
is Jesus Christ Our Lord.
She is His new creation
By water and the word.
From Heaven He came and sought Her
To be His holy bride.
With His own blood He bought Her
And for Her life He died.

She took out a pen and wrote a new version that goes as follows:

Religion's one foundation
Is Christianity.
The faiths of Other nations
Don't make the category.
From all their works defend us

Preserve us from their texts.
We know these faith pretenders
Are naught but heathen sects.
Though liberals argue plainly
For Hindu, Muslim, Jew
And keep repeating vainly
That they're religions too.
Our faith will never falter,
Truth's trumpet still will sound.
It's on the Christian altar
That true religion's found.

I fear that the Director of the Centre was not amused when I handed over a copy. It is no surprise then, even though it is deeply troubling, that Judaism has been eliminated from the curriculum in two departments of theology and religious studies, where I taught for over three decades. It is the hook-nosed elephant in the corner that is ignored. 'Though liberals argue plainly for Hindu, Muslim, Jew, and keep repeating vainly that that they're religions too'—it does little good. Their voices are drowned by Christian trumpets that proclaim the truth: 'it's on the Christian altar that true religion's found.' I shall tell you next of a little altercation I had some years ago about just this point. The University of Wales, Lampeter was a Christian foundation. It was established in the early 19th century as a training college for Anglican priests in Wales. Its aim was to educate Welsh clergy who were too poor to study at Oxford and Cambridge.

All this changed in the 1970s when St David's College was secularized and became part of the University of Wales. Nonetheless, it still has a lovely chapel in the centre of the original Georgian building where students were housed. It currently functions as the university chapel. Every day there are services for the faithful, and at graduation a leaving service is held just before the degree ceremony. Although the

service is for all students who wish to attend, regardless of their religious orientation, it is a Eucharist.

The difficulty with such a service, however, is that non-Anglicans as well as members of other faiths like me who would like to attend are left out of the focal point of the service: the Eucharist itself. Concerned about the inappropriateness of such a religious event, I recommended to the Vice-Chancellor and the Chaplain that it would be more suitable to have a simple Matins service. This, I believed, would be completely consistent with Christian practice and more inclusive. However, when several of my Christian colleagues heard about my suggestion, they were outraged. It was, they believed, presumptuous for a rabbi to interfere with the traditions of the university. In response, I pointed out that the Eucharist service was a recent innovation. In the end, the Vice-Chancellor put the matter to Council. I was not allowed to attend the meeting, and I later heard that in the light of the forceful criticisms made by the Christian members of Council, it was decided to proceed with the Eucharist service as planned. I might add that this Eucharist service is very poorly attended.

Such a lack of sympathy for the non-Christian again illustrates my main point: Christian triumphalism in a modern guise continues to pervade the way in which universities and departments of theology and religious studies are run. Now, you might object by pointing to the creation of my own lectureship and Chair of Judaism. If I am right, then how did I ever get a job teaching Jewish studies in a university in the first place? I shall tell you. In the late 1960s and early 1970s there was a thriving department of religious studies at the University of Lancaster headed by Professor Ninian Smart. Unlike most departments, Lancaster actively fostered the teaching of religions other than Christianity. Reacting to this recent trend, Kent decided that they should add non-Christian religions to the curriculum, and a temporary lectureship was advertised in 1974. However, before an appointment was made, the Chairman of the department and others attempted to attract external funding from the Jewish community to support this new lectureship. The same applied to my Chair at Lampeter, and my first task was to establish a joint honours degree in Jewish studies in the expectation that this might attract Jewish support. However, because of the remoteness of Lampeter, it was an impossible task: no Jewish organization felt it worthwhile to help support a post with such a

limited number of Jewish students. Why do departments of theology and religious studies seek outside funding for non-Christian appointments while posts dealing with Christianity are funded from university resources? The answer is obvious: non-Christian religions are viewed as tangential to the central activity of the department and a means of raising external funding for the institution. But there are serious dangers in this approach. Externally funded appointments come with strings attached. In many if not most cases donors are involved in the appointment process and have their own agendas.

There is a final point that I should make. It is true that lecture-ships and other posts in religions other than Christianity do exist at numerous universities (often funded in the way I suggested). But in almost all cases, such individuals do not take leadership roles in the department. There is an unspoken assumption that Heads of Departments of theology and religious studies should be Christian. It makes no difference if they are Catholic, Anglican or Protestant or male or female. What is vital is that they are perceived as mainstream. In this case, gender discrimination has been eliminated, but religious discrimination is the norm.

So, there we are. Throughout the country departments of theology and religious studies proclaim they are anxious to foster the study of other faiths. But in fact non-Christian religions are sidelined in numerous ways. At times such discrimination is blatant. At others it is subtle. This is what I mean by modern Christian triumphalism. There is no evangelical quest. Rather, there is a pervasive assumption that Christianity is mainstream and should occupy centre stage. Other faiths, like Judaism, can be given a bit part in the drama of the religious history of humankind. But, sometimes they are completely ignored and do not even appear on stage. Certainly at Kent and Lampeter the poor hooked-nosed Jewish elephant has disappeared entirely.

Recently a comic campus novel, *Degrees R'Us*, was published by Impress Books based at the University of Exeter. The author is anonymous, but I shall let you into the secret: it was written by my wife who is rather incensed by what I am describing. In one scene, the protagonist, Dr. Felix Glass, a Jewish philosophy lecturer had just been co-opted into the theology department. In an interview with his Head of Department, Dr. John Pilkington, an evangelical Methodist, he asked why he was taken on since he was not a theologian.

John stared out of the window. 'I know you're not and this may be a problem. We must see how it all works out. To tell you the truth, several of us are rather troubled by your background in particular.' 'My background?', Felix wondered. 'Now I really was flummoxed. What could my background have to do with joining the theology department? I thought back to my parents: my father was a doctor, a dermatologist, and my mother dedicated herself to running the house, looking after her family and volunteering for a range of good works. I could not see anything very objectionable to that. Perhaps our neat 1930s villa in Hampstead Garden Suburb was the problem? Or could it be my new colleagues were unhappy with the fact that I had won a partial scholarship and had been educated as a day boy at Westminster School? Perhaps the theologians found something objectionable in private education. 'I am sorry, I don't understand. What's wrong with my background?' I said. Pilkington looked embarrassed. 'Well,' he said, 'as you know, we are a Christian department. Most of us are in some sense committed to the original vision of the university as an evangelical missionary college. Of course, its role is different now. We're a modern university. We have a new vocation: to bring educational opportunities everywhere around the globe. Yet there is still the feeling in the department that our first duty is to encourage students in their faith. "Fides Quaerens Intellectum", faith seeking understanding. You see...that's the purpose of theology, at any rate here at our university.'

My heart stopped and I stared at him. I had been warned about this, but in my entire career I had never had to face it before. My family were completely non-religious. The only time in my life I had ever entered a synagogue was to go to the bar mitzvahs of various of my school friends. It was true that both my parents as children had fled with their families from Germany. They had been lucky. Both sets of grandparents were originally from Berlin, and they knew what was going on. With the rise of the Nazi party, they had realised there would be real trouble for anyone with Jewish ancestry. They had settled in England as soon as things became difficult in 1933. In London they had established a new life, cultured, civilised, influenced by their German heritage certainly, but determinedly secular and patriotically English. 'You mean you don't like the fact that I'm Jewish', I said. 'You people are always so sensitive,' Pilkington replied. 'I knew it would be difficult to talk to you about this. What I am

trying to say is that we do see ourselves as a Christian department. We're particularly strong in Biblical studies. We want to get away from the misguided twentieth-century fashion for phenomenology and world religions.'

Assuming I am right about this, is there anything that can be done? What is required, I believe, is a revolution in orientation. Many of you will be familiar with the distinction drawn by philosophers of religion such as John Hick between a Christo-centric conception of the world faiths, and a Divine-centric approach. According to these writers, a Copernican revolution is now required in the understanding of religion. In the past it was assumed that Christianity contains the fullest divine disclosure. On this basis, Christianity was at the centre of the world's faiths. Christian thinkers who embraced such a view were like scientists who endorsed a Ptolemaic view of the universe in which the earth is at the centre. In the modern world, however, where adherents of one tradition continually come into contact with adherents of other faiths, it is difficult to sustain such a narrow vision. Instead a complete shift in orientation is required. Instead of placing Christianity at the centre of the world's religions, there should be a paradigm shift to a divine-centric conception of religious history. On this basis, the world's religions should be understood as different human responses to the one divine reality. In previous ages religions conceived of this one reality either theistically (as a personal deity or non-theistically as non-personal), but such differences were in essence the result of historical, cultural and psychological influences. A frequent image used to represent this new conception of the universe of faiths is that of alternative paths ascending a single mountain. The routes of these faith communities are all different, yet at various points they intersect: these intersections should be understood as those areas where religious conceptions within the differing traditions complement one another. Thus, as pilgrims of different faiths ascend to the summit, they will encounter parallels with their own traditions. But the divine reality they all pursue is in the end unattainable by these finite quests. As the Infinite, it is unknowable and incomprehensible. It is the cloud of unknowing hovering beyond the mountain itself. Such a pluralistic conception of the universe of faiths calls for a shift away from viewing all religions from a Christian perspective, and towards acknowledging the spiritual integrity of other religious traditions.

This is the model that I want to endorse. Departments of theology and religious studies should seek to free themselves from an attitude of Christian superiority. Even if there are more courses dealing with Christianity on offer, space should be made for other faiths. No university should drop a major world faith as Kent and Lampeter have done in the case of Judaism.

It is not enough for departments to state in their publicity that they support the teaching of the world's religions. They should do so in fact. There should be no fear of hiring lecturers from non-Christian traditions to teach about Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and other major traditions. Scholars from non-Western countries should not be denigrated. If the teaching of religion in the United Kingdom is to thrive, a Copernican revolution needs to take place. The spiritual treasures of the world's religions should be on display. For thirty-four years I have had the pleasure of being an academic. I am deeply grateful to the UK university system for saving me from the rabbinate which, believe me, is not a job for a nice Jewish boy. I can say without hesitation that I truly loved my job. But I have been dismayed by the way Judaism and other faiths have been treated at the universities where I have taught. There is a poor, neglected hooked-nosed elephant in the corner. He does not like being treated as a nobody. He is proud of his tradition and heritage. He does not want to crowd out Christianity. But he wants just a bit of respect. He wants to be liked. He wants to be seen as an equal. He is lonely. And he wants some friends. Is it really too much to ask?

‘If Heaven is Such a Wonderful Place, Then Why Would White People Tell Black People About It?’:

Problematizing Black Christian Confessional Belief in Postcolonial Britain

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Introduction

I had the privilege of being invited to attend and indeed sit on one of the panels at the first ‘State of Black Britain Symposium’ held at the Commonwealth Club in London on the 17th October 2009. The event brought together a number of prominent Black British spokespersons,

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personalities, politicians, entrepreneurs and educators to discuss the current state of Black people in Britain. At an earlier juncture in the meeting, as the conversation addressed the issue of the rise of the BNP and the implications of this apparent growth in support for Black people in Britain, a leading Black Christian minister rose to his feet and declared that 'Black people should join the BNP and so attempt to undermine them from within'. There was a moment of silence, followed by a ripple of applause and some general nods of agreement. Several minutes later, I overheard two older Black people observing that whilst they might not go as far as attempting to join the BNP, they would certainly vote for them as they were, and I quote one of them directly at this point, 'They are at least standing up for Christian Britain'.

Suffice it to say that I was stunned at what I had just heard. Voting for the BNP as a Black person is akin to turkeys looking forward to Christmas. A fascist party whose stated *raison d'être* is the removal of all non-Anglo-Saxon people from country is not one that seems to even want Black support let alone the absurd idea that Black people should vote for them and possibly even join the party to undermine them from within.

What intrigued most, however, as a Black religious scholar, was the notion that voting for this party was a means of defending Christian Britain. The fact that the BNP cannot be said to represent Christian anything, is clearly, the first obvious point to be made. I was stunned that the BNP would even countenance trying to defend a religious faith, whose sacred figure at the heart of it was a Palestinian Jew. But whatever the logic, or otherwise, of the BNP seeking to defend Christian Britain, it is perhaps the even more critical question as whether 'Christian Britain' is something worth saving by Black Christians that is exercising my thoughts in this lecture. This is the same Christian Britain of empire that gave us Transatlantic, chattel slavery of African people; the same Christian Britain of Empire and of colonialism; and the same Christian Britain of the mass exploitation of subjugated peoples, appropriating their lands, their bodies and their very selves. Is this the construct these individuals were hoping to defend by voting for a fascist political party?

In this paper, it is my intention to demonstrate how my scholarship and teaching has sought to address the often inhibited and inter-

nalised colonisation of the mind that has bedevilled and continues to impact on Black people in postcolonial Britain. I am interested in how a participative model of Black Theology, influenced by notions of transformative pedagogy, can be the means by which ordinary Black people of faith can be enabled to reflect more critically on the implication of the underlying theological constructs they hold. In what ways do the confessional belief structures that arise from particular theological themes become harmful and even detrimental to the Black self? How can these elements be challenged, resisted and even overcome? Clearly, in the scope of one lecture, I will not accomplish all of the aforementioned, but at least, in the words of a now a famous Russian meerkat, 'You know where I am coming from.'

Before I commence with this paper, let me offer a few caveats in advance of the remainder of the paper. First, while there is no doubting the arresting nature of the title of this address, drawn from the words of Roy Sawh, I will not be exploring the efficacies or truth claims of the substantive belief in heaven, either as a concept, or as a psycho-social construct for human meaning-making. Rather, I want to use Sawh's comments as a rhetorical device to explore aspects of a seeming *naiveté* amongst some Black Christians in Britain regarding the relationship between the material, historical reality of their Blackness and the superstructure of the Christian faith, which sits in dialectical tension with the former as a means of connoting identity and subjectivity in Britain.

I think it is also important that I make it clear that my work offers only a small snap shot, a microcosm if you will, of what is undoubtedly, a large and significant social phenomenon. I am not writing about or speaking for or against all or every Black Christian in Britain. I write as someone who is himself a confessional believer within the very code I am critiquing. My insider status is not meant to offer me any sense of being 'authentic' or providing greater veracity for my account than that provided by many others.¹ Rather, this work is based on two personal,

¹ I have sought to problematise the notion of the privileged voice as the subjective-insider in theo-ethnographic work in a previous piece of work. I argue that such discourse is often nothing more than a simplistic device to attain a form of 'authentic' authorial voice that attains towards unchallenged authority in the recalling of any socio-cultural accounts of reality. I am not questioning the importance or indeed the efficacy of insider accounts in any absolutist sense; rather, I am critiquing their usage as a short hand descriptor for what which is supposedly more authentic. See

experiential encounters, which are then juxtaposed with wider theoretical material drawn from the literature in order to provide a richly textured account of how and in what ways is the critical consciousness of Black Christians in Britain impacted by the false consciousness provided by Imperial Missionary Christianity.

The other caveat I think I need to make is that my polemical attack on Imperial Missionary Christianity does acknowledge that there were many good, decent and kind White Christians whose individual works of grace and kindness acted as a clear antithesis to the often brutal outworking of colonialism and empire. Clearly, it would be wrong to traduce every White Christian missionary, minister or colonial apparatchik and tar them all with the same anti-imperial polemical brush. My work seeks to attack the overarching phenomenon of imperial, empire based Christianity and to work within the weight of the numerical probability, which reminds us that ‘the goods’, whether in terms of mission schools and hospitals; or in individual works of piety, were very much in the minority. To cite the words of a Black South African friend talking about the number of so-called ‘liberal White people who always opposed apartheid’, he says, ‘If there were so many of them against apartheid, and if they were all actively on the side of us, the oppressed Black people, then why did it last for so long and why did so many of have to die or live such miserable lives?’

I do not doubt that some evidentially good things emerged from colonialism and empire and that some good people were involved within it, but this should not deflect us from the overarching misery, suffering and oppression that was the life and death experience for millions of people across an extended period of time, across the many ‘pink bits’ of the globe.

The Imperial Legacy of Britain and the church

My assessment *vis-a-vis* the colonial context in which Christianity in Britain is located can be witnessed, in part, in two dialogically matching responses to this phenomenon. First, is the very fact that I am

before you, a Black, African Caribbean male, a descendent of enslaved Africans. The second is that my parents came to this country in the late 1950s, from the Caribbean island of Jamaica. This dialogical, experiential truth reminds us of the positionality of Britain within the colonial construct of empire, which links it with a part of the world several thousand miles from these shores and which finds me standing before you, as a postcolonial subject. In the words of a poster beloved of the anti-racist movements of the left in the 1970s and 80s, 'We Are Here Because You Were There'.² It should be axiomatic that one cannot talk about Christianity in Britain without engaging with the broader thematic hinterland that is Empire and Colonialism. I write as a confessional Black Christian from within the Methodist tradition, for example. Methodism found its way to the Caribbean via the missionary enterprise of Nathaniel Gilbert, even though the indefatigable work undertaken by his Black enslaved women has largely gone unheralded.³ The 'historic church'⁴ version of Caribbean Christianity into which

²This phrase has now been developed into a multi-media educational resource for teaching about empire, nationality and asylum in Britain. See http://www.virtualmigrants.com/we_rhere/index.htm.

³In more recent times, my colleague and friend Michael Jagessar has sought to both critique Gilbert's importance and give agency to the two enslaved African women in an important essay. See Jagessar, Michael N., 'Early Methodism in the Caribbean: Through the Imaginary Optics of Gilbert's Slave Women – Another Reading', *Black Theology: An International Journal* Vol.5, No.2, (2007), pp.111-170.

⁴In using this term I am referring to those established denominations of the Protestant tradition, plus the Roman Catholic church, which account for the greater majority of the population that can be described and identified as attendees and practising Christians. The churches in question are the Anglican church (the Church of England), the Methodist Church, the Baptist Church, the Reformed Church (the United Reformed Church in the UK) and the Roman Catholic Church. These churches account for approximately two thirds of all Black Christians in the UK. Pentecostalism, which emerged at the dawn of the twentieth century in North America accounts for the other third. As I will detail at a later juncture in this paper, Black Pentecostalism displays an alternative set of pathologies than that exhibited by Historic church Christianity. Both branches or wings of the Christian faith have, nevertheless, been informed by the Imperial missionary strains of British Christianity via the Caribbean and the continent of Africa. See entries marked 'Christianity' and 'Churches' in Dabydeen, David, Gilmore, John and Jones, Cecily, (eds.) *The Oxford Companion to Black British History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007), pp.99-104.

approximately two thirds of all Black people of Christian faith in Britain have been inducted and formed is one that echoes to the continual strains of British run slavery in the English islands of the Caribbean.⁵ Caribbean Christianity, which emerges from the comparatively more recent Pentecostal tradition, has nonetheless, been influenced to an equal extent by the blandishments of Empire and colonialism. Michael Jagessar, commenting on Caribbean British Pentecostal Christianity as it pertains to Joe Aldred's book *Respect*,⁶ writes,

Further, in spite of his discourse on the richness of Caribbean diversity (ethno-religious), what comes across from this volume is the sense that the default mode represents Caribbean folks stepping off the Windrush, so fully de-culturalized and purified of their inter-cultural ethno-religious heritage that their faith resembled the chalky white cliffs of Dover and the pristine un-deconstructed euro-centric theology.⁷

The continental African dimension of Christianity in Britain has also been informed by colonialism and empire, which continues to circumscribe the parameters of acceptability and notions of what constitutes the status-quo and normality in terms of faith adherence.⁸ In using the term 'Imperial Missionary Christianity', I'm referring to the development of the Christian faith that arose from the missionary activities, which went hand in hand with empire and colonialism. It was this version, as opposed to more indigenous movements, such as North African Orthodox Christianity,⁹ into which the bulk of colonial subjects

⁵ See Reddie, Richard, *Abolition: The Struggle to Abolish Slavery in the British Colonies* (Oxford: Lion, 2007).

⁶ See Aldred, J.D., *Respect: Understanding Caribbean British Christianity* (Peterborough: Epworth press, 2005).

⁷ Jagessar, Michael N., 'Book Review of J.D. Aldred, *Respect: Understanding Caribbean British Christianity*'. *Black Theology: An International Journal*, Vol.5, No.2, (2007) pp.128-130 (p.130).

⁸ See Chike, Chigor, *African Christianity in Britain: Diaspora, Doctrines and Dialogue* (Milton Keynes: Authorhouse, 2007) for an excellent appraisal of African Christianity in Britain.

⁹ There was a long legacy of Christianity in North Africa, which existed prior to Christianity reaching Britain. This is often known as the 'Alexandrian School' and was characterised by its great learning and the contribution it made to the intellectual development of early Christianity. See Brown, Michael Joseph, *The Lords Prayer*

were inducted and formed. A number of writers have spoken of the mis-education and indoctrination elements of colonial Christianity.¹⁰ Constraints of space prevent a detailed exploration of the relationship between Imperial Missionary Christianity and Black Christians in Britain—suffice it to say, that there can be no doubting that the two are inextricably linked, to a level and at a depth that scholars are only now beginning to tease out. It is worth noting that at the time of writing, there are only a handful of texts that have explored this relationship to any satisfactory degree.¹¹

The relationship between empire, colonialism and Christianity, in many respects, remains the unacknowledged ‘elephant in the room’. Empire and colonialism found much of its intellectual underscoring on the basis of White, Eurocentric supremacy, which marked the clear binary between notions of civilised and acceptable against uncivilised and transgressive. There are no prizes for guessing on which side of the divide Black people found themselves relegated. The unacknowledged weight of invisible Whiteness and its damnable offspring, White supremacy has been remarked upon by the African Caribbean, Black British TV presenter and religio-cultural commentator, Robert Beckford thus:

I would say that theology is the last bastion of White suprema-

Through North African Eyes: A Window into Early Christianity (New York and London: T & T Clark, 2004).

¹⁰ See Erskine, Noel L., *Decolonizing Theology: A Caribbean Perspective* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1981), Gregory, Howard, *Caribbean Theology: Preparing for the Challenges Ahead* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1995), Williams, Lewin L., *Caribbean Theology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), Davis, Kortright, *Emancipation Still Comin’: Explorations in Caribbean Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1990). A more recent offering, which provides, perhaps, the most radical riposte for the conservative and reactionary theological motifs contained within (Caribbean) Imperial Missionary Christianity, see Thomas, Oral, *Biblical Resistance Hermeneutics Within a Caribbean Context* (London: Equinox, 2010).

¹¹ See Beckford, Robert, *Dread and Pentecostalism: A Political Theology for the Black Church in Britain* (London: SPCK, 2000). See also Reddie, Anthony G., *Black Theology in Transatlantic Dialogue* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), Jagessar, Michael N., and Reddie, Anthony G., (eds.) *Postcolonial Black British Theology* (Peterborough: Epworth press, 2007) and Jagessar, Michael N., and Reddie, Anthony G., (eds.) *Black Theology in Britain: A Reader* (London: Equinox, 2007).

cy in Britain. Most disciplines have woken up to the need to engage with critical theory. They've engaged with diversity at the core, thinking more critically and constructively about how they shape things. Sociology students here at Goldsmith's take courses in 'critical Whiteness'. In theology circles they'd think you were dealing with table cloths they have at different times of the year!¹²

At the time of writing it is interesting to note the paucity of theological texts written by White British authors seeking to explore the relationship between empire, colonialism, Whiteness, racism and the church in Britain.¹³ The almost complete absence of literature pertaining to the collusion between Imperial Missionary Christianity and Black people of faith remains one of the significant challenges facing Black and Asian theologians in the British context. R.S. Sugirtharajah, the doyen of Postcolonial Biblical hermeneutics writing on the development of Imperial Missionary Christianity writes:

It is no coincidence that the founding of all these missionary societies took place contemporaneously with the activities of the trading companies like the East India Company and the Dutch East India Company. The East India Company initially resisted the presence of the missionaries. It feared that the interference of missionaries in local religious customs and manners might be counter-productive to its mercantile interests. However, [with] the renewal of the Company's charter in 1833 and the abolition of its monopoly, missionary enterprise received a boost....Once the impediment to missionary work was removed, the missionaries themselves became willing supporters of commercial expansion.¹⁴

¹² Interview with Robert Beckford in *Reform* – URC magazine. (London: 86 Tavistock Place, June 2010), pp.12.

¹³ To the best of my knowledge these texts include Leech, Kenneth, *Struggle in Babylon* (London: Sheldon press, 1988), Leech, Kenneth, *Race: Changing Society and the Churches* (London: SPCK, 2005), Haslam, David, *Race for the Millennium: a Challenge to Church and Society* (London: Church House for the Churches' Commission on Racial Justice [CCRJ], 1996), Haslam, David, *The Churches and 'Race': a Pastoral Approach* (Cambridge: Grove books, 2001), Wilkinson, John L., *Church in Black and White : the Black Christian Tradition in 'Mainstream' Churches in England: a White Response and Testimony* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1993), Gorrington, Timothy J., *Furthering Humanity: A Theology of Culture* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2004).

¹⁴ Sugirtharajah, R.S., *Postcolonial Reconfigurations: An Alternative Way of*

But if the legacy of the under explored relationship between ‘Christianity, Commerce, and Civilisation’¹⁵ within White British theological circles is a cause for concern, the record amongst Black Christians in Britain has, until comparatively recently, been equally lamentable. I must make the point at this juncture that the absence of writing in terms of the latter has not been an indication of the lack of ability amongst Black people of African descent to write. One can point to such landmark texts as the now iconic *The Empire Strikes Back*,¹⁶ produced by the then ‘Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies’ at the University of Birmingham, as an example of the excellent work undertaken by Black British scholars. This work has become part of a larger tradition of cultural studies and sociological work that has made explicit the relationship between the Christian super-structure that buttressed and offered the necessary theological underscoring of the colonially-led, missionary enterprise that underpinned empire and the development of Britain’s imperial might, at home and abroad.¹⁷ It should be noted that it took some twenty-five years for Black Theology in Britain to produce its equivalent text.¹⁸

It was not until the 1990s, in fact, 1990 to be precise that the

Reading the Bible and Doing Theology (London: SCM, 2003) pp.24.

¹⁵ Comments made by Stanley Livingstone to sum up the imperial colonial missionary enterprise in Africa. See Nkomazana, Fidelis, ‘Livingstone’s Ideas of Christianity, Commerce and Civilisation’. *Botswana Journal of African Studies* Vol.12, Nos. 1 & 2, (1998), pp.45-57.

¹⁶ See *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 1970s Britain* (London and New York: Routledge in association with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1982).

¹⁷ Within the British context, this work has, until more recent times, been undertaken with greater alacrity by sociologists and cultural theorists than theologians. Amongst the best work that has emerged from the former, see The University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain* (London: Hutchinson, 1982). See also Sivanandan, A., *A Different Hunger: Writings on Black Resistance* (London: Pluto Press, 1982); Prescod, Colin and Waters, Hazel, (eds.) *A World to Win: Essays in Honour of A. Sivanandan* (London: Institute of Race Relations, 1999); and Kundnani, Arun, *The End of Tolerance: Racism in 21st Century Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 2007). To my mind, the best collective work from a Black theology perspective in Britain can be found in Jagessar, Michael N., and Reddie, Anthony G., (eds.) *Black Theology in Britain: A Reader* (London: Equinox, 2007).

¹⁸ Jagessar, Michael N., and Reddie, Anthony G., (eds.) *Black Theology in Britain:*

development of Black, politically charged Christian writing in Britain began to emerge that would challenge the sleeping elephant in the room. *A Time to Speak*¹⁹ and its sequel, *A Time To Act*²⁰ were landmark texts that began to demonstrate the importance of linking confessional Christian faith to critical reflections on racism, White Supremacy and colonialism. These important texts were in turn, followed by the now iconic first, fully-fledged Black Theology text in Britain by Robert Beckford, entitled *Jesus Is Dread*.²¹

While Black Theology in Britain (about which I will comment more in a moment) has continued to grow and develop since the first texts were produced in the 1990s, it nevertheless remains a minority pursuit amongst most Black Christians. It is the contention of this author that greater attention to Black Theology would enable Black Christians in Britain to be better equipped to deconstruct the debilitating effects of internalised oppression and self-negation that has remained the constant legacy of Imperial Missionary Christianity in the psyche of some Black people of Christian faith in Britain.

In using the term ‘Postcolonial Britain’, in the context of this paper, I am seeking to problematise the overarching political, economic and cultural frameworks that have circumscribed and constrained Black subjectivity and life in this country since the 18th century.

In an earlier piece of work my colleague, Michael Jagessar and I introduce the notion of ‘postcolonialism’ by saying it:

is not about the demise of colonialism as ‘post’ since it embodies both ‘after’ and ‘beyond’. It is not about historical chronologies, but more about a critical stance, oppositional tactic or subversive reading strategy.²²

A Reader (London: Equinox, 2007).

¹⁹ Grant, Paul and Patel, Raj, (eds.) *A Time To Speak: Perspectives of Black Christians in Britain* (Birmingham: A Joint Publication of ‘Racial Justice’ and the ‘Black Theology Working Group’, 1990).

²⁰ Grant, Paul and Patel, Raj, (eds.) *A Time To Act: Kairos 1992* (Birmingham: A Joint Publication of ‘Racial Justice’ and the ‘Black and Third World Theology Working Group’, 1992).

²¹ Beckford, Robert, *Jesus is Dread: Black Theology and Black Culture in Britain* (London: DLT, 1998).

²² Jagessar, Michael N., and Reddie, Anthony G., (eds.) *Postcolonial Black British Theology* (Peterborough: Epworth press, 2006), pp.xvii

Postcolonialism is a critical, intellectual and methodological approach to deconstructing and unmaking the surreptitious, hegemonic power of colonialism, which arises from the toxic residue of empire. It is worth quoting R.S. Sugirtharajah at length, at this juncture. Sugirtharajah, reflecting on the nature and purpose of postcolonialism as a counter-hegemonic, anti-imperial discourse writes:

First, in a historical sense, it encapsulates the social, political and cultural conditions of the current world order, bringing to the fore the cultural, political and economic facts of colonialism, and aiding the recognition of the ambiguities of decolonialization and the ongoing recolonialization. Secondly, as a critical discursive practice, postcolonial criticism has initiated arresting analyses of texts and societies. It provides openings for oppositional readings, uncovers suppressed voices and, more pertinently, has as its foremost concern victims and their plight. It has not only interrogated colonial domination but has also offered viable critical alternatives. Thirdly, the term applies to the political and ideological stance of an interpreter who is engaged in anti-colonial and anti-globalizing theory and praxis. Applied to biblical studies, it seeks to uncover colonial designs in both biblical texts and their interpretation, and endeavours to read the text from such postcolonial concerns as identity, hybridity and diaspora.²³

Black Christianity in Britain, in its various guises, has been ‘infected’ by the viral strain of Imperial Missionary Christianity, that has exerted a form of cultural dissonance on the colonised mind of the Black Christian subject in the UK, to such an extent, that many are unable to incorporate their own material realities and existential needs alongside that of their faith. What one often sees exemplified in some Black Christians in Britain is a de-contextualised faith, which incorporates, at a subterranean level, all the traits and hallmarks of a form of self-negation of Blackness. This as a corollary, then, manifests itself in a form of religio-cultural ‘turkeys looking forward to Christmas’ type syndrome, which cares more about abstract theologising as opposed to contextual analysis of colonial, Mission-imparted Christianity.

One can witness this, for example, in the number of prominent

²³ Sugirtharajah, R.S., *Postcolonial Reconfigurations: An Alternative Way of Reading the Bible and Doing Theology*, (London: SCM Press, 2003), p.4.

Black Christians who chose to sign the ‘Westminster Declaration’,²⁴ which whilst not overly ‘Party Political’, nonetheless, adhered to the basic tenets of right-wing, ‘family values’ political rhetoric. The latter, which has remained consonant with those proponents who are more likely to want to argue for the ‘decline of Christian Britain’, form the high water bench mark of empire and colonialism.

I am not arguing that all the signatures to the document subscribe to the rhetoric of Britain’s glorious past (although several of them do), it is that the link between this discourse and the implicit language of Britain’s imperial past was not made by these Black Christians. That White conservative Christians might want to sign such a document seems axiomatic—the fact that Black Christians should do so might be construed as being psychotic.

As I hope to demonstrate in the context of this work, Black Theology in Britain can be best exemplified as the critical, intellectual and discursive practice that has attempted to offer a more politicised conception of Christian for the expressed purposes of Black existential liberation.²⁵

²⁴ The pre-amble to the Westminster Declaration reads thus: ‘Protecting human life, protecting marriage, and protecting freedom of conscience are foundational for creating and maintaining strong families, caring communities and a just society. Our Christian faith compels us to speak and act in defence of all these.’ See <http://www.westminster2010.org.uk/declaration/> for further details.

²⁵ This work is exemplified in a number of the significant texts in the British context. See Beckford, Robert, *Jesus is Dread: Black Theology and Black Culture in Britain* (London: DLT, 1998), Beckford, Robert, *Dread and Pentecostal: A Political Theology for the Black Church in Britain* (London: SPCK, 2000), Beckford, Robert, *God of the Rahtid* (London: DLT, 2001), Reddie, Anthony G., *Nobodies to Somebodies: A Practical Theology for Education and Liberation* (Peterborough: Epworth press, 2003), *Dramatizing Theologies: A Participative Approach to Black God Talk* (London: Equinox, 2006), *Black Theology in Transatlantic Dialogue* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), *Working Against The Grain: Re-Imaging Black Theology in the 21st Century* (London: Equinox, 2008), Jagessar, Michael N., and Reddie, Anthony G., (eds.) *Postcolonial Black British Theology* (Peterborough: Epworth press, 2007) and *Black Theology in Britain: A Reader* (London: Equinox, 2007). See also *Black Theology in Britain: A Journal of Contextual Praxis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998-2002) and *Black Theology: An International Journal* (London: Equinox, 2002-).

Black Theology in Britain

When speaking of Black Theology in Britain, I am speaking of the specific self-named enterprise of re-interpreting the meaning of God as revealed in Jesus the Christ, in light of existential Black experience in Britain. This approach to engaging with the Christian tradition is not unlike Black Theology in differing arenas like the U.S. or South Africa, where one's point of departure is the existential and ontological reality of Blackness and the Black experience, in dialogue with 'Holy Scripture'.

Black Theology in Britain, like all theologies of liberation, is governed by the necessity of ortho-praxis rather than orthodoxy. In using this statement, what I mean to suggest is that one's starting point in talking about God is governed by the necessity to find a basis for acting in response to the existential struggles and vicissitudes of life, which impinge upon one's daily operations in the attempt to be a human being. The need to respond to the realities of life as it is lived in postcolonial Britain is one that has challenged many Black British Christians to seek, in God, a means of making sense of situations that seem inherently senseless.²⁶

In seeking to make sense of the Black condition in Britain, Black Theology has been inspired by the work, of predominantly, North American scholars, most notably James Cone,²⁷ Delores Williams²⁸ and Jackie Grant.²⁹ The frameworks for re-imaging Christianity by means of an explorative heuristic of Black hermeneutics, drawn from Black existential experience, has been most forcibly explored from within the British context by Robert Beckford.³⁰

In seeking to outline the definitional dimensions and parameters

²⁶ These themes are explored to great effect by Robert Beckford in the third of his groundbreaking trilogy of work *God of The Rahtid* (London: DLT, 2003), pp.1-30.

²⁷ See Cone, James H., *A Black Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis. 1986).

²⁸ See Williams, Delores, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Press, 1993).

²⁹ See Grant, Jacqueline, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus* (Atlanta: Scholar's press, 1989).

³⁰ See Beckford, Robert, *Dread and Pentecostal: A Political Theology for the Black Church in Britain* (London: SPCK, 2000).

of Black Theology in Britain, I am forced to acknowledge my own myopia at this juncture in the proceedings. For whilst there is a growing wealth of literature that has explored Black theology from within other religious paradigms, including Rastafari,³¹ Hinduism³² and traditional African religions,³³ Black Theology in Britain, like her counterparts in South Africa or the U.S., has been dominated by a Christian-inspired gaze.

Combining Black Theology with transformative, experiential knowledge

The bulk of my scholarly work has been concerned with exploring the relationship between Black theological reflection and differing forms of Christian education. In this work I am interested in how the latter—by means of transformative, experiential learning can be achieved through the framework provided by the central tenets of Black Theology. My own engagement with transformative learning has its roots in my engagement with Paulo Freire, Ira Shor and James A. Banks. The latter describes transformative knowledge as that which challenges the dominant theories and paradigms that constitute the normative frames of epistemology.³⁴ Transformative knowledge proceeds from a critical, dialectical inquiry into the very basis of what constitutes knowledge and truth.³⁵ Central to the epistemological framing of transformative knowledge is the challenging of the alleged objectivity of western scholasticism. Banks asserts that ‘The assumption within the Western empirical paradigm is that knowledge produced within it is

³¹ See Spencer, William David, *Dread Jesus* (London: SPCK, 1999).

³² Jagessar, Michael N., ‘Liberating Cricket: Through the Optic of Ashutosh Gowariker’s Lagaan’, *Black Theology: An International Journal* (Vol.2, No.2, July 2004) pp.239-249.

³³ Karran, Kampta, ‘Changing Kali: From India to Guyana to Britain’, *Black Theology in Britain: A Journal of Contextual Praxis* (Vol.4, No.1., Nov. 2001) pp. 90-102.

³⁴ Banks, James A., (ed.) *Multicultural Education, Transformative Knowledge and Action: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1996) p.9

³⁵ See Habermas, Jurgen, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Boston: Beacon, 1971).

neutral and objective and that its principles are universal'.³⁶

Banks' challenge to the seemingly axiomatic centrality of the western empirical tradition is central to this work. In this method for engaging with controversial subject matter in the teaching-learning process, I am inviting adult learners to reflect in a critical, dialectical manner on what constitutes truth, using Black Theology as a normative theological paradigm through which this process of transformative knowledge takes place. It is the dominant, captive possession of knowledge and truth arising from the western empirical tradition that has provided the vital underscoring of the construction of White Eurocentric hegemony, in which Christian theology and the church has been a convenient hand-maiden. Emmanuel Eze has demonstrated the potent and corrosive relationship between Enlightenment thought and White Eurocentric knowledge construction and the hierarchical claims for White superiority and supremacy.³⁷

Perhaps the central task of this work is that of using the frameworks of transformative knowledge, coupled with Black Theology, in order to critically re-evaluate the essential meaning of Blackness and the ontological value of Black people. Perhaps the centrality and import of this task can be perceived in the following quotation from Gayraud Wilmore, who writes:

'If I had a choice before I was born to be one color or the other, which would I prefer and why?' The pejorative connotations continued in the English vocabulary where we continue to speak of 'black-mail', 'blackguards', 'black sheep of the family', or of having one's reputation 'blackened'. All these and many more found in the dictionaries, are negative images that reflect on Africans and Diasporic descendents. On the other hand, whiteness has been consistently presented to the world as something positive—something connoting goodness, cleanliness, beauty, holiness, and purity. It would be much fairer to make the case that we are all somehow 'obsessed' with color than to single out the psychology of black people as unfortunate. As much as we may deplore it, the color symbolism of our language in Great Britain and North America gives the white-

³⁶ Banks, James A., *Race, Culture and Education: The Selected Works of James A. Banks* (London & New York: Routledge, 2006) pp.148.

³⁷ See Eze, Emmanuel C., *Race and The Enlightenment: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

ness/blackness dichotomy ontological significance—at least, up to the end of the twentieth century. We must wait and see what happens now in the twenty-first, but not look for any startling changes.³⁸

Transformative knowledge in the context of this work alludes to a critical process of reflection and action on how oppressive epistemologies are constructed and enacted. It is an invitation to ordinary learners (of all ethnicities) to critically assess the veracity of particular truth claims and the processes that produce hegemonic, interlocking systems and structures that constrict and inhibit the God-given selfhood of Black peoples.

Using Black Theology as a heuristic device for illustrating the illusory dimensions of the White, Euro-American western world order, this work seeks to enable ordinary people to pose critical questions and to gain important insights on truth and knowledge, in the hope that what accrues from this educative process is a form of learning that is transformative. As bell hooks has observed, transformative knowledge can give rise to new, distinctive forms of thinking, which as a corollary, can assist in re-shaping one's perception of reality that is not conditioned or silenced by the hegemonic, patriarchal constructs of imperialism and androcentric totalism.³⁹

What does this look like in practice?

The theoretical paradigms provided by Transformative knowledge and learning clearly inform this approach to Black theological reflection. The use of experiential models of learning, in which the adult learner is immersed within a constructed exercise, game or drama, becomes a means by which they are enabled to reflect critically on the immediate experiences and feelings that have accrued from the activity itself. Participants are invited to reflect on what they have felt and learnt whilst being immersed within the embodied, metaphorical activity that

³⁸ Wilmore, Gayraud S., *Pragmatic Spirituality: The Christian Faith Through an Africentric Lens* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), pp.142-143.

³⁹ hooks, bell, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp.93-128.

forms the active element in the Practical theological process that has emerged from what I have now termed as 'Participative Black Theology'.⁴⁰

Immediately following the performance of the exercise, role-play/game, I usually spend several minutes with the participants helping them to reflect upon the events in which they have just taken part. Participants are encouraged to connect with their feelings for a few moments as they reflect on the implications of the embodied metaphorical exercise for the faith positions and theology they presently hold. Oftentimes, within the central activity, there will be inbuilt dynamics that seek to represent the issues of contestation and argument that are often commonplace in all philosophical and religious frameworks that give substance to and which act as meaning-making operations in life. This opportunity for reflection is essential because it provides the necessary bridge between previous beliefs and attitudes, and the possibility of critical, reflective change that sometimes accrues from the performative activity.

Central to the working of the exercise/game or role-play is the sense that at the heart of this approach to theological reflection is the demand, indeed the expectation that participants are willing to enter into the 'internal logic' of the activity. By internal logic, I am referring to a process in which the participant takes seriously the perspective of the performative activity itself—that is, they are acted upon and are active subjective selves within the activity in which they are a part. It is essential that each participant imbues their role within the activity with a degree of seriousness. This does not mean that the activity is one replete with solemnity and sententiousness. On the contrary, I would argue that comedy and laughter have been central ingredients in all my participative Black Theology work since its earliest conception in the mid 1990s.⁴¹ This mode of behaviour is not unlike that demanded of

⁴⁰ This work is best exemplified in two books: See Reddie, Anthony G., *Dramatizing Theologies: A Participative Approach to Black God Talk* (London: Equinox, 2006) and Reddie, Anthony G., *Working Against The Grain: Re-imaging Black Theology in the 21st century* (London: Equinox, 2008).

⁴¹ The use of comedy can be seen in several of my books. As The Revd Dr Colin Morris has been known to remark, 'The opposite of funny, is unfunny, not serious'. i.e. that there is no oxymoron in juxtaposing 'funny' and 'serious' in any approach to theological reflection. Jacqueline Bussie has written an award winning study on

participants in Groome's⁴² or Berryman's⁴³ respective educational approaches to Practical theology.

This approach to undertaking educational, transformative Black Theology-related teaching is one that challenges Black Christian learners to suspend reality as they have experienced it and to enter into the basic logic of a 'simple game', in which they are invited to engage and interact with others. The premise of the game or exercise may appear absurd or ridiculous, but participants are challenged to take the game seriously, in terms of their participation in it.

This sense of asking participants to suspend their critical, realist judgements, in order to enter into the internal logic and dynamic of a piece of activity, is one that lies at the centre of this approach to the teaching and learning of so-called controversial topics. This approach is one that seeks to engage with the emotional or the affective repertoire of adult learners and not just the cognitive domains of the human self. The process is also critical because in the final analysis, it is with the emotional or the affective self that profound changes in religious consciousness are most likely to accrue. The best theology is never just a cognitive affair. It is one that engages not only the emotions, but perhaps, most crucially, it stimulates the imagination. What would happen if one were enabled to see something completely differently? How might one's perception of God be changed, if through an exercise, one were able to witness, if only a glimpse, of another way of knowing, or an alternative mode of being?

As an educator, using this method of teaching and learning, perhaps the greatest challenge that confronts me is the need to ensure that I seek to create an environment in which participants can be

the relationship between laughter, oppression and resistance. The pointed use of laughter and comedy becomes a means of effecting resistance in the face of oppression and marginalisation. See Bussie, Jacqueline, *Laughter of the Oppressed: Ethical and Theological Resistance in Wiesel, Morrison and Endo* (New York and London: T&T Clark, 2006).

⁴² See Groome, Thomas H., *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministries* (San Francisco: Harper-San Francisco, 1991) and *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass [1st published 1980] 1999).

⁴³ Berryman, Jerome W., *Godly Play: An Imaginative Approach to Religious Education* (Minneapolis: Augsburg [1st published in 1991 by Harper: San Francisco] 1995).

enabled to ask critical questions of the Christianity and some of the underlying theology that underpins many of the accepted norms of the faith. In the learning environment of the classroom or the workshop, the use of such activity-based learning is to provide a cathartic space in which the participant can be enabled to see that there are differing possibilities to what we often assess as religious truth.

Re-visiting an old exercise

The exercise that follows is one I have used on many occasions to demonstrate how an imperial, Eurocentric missionary inspired interpretation of Christianity has led to many Black people interpreting the truths of the Christian faith in a manner that negates their Blackness and unwittingly supports White supremacy.

The exercise I created was entitled *Are You in the Story?* After further revisions and amendments it was later incorporated into the introductory material in volume two of *Growing into Hope*.⁴⁴ This exercise was intended to help leaders understand more clearly a process that has afflicted African people for approximately five hundred years. A process of mis-education and biased, self-serving teaching strategies have led African people to develop a negative psychological condition manifested primarily as a form of self-denial. This can be seen in the inability of 'colonised' people to assert their own worth, or to see themselves reflected positively in popular stories, myths or historical events that have become central within the narratives of the metropolitan centre.

The aim of this experiential exercise is to describe clearly one of the principal sub-texts of *Growing into Hope*, namely, the need for oppressed people to re-interpret and appropriate the defining narratives that constitute story/vision (of the Gospel) for their ultimate liberation. This work enables Black Christians to attempt to claim the Gospel of Jesus Christ as their own, through the inculturation and re-thinking of the central norms of what constitutes the Christian faith.

The exercise asks individuals to imagine a scene from the Bible—I chose John's account of the feeding of the five thousand in chapter

⁴⁴ See Volume Two of *Growing Into Hope: Liberation And Change*, pp. 7-8.

6, verses 1-15. All participants are asked to imagine the scene in the story in as much detail as is possible. What does Jesus look like? What are the disciples like? What is the boy wearing? How do they see the crowd? What is the cultural setting of the scene?

Having imagined the scene in great detail, individuals are then asked to reflect upon where they are in the story. If individuals see themselves as one of the disciples at the centre of the story, then they are encouraged to walk to one particular side of the room. Conversely, if they are mere bystanders, standing near the back of the crowd, then they are encouraged to walk to another side of the room. Finally, I ask some if they are even in the scene at all, or are they watching the action as if they are in a living room, far removed from the whole event, viewing everything on television?

The crucial learning that has resulted from this exercise is the sense that marginalised and oppressed Black people tend to see themselves as distant spectators in God's story, not as central players.⁴⁵ This in itself should not surprise us. If broader society largely confines Black people to subservient and demeaning roles, then why should we necessarily expect these self same people to imagine themselves in central, defining positions within biblical narratives? In the exercise, it is often the case that biblical narratives and their concomitant, underlying theological themes are re-interpreted in light of English societal manners and social mores.

In my initial doctoral research back in the mid 1990s, I was concerned to locate a mechanism that would enable Black Christians to experientially inhabit the Christian 'story' by means of a process of self-actualisation. Reflecting back on that work, I want to return to some of my words, written in the late 1990s, taken from volume two of *Growing into Hope: Liberation and Change*. In opening that text I state that:

In much of our Biblical reflection and related materials, we present a one-dimensional image of the Bible. The Eurocentric perspective holds sway, and the stories and events become re-enactments of European culture, incorporating their values and beliefs. In such circumstances, Black children are excluded. They, coming from a variety of backgrounds and informed by different cultures, are

⁴⁵ See Reddie, Anthony, *Growing into Hope: Liberation And Change*, pp. 8-9.

simply observing. They are watching, but are not a part of the story, or the ongoing traditions of faith. They are observers who do not belong in the truest and fullest sense of the word.

Many studies by researchers in education have shown, clearly, that many black children, when they are asked to imagine people in their minds or to draw pictures that are visual representations of themselves or people they would like to become, these images are often of white, European models and are not accurate pictures of themselves or people recognised as members of their family. Such has been the dominance of white images and models that are always presented as being the norm, that for many black children, these white forms become more desirable than those images that represent their own cultural backgrounds and identities.

We need to find inclusive images, stories and alternative ways of reading these narratives, in order that different cultures and backgrounds are depicted and that Black children and young people can feel a part of the story. – That they can believe that they belong and are not simply observing or standing aside, looking on.⁴⁶

This process of performative action operates within constructed, often contested spaces in which religious participants are invited to adopt particular roles in various exercises (such as the one I have just described) as a part of an imaginative process of role-playing.

The exercise I have described has been used as a means of enabling many confessional Black Christians to reflect on their inherited belief structures in a more critical manner; but using a learning device that enables them to adopt the semantic game-playing of pretending it is 'just a game'.

This particular approach is necessary because many confessional Black Christian believers will enter the theology class intent upon defending their inherited faith.⁴⁷ A number of Black scholars have

⁴⁶ See Reddie, Anthony, *Growing into Hope: Liberation And Change*, (ibid.) p. 8.

⁴⁷ The renowned Euro-American religious educator, John Westerhoff identifies a four part typology in Christian faith formation and development. He argues that people move from 'Experienced' faith to 'Affiliative' faith, through to 'Searching' faith and finally 'Owned' faith. See *Unfinished Business: Children and the*

demonstrated the extent to which Christianity as a global phenomenon has drunk deeply from the well of Eurocentric philosophical thought at the expense of African or other overarching forms of epistemology.⁴⁸ Black Christianity in Britain has imbibed these overarching Eurocentric, Greek influenced thought forms, often at their expense of their own identity and African forms of epistemology. This adherence to 19th century Biblicism has meant that the blandishments of Historical-Critical Biblical studies, for example, have barely failed to penetrate the edifice of the Black Christianity across the world.

It is interesting to note that many Black evangelicals will argue vehemently against notion of syncretism (the coming together of and mixing of differing religious and philosophical frameworks as a way of understanding and talking about God). In the many workshops I have led over the years in a variety of Black Christian communities, I have lost count the number of times I have heard Black Christians rail against the incorporation of ‘African Cultural practices’, for example, in any understanding of the Christian faith. Even when one can point to respected scholars such as Gayraud Wilmore, one of the architects of African American Black Theology, as evidence of the legitimacy of such an approach, many ordinary Black people of faith remain steadfastly unconvinced.⁴⁹

Yet, when I have then reminded them (some at least) and told others (for the first time), that much of John’s Gospel, particularly the opening sections, which describe the Cosmic Christ as the ‘Logos’ is in fact a Greek philosophical idea; which represents the very kind of syncretism they claim to despise, many remain silent on this matter.⁵⁰ It would seem that syncretism is not really that appalling when the

Churches (London: The Consultative Group on Ministry among Children, CCBI publications, 1995), p.35. See also , Westerhoff, John, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (New York: Sebury Press, 1973).

⁴⁸ See Hood, Robert E., *Must God Remain Greek?: Afro-Cultures and God-Talk* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990). See also Byron, Gay L., *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

⁴⁹ See Wilmore, Gayraud S., *Pragmatic Spirituality: The Christian Faith Through an Africentric Lens* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2004), pp. 87-152.

⁵⁰ This issue is raised by Robert E. Hood in his landmark *Must God Remain Greek?: Afro-Cultures and God-Talk* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

dictates of orthodoxy sanction it. Perhaps, more critically, the issue may be more concerned, not with whether Christians can tolerate syncretism (for clearly all of us can, to some extent), but more pertinently, with what kind of syncretism can some of us live?⁵¹

While the inclusion of White-Euro-American religious thought forms as a means of enabling us to culturally appropriate the Christian faith seem acceptable, the inclusion of Black-African traditions seems not to be. In more recent times, one can point to the work of Michelle Gonzalez, who has undertaken considerable work looking at the relationship between Afro-Cuban religious traditions and Roman Catholicism on that particular island.⁵²

For the most part, Black Christianity in Britain is often locked into literalistic readings of the Bible, in which many adherents claim to believe the whole of the canon as being divinely inspired and the supreme authority in all matters.⁵³ My concern in assisting Black Christians in Britain to reflect on and to re-assess the implications of their Christian faith arises from the dangers of reading subliminal Whiteness into their overarching hermeneutical frameworks for interpreting truth. When some Black Christians claim to be defending 'Christian Britain' what they are in effect stating in covert ways is a desire to protect normative Whiteness. When some claim that the BNP 'may have a point', once again what such protestations illustrate is a penchant for re-scribing White supremacy, often at their own expense, which is at a variance with their experiential, social realities. White Imperial Missionary Christianity does not need Black subjugated minds and bodies to defend it. Black Theology offers a means by which

⁵¹ As Hood reminds us, it would appear that so long as 'White' European cultures and thought forms are being intertwined with so-called 'pure' Christianity, then any notion of syncretism (often rarely admitted as such, however) can be tolerated. But when Black African traditions are being utilised like Vodun in Haiti or Santería in Cuba, then the dictates of White Euro-American hegemony are brought to bear, often at the expense of the latter. See Hood, Robert E., *Must God Remain Greek?*, (ibid.) pp. 43-102.

⁵² See Gonzalez, Michelle A., *Afro-Cuban Theology: Religion, Race, Culture and Identity* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2006).

⁵³ See 'The Statement of Faith' of the influential Council for Black-Led Churches. <http://www.cbllcuk.com/membership/index.php?pageID=429> Accessed 22/3/2010.

this specious artefact from colonial history and empire can be resisted and hopefully, deconstructed.

Having used a number of embodied, metaphorical activities in a number of educative settings, be it formal classrooms and informal workshops in Black communities across the UK, indeed, across the world, I can attest to the ways in which they can be helpful means of creating subtle nuances, multiple meanings and new interpretations for how we understand and assess the meaning of Christian faith in the context of postcolonial Britain.

In this particular method for undertaking Black Liberation theology in the British context, I have adopted an approach that uses experiential exercises as a means enabling ordinary Black people to become part of a process that provides them with opportunities to enter into the performance of theological activity.⁵⁴ The performance is one that encourages them to engage in a fictional game-activity that allows them to enter into the dramatic possibilities of the exercise in order that their often inhibited subjectivity can be challenged by the revealed truth arising from the game itself. That in effect, they are able to tease out or adopt provisional truth claims arising from their engagement with the exercise or game (or some cases drama sketches I have written) without any substantive commitment to that position itself.

This kind of dialectical repository of truth; namely being able to hold to one's confessional belief in many of the creedal building blocks of Christian faith; while being able to juxtapose alternative belief structures is one that is central to this method of teaching and learning and theologising. It is this type of improvisation within the context of an exercise, game or piece of drama that enables ordinary Black people to become part of a process of trying to discern and create new truths, as supplement to their existing confessional belief structures.

This work is built upon the active involvement of ordinary voiceless people.⁵⁵ It is an approach that enables them to engage with

⁵⁴ Some of my initial thinking has been inspired by Jose Irizarry and his notion of theology as 'Performative Action'. Irizarry argues for a dramatic process of doing theology in which participants and the educator enter into a process of performance in which there is an inherent dialectic and from which new truths can be discerned. See Irizarry, Jose R., 'The Religious Educator as Cultural Spec-Actor: Researching Self in Intercultural Pedagogy', *Religious Education* Vol. 98, No. 3, (Summer 2003), pp.365-381.

emotions and aspects of their lived experience and reality of Black people, in manner that brings these elements into conversation with their faith. Hopefully, by means of this kind of educative-theological work, Black participants are enabled to see the links between the constructions of social reality and revealed nature of religious faith. When one is able to combine the two, hopefully, the inane discourse of wanting to defend Imperial Missionary Christianity; the very framework that has often been the cause of one's own estrangement from oneself, will begin to dissipate. Similarly, the desire to want to defend the BNP as defenders of 'Christian Britain' will be disregarded as arrant nonsense.

This dialectical process is one that eschews the blandishments of Imperial Missionary Christianity, with its emphasis upon upholding and supporting the unreconstructed and unacknowledged pernicious normality that is Whiteness and White supremacy. This approach is one that teaches ordinary Black people to be just a tad wary of the exalted possibilities of heaven as proclaimed to them from within the dictates of White hegemony. I am not asking ordinary Black Christians in Britain not to believe in Heaven, just to be a tad more suspicious of the Imperial Missionary Christianity they have imbibed, and to ask whether the social reality of Blackness as they have experienced it is always best served adhering to a religious tradition that has often been revealed to them in the noxious and toxic fabric of empire, colonialism and neo-colonialism.

⁵⁵ Aspects of this theological dynamic can be found in the Black liturgical practice of the 'Call and Response' tradition of Black preaching, which exists in within numerous Black ecclesial contexts across the African Diaspora. See Fielding Stewart, III, Carlyle, *Black Spirituality and Black Consciousness* (Trenton, New York: Africa World Press, 1999) pp.105-120.

‘Do They Really Believe That?’:

Experiential Learning Outside the Theology and Religious Studies Classroom

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At Bath Spa University, thanks to ‘mini-project’ funding from the HEA Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies, and in partnership with colleagues from Newport and York St. John Universities, we are engaged in a project to explore and enhance the use of experiential and fieldwork learning within Theology and Religious Studies. The main outcomes planned for the ‘Living Religion’ project are:

- i) a survey of departments to discover how widespread is the use of experiential elements;
- ii) increased opportunities for fieldwork placements gained

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- from sharing ideas and resources;
- iii) provision of on-line support materials; and
- iv) to encourage a dialogue about religion as lived experience.

We value experiential learning as providing for students a direct encounter with Cultural and Religious Diversity which may sometimes also ‘court controversy’ as students are brought face to face with beliefs, values and lifestyles which they may not share and which may even be directly opposed to their own.

Cultural and Religious Diversity denotes the plurality of beliefs and values that characterises modern Britain. However, the nature and relationship of both culture and religion are contested. For example, opinions differ on the meaning and status of culture and religion: whether culture is an unambiguously human creation whereas religion has a divine or transcendent source; if culture is believed to be a stable inheritance or it is in a constant process of creation; and if religion is believed to possess an essence and true existence or if it is identified as an act of imagination associated with the modern West with only a derivative and dependent reality (Cush, 2008: 48-49; Lincoln, 2000: 409; Nesbitt, 2004: 139; Smith, 1982: xi). Opinions also differ on the connection and scope of culture and religion: sometimes culture and religion are seen as interchangeable, sometimes as incommensurable; while culture may be regarded as incorporating religion or, alternatively, religion may be deemed to include and extend beyond, or even above, culture (Cush, 2008: 48; Hulsether, 2005: 500). In such circumstances, the phrase Cultural and Religious Diversity points to a range of conceptual issues.

Moreover, Cultural and Religious Diversity is only one, albeit complex, dimension of the wider Equality and Diversity agenda. Consequently, while Cultural and Religious Diversity presents itself particularly prominently within Theology and Religious Studies, other aspects such as age, disability, gender and sexuality are also encompassed by the overarching Equality and Diversity agenda. Indeed, since cultures and religions, on whatever definition, have norms and expectations that are relevant to features of this wider agenda, they offer ethical perspectives on and insights into conduct and lifestyle. In turn, these pose their own problems, while also affording exciting opportunities, for students encountering lived religion given that, as Weller

(2008:192) observes, there are '[t]ensions [b]etween the "[s]trands" ' of Equality and Diversity (an obvious issue in the news and in our recent research experience being attitudes to diverse sexual orientations).

Questionnaires were sent by email to 40 Theology/Religious Studies Departments with a response rate of 19 out of 40. Fourteen of the nineteen respondents indicated that departments do offer experiential elements here defined as students engaging directly with religious practitioners in their own settings (rather than say as visiting speakers). It might be presumed that those who did not respond are less likely to be engaged in these activities, but it is interesting that the five departments who did not do so cited mainly practical difficulties. Thus at least one in three departments offer experiential elements which were discovered to be mainly of four types: the day visit, to a place of worship or religious interest, usually led by a tutor; the study visit abroad (e.g. India, Korea, Egypt); the fieldwork placement in a specific community and the vocational placement in, for example, youth work or for ministerial training. One interesting discovery was that not one department had a specific policy on experiential learning, an omission the project seeks to rectify.

To focus on our own institution, which offers Religious Studies but not Theology, we offer day visits, a study visit abroad (South Korea) and a one-week fieldwork placement in a religious community. Such elements have been considered a vital part of the curriculum for several decades and have been given a high priority in our use of resources. At this point it is appropriate to explore the rationale for this stress on experiential elements.

By experiential elements we mean learning opportunities that involve students in meeting members of faith communities in their own centres and places of worship. One obvious resonance here is with experiential learning. Again, there is much disagreement about how to define it, given that any definition inevitably involves a specific view of both experience and learning so that if there is a consensus it consists in the claim that experiential learning connotes a special sense of experience that informs a distinctive kind of learning. Nevertheless, one definition that has much to recommend it has been proposed by McGill & Warner Weil (1989: 248) as follows:

The process whereby people individually and in association with

others, engage in direct encounter, then purposefully reflect upon, validate, transform, give personal meaning to and seek to integrate their different ways of knowing. Experiential learning therefore enables the discovery of possibilities that may not be evident from direct experience alone.

This definition conveys two of the vital features of experiential elements in Theology and Religious Studies, these being direct encounter, in our case with religious people in religious places, and reflection on this experience, in our case often associated with assessment.

Jennifer Moon (1994: 120) suggests that experiential learning has certain connotations, among which is the unmediated nature of the process that is based upon direct experience and active engagement as well as the role of reflection and the availability of feedback. Crucially, experiential learning is framed by what Moon (1994: 120) calls the ‘formal intention to learn’ and is believed to offer ‘a favoured manner of learning’. These two features clearly cohere with the inclusion of experiential elements within Theology and Religious Studies where they are embedded in student programmes and where, we wish to argue, they do indeed offer an especially valuable learning opportunity that can foster genuine respect for and appreciation of another life-world.

Yet experiential elements have another resonance—religious experience. The term religious experience is in common currency yet, arguably for this reason, lacks clarity and focus (Fitzgerald, 2000: 125). In part, this reflects debate about religion as *sui generis* and thus about religious experience as distinct and different from other types of experience (Connolly, 1999: 137; Merkur, 2005: 173). Although it is necessary to bear in mind that religious experience is difficult to define, for present purposes it is more pertinent to note that there may be more of a division within Theology and Religious Studies since, while this contrast can be overstated, Theology students may be working within a familiar religious context whereas Religious Studies students tend to be dealing with a variety of religions without necessarily any commitment to any of them. Thus, in general terms, given the explicitly Religious Studies ethos of our course, we are concerned to provide students with experience of religions. That being said, we cannot exclude the possibility that students will have religious experiences, probably more

likely during extended and intensive study though, of course, possible in any visit or placement. Such experiences may be welcome or—and this is the significant issue—unwelcome. Especially in the latter instance, there is an ethical dilemma between openness to the transformative potential of lived religion and the importance of maintaining personal integrity in the face of challenge. Here, in the clash between understanding and empathy, on the one hand, and believing and endorsing, on the other hand, for us at least, is one way in which experiential elements court controversy even if we recognise that this may not be a major concern across Theology and Religious Studies at least in the same form.

The point is that experiential elements do allow for a rich and deep form of learning. It is not that students do not meet Cultural and Religious Diversity in the classroom, whether through interaction with members of staff, visiting speakers or each other, not ignoring textbooks, documentaries and other sources of information and insight. Nevertheless, learning in the classroom can be complemented and/or critiqued by learning outside the classroom where that learning is holistic and contextualised, occurring in the company of religious people and on their sacred ground.

Day visits

At Bath Spa University experiential elements include day visits and it is perhaps worth noting that similar activities emerge as the most common form of experiential element in the survey we conducted of Theology and Religious Studies departments. These are group visits to religious centres and places of worship led/accompanied by a tutor or lecturer but in which students interact with members of faith communities. These visits are arranged for first year students on both the compulsory core module that introduces a range of new religions and alternative spiritualities along with issues in and methods of studying them and the optional modules focused on major religious traditions.

One of these optional modules introduces Sikhism, Buddhism and Hinduism and for this module a day visit is arranged to Bristol. The reason for this is the limited diversity of the city of Bath, suggested by the 2001 census figures which show that 72% of the population

returned as Christian and, of those residents who indicated a religious affiliation of any kind, Christians constituted 98% (Bath and North East Somerset Faith Forum, 2010: 6). There are Sikhs but no Sikh group even though there is a Sikh representative on the local SACRE (Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education). Bath Sikhs themselves go to Bristol to attend gurdwara. There are a number of Buddhist groups, four Tibetan in character (Bath Diamond Way, Bath Jamyang, Bath New Kadampa and Bath Sakya Groups), the multi-tradition Bath Buddhist Group and, in nearby Keynsham, a Soka Gakkai Group. None of these groups have their own centres. There is a Hindu group that is looking towards building its own temple but as of yet is still meeting in rented premises. Therefore, in order to enable students to gain experience of Sikhism, Buddhism and Hinduism, we go to Bristol which has a larger religious minority presence. Students visit the Shri Guru Nanak Prakash Singh Sabha Gurdwara, Lam Rim Bristol (a Tibetan Buddhist Centre combined with the Centre for Whole Health offering complementary medical services and courses in various 'Eastern' arts and disciplines) and the Hindu Temple (Bristol) (founded as the Sanatan Deevya Mandal in 1979 in what was once a Methodist Church). Of the students who completed a questionnaire about this day visit, none had previously visited a gurdwara and only a small proportion had visited a Buddhist or Hindu place of worship. In part, this may reflect the nature of the University's intake which remains predominantly regional with a majority of students drawn from the South-West and Wales where, with some notable exceptions, there are fewer opportunities for such visits.

The day visit for the compulsory core module was to Glastonbury. While Bath has a strong and vibrant alternative scene, Glastonbury has a special reputation as a place of pilgrimage where pilgrims will find a vast assortment of resources and services for spiritual development. Glastonbury is a small Somerset town, about an hour from Bath, with a rich Christian heritage both historical and mythological combined with a strong New Age and Pagan presence and a variety of 'Eastern' influences including Hindu and Buddhist ideas and groups (Bowman, 2005: 159-164, 169-173). What Glastonbury offers is a very different type of diversity where that diversity is religious but not cultural as it often is in minority religions with a particular ethnic or migrant profile (Bowman, 2009: 167) It may be subcultural, of course,

in that its diversity is located in the presence of a particular 'post-Hippy' subculture. On this occasion, students went to the Goddess Temple where they were addressed by a priestess, the Isle of Avalon Foundation where they listened to a druid speaker and Chalice Well Gardens where they saw the well which is identified as the resting place of the Holy Grail but also with the Goddess as well as visiting the Tor and some specialist shops. Most of the students who completed a questionnaire about this day visit indicated that they had had none or very limited experience of practitioners of these New Age and Pagan religions. In terms of prior experience of Glastonbury in particular, some had visited previously (one or two lived nearby) though mainly to go shopping or see the tourist attractions rather than to make pilgrimage. It should be added that these day visits are integral to the modules concerned and attempts are made to bring together the lecture and seminar programme, recommended reading and the visits in order to avoid a shallow and superficial encounter that more resembles tourism than research (cf. Geaves, 2007: 248-249).

Before considering student responses and reactions to these day visits, it is worth setting out why we believe such experiential elements to be so important. Take the now famous example of Ron Geaves' account of bringing first year students to the Baba Balaknath Mandir in Walsall where a nominally Hindu temple containing images of Sikh gurus and Sant masters presided over by a priest who rejected the title of pandit in preference to that of bhagat and who self-identified as Sikh rather than Hindu and with both Sikh and Hindu worshippers unified by their shared Punjabi background (Geaves, 1996). The contrast with the conventional model of religions as discrete reified entities is striking as is the mismatch with official orthodoxy where a Jat Sikh, not wearing the Five Ks that symbolize Khalsa membership, has a family history of priesthood dedicated to Baba Balaknath who is conceived as an incarnation of the Hindu deity, Skanda, and as a forerunner of the first Sikh guru, Nanak (Geaves, 1996). To say the least, those first year students were presented with a version of religions that diverge markedly from standard textbook portrayals and with the dominant images of religion, for instance, the features generally attributed to Sikhism defined on the Khalsa model emerging from the modern Tat Khalsa reforms. What students stood to gain from this, therefore, was a nuanced understanding of lived religion, a snapshot of a particular

religious community at a particular time (cf. Geaves, 2007: 246), that incorporated, even if in a very limited sense, some anthropological or ethnographic data.

The significance of lived religion is increasingly being acknowledged. Vasudha Narayanan (2000) has argued against the hegemony of a textual model of Hinduism, particularly at introductory level, choosing instead to emphasise local independent goddesses and musicians and dancers who do not claim Vedic origins for their arts and insisting that there is a multitude of voices to which we should listen. In order to do this, it is necessary to move beyond a textual approach and a more anthropological or ethnographic methodology has been employed in many recent studies such as those focused upon Buddhism in diaspora (Wuthnow & Cadge, 2004: 363). This methodology is particularly appropriate when examining new trends and movements though its suitability to reveal perspectives other than those normally represented in the academic literature which tend to be high class and male in addition to deriving from a textual source is of more general application (cf. Geaves, 2007: 238).

Certainly our students, when asked in anonymous questionnaires, were able to articulate the advantages of day visits, many stressing the value of first-hand direct experience benefiting from encounter with believers themselves and, borrowing from an image used by a student, moving beyond a two-dimensional account. The impression conveyed is of the authenticity of the insider's account in contrast to the lecturer who is seen as an outsider. However, they also suggested some potential disadvantages where, counterpointing the insider's authenticity, is the notion of bias or selectivity where the outsider is deemed to be objective which makes any deviation from academic norms problematic. It is instructive that one student observed that time was too short to experience much at all, underlining the need for additional and extended experience.

To return to the main point, such responses may be controversial in terms of how we do Theology and Religious Studies—it is clearly one thing to be told that the Sikh holy book, the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, is treated as a human Guru and another to see the bed where it is placed at night or again to be told about the many spiritualities found in Glastonbury and to see this on the ground. Admittedly, this is a comparatively safe and undemanding exposure to lived religion but even

here students expressed some concerns and sensitivities. They were anxious about how to ask questions without giving offence and to observe the protocol and etiquette of the communities they were visiting yet students also had personal issues, for example, unwillingness to bow before the Sri Guru Granth Sahib and how to cope with feelings of antagonism stirred up by a speaker's comments.

Further feedback was given by students in reflective portfolios at the end of the module which included the visit to Glastonbury. Many comments affirmed the value of experiential learning: 'sitting in the Goddess temple is probably one of the best ways one can think of in which to 'feel' and understand the significance of Glastonbury'; however the experiences are not always positive when image and reality were seen to be at odds or when speakers expressed opinions with which students took issue. Others stressed how experiential learning brings surprises; 'the difference between Welsh and English Druids is astonishing'; 'what stayed in my mind was the commercialization...from Wiccan artefacts to Buddha images'. The impact could be personal 'I expected myself [as a non-believer in either Christianity or alternative spiritualities] to be rather indifferent, but it was the total opposite' going on to describe being 'awe-inspired' in the Goddess temple. Interestingly another found significance in the group experience 'being with my colleagues...was a transcendent experience ultimately'.

Fieldwork placements

For purposes of the project, fieldwork placements are defined as intensive or sustained experience, often residential, in which students spend time in religious communities and employ ethnographic methods in their study. A number of departments in our survey used variations on the fieldwork placement.

At Bath Spa students undertake a compulsory one-week placement as part of the core course on studying religions in the contemporary world. The placements used include Buddhist monasteries of various traditions, Christian convents, new religious movements such as ISKCON or the Brahma Kumaris, the Salvation Army, alternative spiritualities in Glastonbury, and a local Gurdwara.

Students can choose their placement, with the proviso that it must not be a tradition that features either as their current personal affiliation or that of their upbringing. The reason for this is to maximise the distance between the beliefs and values of the student and the host community and thus both the experience of Religious and Cultural Diversity, but also of being in a minority in this context. Placements are assessed by both oral/visual presentation and a research project that focuses on a particular theme or issue relevant to the host community and includes reflection on methodological and ethical questions.

The value of fieldwork placements in which students act as ethnographers seems clear to us as the culmination of experiential elements within the undergraduate programme. The suitability of ethnography is evident in this description of the approach:

Ethnography is the study of people in naturally occurring settings or 'fields' by means of methods which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally. (Brewer, 2000: 10)

Fieldwork placements enable students to study religious people in their own communities, thereby to discover what religious people believe and practise by sharing, insofar as is possible, the life of their communities so as to gain the necessary information and insights to offer an authentic interpretation.

Writing in the 1970s, John Saliba (1974: 154-155) advocated an increased use of fieldwork in the study of religions, commenting favourably upon the possible contribution of ethnography in resisting the impulse to impose one's own views of religion and instead in seeking to discern the views of one's informants with openness and without distortion. (Interestingly, given the subject of this paper, Saliba (1974: 155) refers to an understanding of religion as 'simply a form of experiential knowledge' and thus concentrates on various modes of knowing, neither privileging the religious nor prejudging what is religious.) The 2010 OFSTED report on Religious Education in schools also recommends increased use of fieldwork.) Yet, still now, fieldwork is not a mainstream part of Religious Studies scholarship (Geaves, 2007: 249).

This is in spite of fieldwork's significance and benefits albeit combined with particular demands and difficulties. For example, as Geaves (2007: 238, 240, 243, 245, 248) explains, fieldwork offers another dimension, challenging stereotypes of religions and generalizations about them, and undermining essentialist notion of religions as unified and bounded. However, fieldwork requires interaction with other human beings and accordingly means that the fieldworker has to cope, not only with academic issues, but also with her/his personal responses to other worldviews, be they positive or negative, prompting reflection and critique (Geaves, 2007: 240-241). Moreover, the fieldworker's own beliefs may restrict the extent to which s/he can share in the life of the community and pose moral dilemmas about how to conduct oneself so as to remain true to one's own convictions while showing appropriate respect and courtesy to one's hosts (Geaves, 2007: 250-251). Indeed, fieldwork can be engaged as well as ethical in character. For Kim Knott (1995: 209-211), fieldwork is shaped by her feminism and is governed by principles that include '[a]ccountability and partnership'. Perhaps by its very nature, fieldwork promotes personal involvement with, alongside professional responsibility towards, informants.

Our students' thoughts on their fieldwork placements, that echo some of these points and contribute others, were gathered from focus group discussions with separate groups of second and third year students convened by a member of University staff outside the Humanities Department where Study of Religions is located. Students endorsed the fieldwork placement as part of a Religious Studies programme as a new and important form of learning, describing it as both vital and valuable. They emphasized that the placement was integral to a broad-based study of religion with its comparative dimension. One student observed that they had learned far more than they would have from lectures and books, and one commented on the improved grasp of theory and method that was a consequence of applying it for oneself. Among the features of the placement that were identified as particularly rewarding were the opportunity to see a religious community in its everyday life and to learn how to interact with people from different backgrounds. There was also recognition of the role of placements in students' personal and academic development.

Additionally, students' responses ranged across possible chal-

lenges. They alluded to ‘culture shock’ and the need to consider how to cope with this and to the balance between participation and observation in the light of the community’s attitude. Where students were on placement with other students rather than individually, they noted that interpersonal dynamics could be problematic. They recommended keeping an open mind, acknowledging that the placement can lead to questioning one’s own values. Further, they appreciated the merit of independence and self-management in the research setting where initiative and flexibility are useful while they showed awareness of issues of interpretation given doubt about how far their own experiences of a specific community were representative of the religion as a whole.

Some of the students’ responses suggested possible areas of controversy. Students advised future students to remember that their role is not to change the community that they are researching. Yet is it possible to avoid the ‘researcher effect’ when students, either individually or in small groups, for a week or in successive weeks, often over a period of years and, in some cases, decades, live in the community, working and, to some extent at least, worshipping alongside its members? Hostility towards students was also raised where a student felt that s/he had been met with rudeness. Here too there are difficulties since the student is dependent on the community for her/his research and, though consent has to be given on behalf of the community, members may take a different view, especially as our students are, by definition, ‘outsiders’ who do not share the community’s values. A clash of values can also occur where a student is confronted with beliefs and practices that are not only different from her/his own but opposed to them, for example, the perceived indoctrination of children. This may not happen frequently but, when it does, it places a student under great strain and not merely academically, at the same time as bringing into sharp focus tensions associated with a religiously and culturally plural society. Finally, there are the unpredictable implications of participation in religious activities. A student may find such participation makes very little, if any, impact upon them yet it may be inspiring and uplifting or profoundly disturbing. The nature and motivation of participation from the perspective of the community that is committed to its spiritual life may contrast sharply with the perspective of the student for whom participation may be purely instrumental in purpose, whatever its subsequent outcomes and however the student may choose to deal with her/his own

reactions. Recent examples of the experience veering into personal religious experience was a student finding learning to meditate of personal spiritual benefit, and perhaps more worryingly, the student who was so intensely involved with ritual practice that s/he experienced visualizations. Careful briefing gives students some resilience against such occurrences but the tutors do worry about the phone call that announces that the student is not returning either to university or their home having found their spiritual path more important than degree or family.

A survey of recent student projects reveals some new insights such as the ability to understand the role of the divine office in the life of an enclosed community, or of art iconography and ritual in Tibetan Buddhism. There are some surprises such as the business organization needed to run a concern such as Bath Abbey, or individual devotees with very different interpretations from the party line. There are occasions when the student had something approaching a religious experience, or found it hard to maintain an academic perspective when so involved in the life and worship of the community. Finally examples of clashes of values included more than one example where observations, research and interviews revealed gender inequalities in communities with a rhetoric of equality, and other examples where treatment of vulnerable people were queried.

Concluding observations

The value of experiential elements, we would argue, is that cultural and religious diversity is experienced in the raw and at first hand. The plurality of beliefs and values both across and within traditions is underlined as are the complex interactions of the 'religious' and the 'cultural', often a topic of discussion within the communities themselves. The difficulty of negotiating the tensions between respect for the beliefs of others which one does not share, and holding firm and possibly speaking out about one's own beliefs and values becomes more than theoretical, and vague platitudes about tolerance are shown to be thin. Our desired outcome is that students learn to conduct an ongoing dialogue that acknowledges difference and disagreement without fear and with respect.

As part of the Subject Centre-funded project that we have been undertaking, we have prepared a Skills Audit based upon the Theology and Religious Studies Benchmarking Statement (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2007) and the Subject Centre Employability Guide (Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies, 2009). In this, we argue that experiential elements facilitate the development of a range of skills including those relevant to Cultural and Religious Diversity and thus to controversy arising out of conflicting beliefs and values.

From the Benchmarking Statement, we suggest the following skills, listed under '[d]iscipline specific and intellectual' and '[g]eneric' skills which we identified in all experiential elements (that is, the day visit, fieldwork placement, study visit abroad and vocational placement), are particularly pertinent (the wording has been revised for brevity):

Representation of views other than one's own with fairness and integrity and express own identity without denigration of others.

In respect of this skill, we comment that students require briefing, guidance and debriefing in order to equip them with the capability and confidence to achieve this.

Awareness of the passion and claims to certainty in traditions, with their positive and negative effects.

In respect of this skill, we comment that the value of meeting adherents is that students can gain an understanding of the meaning and implications of commitment.

Engagement with the convictions and behaviours of others with empathy and integrity.

In respect of this skill, we comment that this requires students to be prepared for the experience and encouraged to develop these attitudes.

From the Employability Guide, we suggest the following skills, listed under '[g]eneric competencies' and '[p]ersonal capabilities' which we identified in all experiential elements in the case of the first two skills and in placements, both fieldwork and vocational, in the case of the final three skills, are particularly pertinent:

Interpersonal sensitivity

In respect of this skill, we comment that a major strength of experiential elements is that students develop their awareness of different perspectives and both respect and learn from the views of others.

Questioning

In respect of this skill, we comment that students develop their capacity for appropriate questioning often across cultural and language barriers.

Achievement orientation

In respect of this skill, we comment that placements may enhance the ability to achieve the intended outcomes. We further comment that interaction with alternative worldviews and lifestyles may simultaneously offer a radical challenge to the hegemonic discourse associated with conventional notions of achievement.

Adaptability and flexibility

In respect of this skill, we comment that placements involve students working in unfamiliar environments informed by religious beliefs and values that the student may or may not share.

Tolerance of stress

In respect of this skill, we comment that placements may put individuals under pressure in a variety of ways, especially when living and working in a new setting. Our students' responses demonstrate the pertinence of most of these skills but also the complexity inherent in, though perhaps obscured by, their rather technical formulation given the reality of diversity on the ground and the resultant potential for controversy.

The next stage of the research includes continuing our series of host community interviews to investigate the experience from the point of view of the receiving communities. We will also develop a template for recording what the communities can offer to students, and visit partner universities to facilitate the sharing of good practice. We will develop the website to include case studies, good practice guides, sample documentation (e.g. policy guidelines) and ideas for curriculum and assessment. It would be useful to know what else university depart-

ments might find useful.

We are aware that we are developing our ideas in a climate where the future of Higher Education as a whole includes many uncertainties. On the one hand, subjects like Theology, Religious Studies and Philosophy may be under threat from being viewed as small or economically irrelevant. Experiential elements are costly both financially and in time and other resources. On the other hand, the Equality and Diversity agenda requires that authorities take account of religious and cultural diversity. The role of religions in the public sphere is being debated nationally, with some seeing the volunteering capacity of religious communities as a major resource in a political climate emphasising the downsizing of the state and the role of social enterprise and active citizens in the ‘big society’. Research reveals that religious communities already contribute to social welfare—for example it has been estimated that in our small unitary authority of Bath and North East Somerset religious communities contribute community-based activity to the financial value of £3,600,000 per year (Bath and North-East Somerset Faith Forum, 2010:4). Concerned as we are about the political and social implications of such an instrumental approach to religious communities, we continue to argue for the importance of a religiously literate society and for experiential learning as one of the most effective means of developing the requisite inter-religious and inter-cultural skills in the citizens of the future.

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The Exoteric-Esoteric Distinction in Theology and the Changing Interests of the State:

Handling 'Diversity' in the Teaching of Theology and Ethics

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If we are to handle diversity in the teaching of Christian theology and ethics in British state-funded universities (and indeed elsewhere), it would be good to take into account the historic interplay and clashes between exoteric and esoteric modes of theological discourse and Biblical exegesis. In the medieval era both modes were woven together in such a way that theology was 'the queen of sciences'. Priests trained in theology and the branches of knowledge were trained in esoteric dis-

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courses which contributed to cryptography, which enabled the defence of church and state from armed enemies without and within. It was first in Italy and then in Puritan Britain that cryptography was demythologised, as part of a revolution in theology and the sciences. The neglect of this reality has led to a state of affairs where much modern theology has become quasi-esoteric, far removed from ongoing political and scientific debates rooted in Biblical exegesis. This has gradually led to a vacuum concerning the depth of the relationship between theological disciplines and the interests of the state. ‘Modernity criticism’ has filled this vacuum in the 20th century, having a major impact on the teaching of Theology and Christian Ethics in the English-speaking world. This paper criticises the case of Alasdair MacIntyre in the light of the relationship between theological disciplines and cryptography. Benedict XVI parallels MacIntyre in diagnosing the problem of ‘diversity’ in theological and religious knowledge as being rooted in a ‘fall from grace’ since the high middle ages, when the Papacy and the Latin Church governed western Europe. The story is told in an idealised manner that focuses narrowly on the internal coherence of ethics and metaphysics, ignoring Biblical exegesis and theology as the roots of both. The result is that students are in danger of being fed a misleading understanding of the historic types of Christian thought and dissent that developed in Britain and migrated to other parts of the world. This makes it more difficult to handle the reality of historic and present diversity within Christian theology in teaching.

Why diversity in Theology and Ethics matters to the state

The mission, strategic aims and values of the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies (Subject Centre for PRS), which includes support for learning and teaching in Christian theology and ethics in its remit, endorse diversity.¹ The statement of values of the Subject Centre for PRS includes ‘working for the public good’, and highlights several concepts includ-

¹ http://www.prs.heacademy.ac.uk/about_us/the_centre/index.html.

ing 'accountability' and 'diversity'. Other values include 'collegiality', listing autonomy, trust, responsibility, openness and honesty; and innovation, specifying that 'evidence must inform all our work'. All of these values may be deemed exoteric, not esoteric. Management and valuing of diversity, of beliefs and values, is central to the ideology and practice of surveillance of the contemporary state. Diversity also of course denotes diversity of ethnic and religious backgrounds. In recent years the public concern about immigration has focused mostly on Muslims, and fears that some of them might want to attack the state and civil society. This is notwithstanding the fact that many immigrants to the UK are of Christian background and therefore enhancing the diversity within Christianity in the UK. Since 9/11 this concern about Muslims has frankly given the state a grand excuse for an ideology of surveillance of the population and of 'religion' in general.² University teachers of Islamic Studies were very concerned that the government wanted to control what and how they taught the subject. From the standpoint of Christian theology and ethics, we should also be concerned in case any government would want to exert as much control as it clearly wanted with Islam. Is theology in a good place to critically engage with such surveillance, in order to handle issues of diversity? This paper takes some steps to address this problem. In order to do so, I shall argue that surveillance as we now know it developed partly from the secularisation of cryptography in Italy and then Britain in the early modern period.

Cryptography was originally expressed in the mode of esoteric modes of theology and scriptural exegesis. Before going on to recount the secularisation of cryptography, it is worth setting out a definition of what is 'esoteric' discourse, following Antoine Faivre.³ Esoteric doctrines are kept secret, for initiates only. Thus their intrinsic hiddenness is further socially and politically concealed. There is an assumption of

² Aldrich, Richard J., *GCHQ: The Uncensored Story of Britain's Most Secret Intelligence Agency* (London: Harper Press, 2010) pp. 532-550. Aldrich concludes by agreeing with Sir Ken Macdonald, the former Director of Public Prosecutions, who blames western populations' use of communication technologies for the rise of state surveillance, as the state has harvested information from private companies catering to private individuals' perceived needs.

³ Faivre, Antoine, 'Esotericism' in Jones, Lindsay, *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, vol. 4. 2nd ed. (Farmington, Michigan: Thomson Gale, 2005) pp. 2842-2845.

the esoteric meaning of the apparent reality of texts, history and nature (a theological gnosis). There may be a belief in the transcendental unity or primordial unity of religions that was lost but needs to be rediscovered by esoteric hermeneutics and practices. This belief may not be a wholesale belief, however, but may only apply to an underlying natural philosophy rather than to beliefs about divine law and redemption. Faivre lists four ‘intrinsic characteristics’ of esotericism in religion: microcosm-macrocosm correspondences in the cosmos, the belief that nature is alive and permeated by a hidden fire, imagination and meditation as central faculties of knowing, and the experience of alchemical transmutation, either personal or of nature. Faivre also provides two lesser characteristics: concordance between several or all spiritual traditions, leading to comparative study of them in the hope of bringing out what is common but hidden; and transmission: from master to disciple; initiatory societies, sometimes ‘secret’. The assumption of a concordance between different religious traditions and theologies enabled possessors of various kinds of knowledge to work together in situations of diversity (e.g. Christians living under Islamic rule in the Middle East), or also to pass on sensitive secrets to enemy powers. Many of Faivre’s criteria for esotericism fit with medieval western and eastern theologies. Indeed we can begin to see that esotericism remained at the core of theology as long as the body politic was conceived in an organic and hierarchical fashion in Christendom. Furthermore, esotericism is first discussed in theology right at the birth of the discipline in Alexandria, at the time when it is reflected upon in Biblical exegesis and hermeneutics.⁴ Because esoteric modes of theology and exegesis typically claim that they are rendering visible truths that have been hidden for a long time, the question of whether Clement of Alexandria and Origen invented or discovered esoteric Biblical exegesis continues to be a very difficult one to answer. It is complicated by the question of the extent to which they could have been using Jewish esotericism, and whether this came mainly from Hellenistic Diaspora Judaism or from the Essene community. If the latter is the case, the question of the possibility of esoteric exegesis

⁴ Hägg, Henny Fiskå, *Clement of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Apophaticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Itter, Andrew C., *Esoteric Teachings in the Stromateis of Clement of Alexandria* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

touches on debates about theological truth-norms, as the Essene or Enochian movement, far from being confined to Qumran, produced writings that were influential on the New Testament.⁵ This turn to Jewish esotericism is significant because it has occurred in both Biblical Studies and Patristics. In the early modern period, one motive for historical-critical study of the Bible was provided by Egyptophile exegesis of the Old Testament, a trend deriving from Hellenistic Judaism. This provided Renaissance-influenced Neoplatonists with the tools for reading behind the text against the Puritan preference for plain reading.⁶ This strand has repeatedly surfaced in 'high church' traditions, especially in the established churches wherein esoteric movements such as Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry have thrived.

Making esoteric assumptions about some aspects of reality would always be controversial. An esoteric approach to the doctrine of God always risked undermining a normative Christian or Islamic political order, whereas an esoteric approach to nature did not necessarily carry this danger. It could positively feed the development of the natural sciences. On the other hand, the esoteric idea that nature is alive could conceivably block the development of natural sciences by permitting the view that experimentation is an injury to nature. Esotericism could theoretically be a friend of diversity concerning religion and redemption whilst being an enemy of scientific progress. Thus more attention needs to be paid to the history of the interrelationship between exoteric and esoteric modes of theology and other disciplines if we are to gain a deeper understanding of the relation between theology and the arts and sciences, including those involved in statecraft.

Theology, cryptography and the state

A degree of secrecy is essential to any social group, including a religious group, and also to the workings of the state.⁷ Religions have typ-

⁵ Boccacini, Gabriele, *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis: the Parting of the Ways between Qumran and Enochic Judaism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998).

⁶ Droge, Arthur J., *Homer or Moses? Early Christian Interpretations of the History of Culture* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1989). Assmann, Jan, *Moses the Egyptian* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997).

ically kept knowledge of various kinds secret by shrouding them in esoteric forms of theology and scriptural exegesis. It is highly significant that we almost never teach this truth when we teach theology in universities. Yet to neglect this is to neglect the historic reality. Many different branches of knowledge were contained by esotericism, and these included the kinds of knowledge affording the most social and political power. Cryptography and cryptology, the encoding of messages and the science of their decoding in the service of combat, originated in esoteric theology. To be precise, it was found in all ancient civilizations and religions. In Judaism and Islam, it was developed from close reading of the sacred texts; Kabbalistic reading of the Torah, and gematriacal reading of the Qur'an. As the Kabbalistic tradition only kicked off after the Jews lost their state in AD 70, it did not contribute directly to a distinctly Jewish school of cryptography, but would later be a covert influence in western cryptography. The story of Islamic cryptography was different, as the Qur'an was the holy book of a religion that very early on became the ideology of Arab imperialists, and thus close reading of it, including esoteric reading, could feed the development of cryptography for the purpose of hiding military communications.⁸ Cryptography underwent numerous transformations in the modern era. The first was by the use of numbers, specifically Arabic numerals. Before then, ciphers were only alphabetic (and only numeric insofar as letters were also used for numerals in many scripts). All of this changed in the Vatican in the 15th century, when Leon Battista Alberti claimed to have invented the polyalphabetic cipher, which also included Arabic numerals.⁹ David Kahn now suggests Alberti got the idea from Raymond Lull's quasi-kabbalistic machine, though I would suggest he got it from an Arabic source, as the Islamic 9th century cryptographer al-Kindi knew of polyalphabetic ciphers.¹⁰ This happened as the Papal states were pioneering the rise of the

⁷ Bok, Sissela, *Secrets: On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) pp. 171-190.

⁸ Al-Kadi, Ibrahim A., 'The Origins of Cryptology: The Arab Contributions', *Cryptologia* 16/2, (April 1992) pp. 97-126.

⁹ Kahn, David, *The Codebreakers* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1974).

¹⁰ Kahn, David, 'On the Origin of Polyalphabetic Substitution', *Isis* 71/1, (Mar. 1980) pp. 122-127.

princely Renaissance state.¹¹ Indeed Alberti's alleged invention was part of the Papacy's contest with the Republic of Venice for political supremacy in Italy.

Prior to these developments, the Dominican Order of Preachers produced the medieval church's most brilliant theologians, including Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, both of whom wrote about esoteric disciplines such as alchemy and astrology, viewing them as integrated within exoteric theology.¹² Members of the Order continued their inquiries in this respect. The cryptographer Johannes Trithemius was a Dominican Abbot, and it has been argued, surely correctly, that had he lived further than 1516, he would have taken the side of his later Jesuit supporters.¹³ His most famous work was the *Steganographia*, written in 1499 and published posthumously in 1606. It was put on the Catholic Church's Index of Prohibited Books in 1609 as it appeared to be a book of magic teaching the use of spirits to communicate long-distance. It was removed from the Index in 1900. The decryption key was published in 1606, and since then many scholars have come to realise that the magical work functioned as a ciphertext for a treatise on cryptography and steganography.¹⁴ The controversies over Trithemius need to be understood in the light of ambiguities in Thomas Aquinas' hermeneutic of miracles and marvels, his writing on astrology, and his writing on alchemy.¹⁵ They also need to be understood in the light of the split mentality of the western church since Constantine, divided between Augustine's ambivalent attitude towards esotericism in general and Hermeticism in particular, and Lactantius' commendation

¹¹ Bobbitt, Philip, *The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace and the Course of History* (London: Penguin, 2002) pp. 75-94.

¹² Aquinas writes on alchemy in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II. II.72.2. Marie-Louise Von Franz argues that Aquinas wrote the *Aurora Consurgens* in Von Franz, Marie-Louise (ed.), *Aurora Consurgens: A Document attributed to Thomas Aquinas on the Problem of Opposites in Alchemy* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 2000) pp. 405-434.

¹³ On what follows on Trithemius I am indebted to Braun, Noel L., *Trithemius and Magical Theology: A Chapter in the Controversy over Occult Studies in Early Modern Europe* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1999).

¹⁴ Reeds, Jim, 'Solved: the Ciphers in Book III of Trithemius' *Steganographia*', *Cryptologia*, October 1998.

¹⁵ Braun, (ibid.) pp. 15ff.

of the latter as a *praeparatio evangelii* in the service of Constantine's Christianisation of the Roman Empire.¹⁶ Trithemius foolishly developed his cryptography via a cover text that was about magic (supposedly angelic magic), developing a practice expressly condemned by Augustine before his discussion of Hermeticism. The problem was that Trithemius had made some important advances in cryptography. Thus succeeding generations of savants tripped over themselves to defend him and absolve him of the charge of magic. They had to absolve themselves of the charge of defending magic and sorcery in the defence of Christian states. Blaise de Vigenère was both a cryptographer and an alchemist who had received a Kabbalistic vision, and he sought to reintegrate a demythologised version of Trithemian cryptography into a theological hierarchy of truths via alchemy.¹⁷ He argued that there were two kinds of writing—ordinary exoteric writing and secret enciphered script. The latter was of elevated origin, and was used by the Hebrews, Chaldeans, Egyptians, Ethiopians and Indians, among many other ancient civilizations, 'for the purpose of veiling their sacred secrets of theology and philosophy.'¹⁸ The Dutch Calvinist theologian Gerhard Voss (1577-1649) also argued that Trithemius' cryptography was merely a method of linguistic encipherment, in his *De Arte Grammatica* (1635).¹⁹

Trithemius' defenders in Britain were the Rosicrucian enthusiasts on the royalist side of the English Civil War. The Welsh Anglican priest and alchemist Thomas Vaughan (1622-1666), known as Eugenius Philalethes, and John Webster (1610-1662), both wanted to reform English education along Trithemian magical lines. Webster set this out in the 1653 book *Academiarum Examen*. Webster opposed both Henry More and Meric Casaubon, son of Isaac Casaubon who had conducted

¹⁶ Stroumsa, Guy G., *Hidden Wisdom: Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1996) pp. 132-146. Augustine, *City of God VIII*, 19-23; X, 8-12. Beatrice, Pier Franco, 'Hermetic Tradition' in Fitzgerald, Allan D., OSA, *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 429-431. Digeser, Elizabeth DePalma, *The Making of a Christian Empire: Lactantius and Rome* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2000).

¹⁷ Braun, op. cit., pp. 179-180.

¹⁸ Braun, op. cit., p. 180.

¹⁹ Braun, op. cit., p. 231.

a historical-critical debunking of the *Hermetica*. More in return attacked Vaughn, whereas Casaubon attacked De Vigenère and John Dee, the magus of the Elizabethan court. The protestant polymath John Wilkins wrote a rejoinder in 1654 entitled *Vindiciae Academicarum*, directed at Webster. In it he differentiated between concealment and grammar, and between cryptography as magic and cryptography as grammar. As his biographer Noel L. Braun explains:

Wilkins' interest in Trithemian cryptography was prompted by his search for a universal language accessible, not just to a privileged few, but to all who were knowledgeable in the required experimental methods for ferreting out the truth of things.²⁰

The distinction arose between the exotericism of the nascent Royal Society and the esoteric standards of Trithemius, continued by the Rosicrucians and the western esoteric tradition. Cryptography was to be based on the idea of a universal grammar or language. This kind of thinking had probably long been in the making since Arabic numerals had come to be used in cryptography. It was to be conceived of in exoteric terms that anybody could understand, not in magical terms that gave the impression that one had to be versed in the magical arts to be able to succeed, nor in hierocratic terms that dictated that one had to be a priest to learn this knowledge.²¹ By virtue of its being exoteric it became meritocratic rather than being the preserve of a clergy or priesthood trained in the occult disciplines. This shift was able to happen also because of the shift in trust in British society. Kings and priests were not necessarily fit to govern, as the Puritans had gained massive support over England and Wales (as had the Covenanters in Scotland) for their ideas. The methodological shift was paradoxical given the hidden nature of cryptographic communication, but it laid the groundwork for advancements in the field based on knowledge rather than fantasy. Thus the theoretical basis changed, from preoccupation with nature (or the Bible) as hiding secrets which required reading them as if they were ciphers, to preoccupation with inventing a universal

²⁰ Braun, op. cit., p. 236.

²¹ Braun, op. cit., 230ff. Shapiro, Barbara J., *John Wilkins 1614-1672: An Intellectual Biography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969).

language for secret communication. Out of this would come the idea of modern computing. If cryptography became exoteric and gradually more ‘scientific’, much Christian theology moved in the opposite direction. With the German mystic Jakob Boehme (1575-1624), magic became linked to ‘unquantifiable religion’, which meant he had an indirect connection back to Trithemius via the disciples of Paracelsus. He wrote that ‘Magic is the best theology, for in it true faith is both grounded and discovered.’²²

From then on, Britain would be the world leader in cryptography.²³ Black Chambers became common in the 17th century in Europe. They were organisations where teams of cryptographers worked on a daily basis on mail that had been intercepted by the state. The most reputed Black Chamber was in Vienna, the capital of the Roman Catholic Austro-Hungarian Empire. England opened its Black Chamber in 1716, and it was run by the Anglican Wallis family, descended from John Wallis, the greatest English mathematician before Isaac Newton. By 1848, Britain, France and Austria had shut their Black Chambers. No sooner had they done this than they took up the telegraph, newly invented by Samuel Morse, as a better medium of cryptography. Morse used electromagnetism.²⁴ In the 20th century Britain, alongside the United States, continued to be a world leader in

²² Boehme, Jakob, *Six Theosophic Points and Other Writings*, trans. John Rolleston Earle (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1958), p. 54.

²³ On Charles Babbage’s work in cryptography and computing, see Franksen, Ole Immanuel, *Mr. Babbage’s Secret* (London: Prentice-Hall, 1985). See Standage, Tom, *The Victorian Internet* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1998) on the development of the electric telegraph. On the most important decipherment of WWI, see Tuchman, Barbara W., *The Zimmerman Telegram* (New York: Ballantine, 1994). On the Enigma, see Hinsley, F. H. and Stripp, Alan, *The Codebreakers: The Inside Story of Bletchley Park* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). Alan Turing’s four last postcards to his friend Robin are entitled ‘Messages from the Unseen World’, and appear to describe a vision of the truths of physics given within a kabbalistic metaphysic, as they start with the sentence, ‘The Universe is the interior of the light cone of creation’. Cited in Hodges, Andrew, *Alan Turing: The Enigma* (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 513.

²⁴ Electricity was seen as the alchemical quintessence by some 18th century theologians. Benz, Ernst, *The Theology of Electricity: On the Encounter and Explanation of Theology and Science in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1989).

cryptography and its offspring computing. This development would contribute to online encryption enabling citizens to protect their own privacy against state surveillance. This has been a key factor in the recent debate over civil liberties in Britain and elsewhere.²⁵ The mathematical transformation of cryptography signalled a step towards its secularisation, because the ever-increasing complexity of mathematics turned the discipline away from correspondence to a language-oriented and language-derived account of reality. When we look at the time when this happened, we see that the mathematization of cryptography occurred just before the challenge to the power of the Papacy by the Reformation. Theological and religious thought was gradually dethroned from its hegemony over a hierarchy of truth and knowledge by the mathematization of natural philosophy and the transformation of mathematics into being a language in its own right.²⁶

Alasdair MacIntyre's narrative of the decline of western ethics in the light of the rise of modern cryptography

The story of the decline of western ethics produced by Alasdair MacIntyre has influenced the scholarship and teaching of Christian theology and ethics over the past few decades.²⁷ It is striking that it coincides with the story of the rise of cryptography. It is therefore possible to mount a critique of his narrative via attention to the account of cryptography's relation to theology. MacIntyre has always adhered to a story of the decline of ethics, both when he was a protestant and a

²⁵ The inventor of 'Pretty Good Privacy' writes about it in Zimmerman, Philip R., *The Official PGP User's Guide* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996). On the impact of cryptography on civil liberties and law enforcement, see Koops, Bert-Jaap, *The Crypto Controversy* (Boston, MA: Kluwer, 1998).

²⁶ Steiner, George, 'The Retreat of the Word' in Steiner, George, *Language and Silence* (London: Faber & Faber, 1967), pp. 30-54.

²⁷ MacIntyre, Alasdair, *A Short History of Ethics: A History of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age to the 20th Century*. 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1998). MacIntyre, Alasdair, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (London: Duckworth, 1985). MacIntyre, Alasdair, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (London: Duckworth, 1990).

Marxist and since he became Catholic. Pedagogically MacIntyre has been very influential in English-speaking theology and ethics since the 1980s. Arguing for the foundation of a Christian university in Britain, Gavin D'Costa sketches a Catholic narrative of how theology lost its position as the queen of sciences.²⁸ Like most scholars advancing this narrative, D'Costa draws heavily on MacIntyre and completely ignores the esoteric dimension of theology. Factoring in this dimension, and asking about the extent to which at various times it was congruent with or radically departed in spirit and substance from the exoteric traditions, would likely complicate such stories of decline and the tendency to use them to propose reconstructions of a 'Catholic' unity of knowledge analogous to the unity of ethics.

Four aspects of MacIntyre's narrative require attention in relation to the link between theology and cryptography. First, he has always held that atheism is the end product of changes in doctrine which were preceded by institutional changes regarding authority.²⁹ This is simply a disguised way of saying that because Papal authority was undermined at the Reformation by rising nation-states, pre-eminently the United Kingdom, the logical consequence of the doctrinal reforms proposed and effected by protestant clergy was mass atheism several centuries later. At the level of belief, the sociological surveys for Britain since the 1960s do not simply register a rise in atheism, but a decline in belief in a transcendent personal God, and a continuance of belief in 'the god within', along with a rise in pagan esotericist and paranormal beliefs.³⁰

²⁸ D'Costa, Gavin, *Theology in the Public Square: Church, Academy and Nation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

²⁹ MacIntyre, Alasdair, *Secularization and Moral Change: The Riddell Memorial Lectures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

³⁰ The gendering of the sociology of religion has teased out the depth and complexity of contemporary religious change much further than conventional secularisation theory could do. See Marler, Penny Long, 'Religious Change in the West: Watch the Women' in Aune, Kristin, Sharma, Sonya and Vincent, Giselle, *Women and Religion in the West: Challenging Secularization* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 23-56. My argument about paganisation and the emancipation of esotericism as supplementing a turn to atheism could be read as critically supplementing in the *longue durée* the main thesis of a 'spiritual revolution' involving sacralization alongside secularisation found in Heelas, Paul and Woodhead, Linda, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005). They discuss the difficulty of assessing the evidence for a 'subjective turn' in

MacIntyre's theory deliberately ignores protestant theology both in its critical aspect towards the Papacy and in its positive aspects.³¹ It is not atheism that has been the result of the Reformation in Britain, but religious plurality in the form of established Anglicanism and Presbyterianism, protestant free churches, and forms of Deism. Esotericism as a mode of thinking broke free from ecclesiastical control after the Reformation. Socially, it is a diffuse and fragmented paganism, rather than atheism, that has been the major religious consequence in modernity. Yet because it has often been expressed in esoteric terms this has not been visible to exoteric modes of theology and sociology of religion. Second, MacIntyre always portrayed Marxism as a sort of Christian heresy due to its being an inversion of Hegel's secularised Christianity.³² This thesis is misleading when inserted as part of his narrative of the decline of ethics, because Marx was in fact using the inversion of Hegel to attack Judaism, from which his own father had tried to escape.³³ There is no Christology or ecclesiology in MacIntyre's description of Christianity. He could just as well have been talking about Arianism or Deism, both of which appealed to an understanding of ancient Judaism as the original natural and rational religion, thus the basis of 'true Christianity' and right secular order in the early modern period. As Marx was Jewish, and consciously repudiated and ridiculed religious Jews and Judaism, this omission is a

Britain and the USA on pp. 49-76. Where I differ from Heelas and Woodhead is in emphasising that esotericism has always been present in western Christianity, and been gradually detached from official expressions of Christianity, what Hegel would call 'objective religion'.

³¹ British theological critiques of MacIntyre have shied away from addressing the Reformation and thus appear rather abstract. Milbank, John, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990, 326-376. Bretherton, Luke, *Hospitality as Holiness: Christian Witness Amid Moral Diversity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 61-91. By contrast the American reformed theologian Richard Mouw has demonstrated clearly that MacIntyre's repudiation of the Reformers on theological anthropology and ethics is misplaced. Mouw, Richard, *The God Who Commands: A Study in Divine Command Ethics* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

³² MacIntyre, Alasdair, *Marxism and Christianity*, 2nd ed. (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1995), pp. 1-18.

³³ Tomasoni, Francesco, *Modernity and the Final Aim of History: The Debate over Judaism from Kant to the Young Hegelians* (Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Press, 2003).

problem for his theory. Marx was partly using his materialist inversion of Hegel to attack religious Jews whom he considered ‘bourgeois’ for wanting to assimilate into German ‘Christian’ society, or sectarian and reactionary for wanting to remain Orthodox. To further complicate things, it is now well established that Hegel’s philosophy had deep roots in his interests in Hermeticism, alchemy and Kabbalah, none of which require a Trinitarian theology, and all of which can happily exist within the framework of a Deist or Arian or other kind of strictly monotheistic theology, e.g. Islamic theology.³⁴ The difference here is that without a high Christology one cannot have a proper ecclesiology, and thus apocalyptic has to become wedded to the millenarian earthly society as it was in Marxism. Thus Marxism may be understood as an attack not only on Hegel, but on the ‘secular’ heresies that preceded his, early modern ‘Hebraic’ notions of polity that spanned protestant and heterodox thinking. Towards the end of his life, Marx reneged a little and encouraged his daughter Eleanor to learn the principles of socialism from the Biblical Jewish prophets.³⁵ The test of my theory here is the fact that had Marx been reneging upon a Christian heresy, he would have told her to read the New Testament. It is hard to derive an ethic for the ‘earthly city’ and international socialism straightforwardly from the New Testament as it is so focused on the church *vis-à-vis* the state. Thus it could be argued that Marx was attempting a radical critique of the early modern *respublica hebraica*. Marx’s materialising of Hegel led to jettisoning the esoteric disciplines that underlay the latter’s theology, including the Jewish Kabbalah, and that of other mainline protestants influenced by Freemasonry. Marxism can thus be said to be thoroughgoing in its anti-esotericism. Third, MacIntyre’s early work is more important for understanding his later work than some admirers will admit, for it reveals that he was never willing to respect critics and opponents of Marxism and Communism because they didn’t seem to have an overarching metanarrative or metaphysic to back up their objections.³⁶ It is very dangerous in a liberal democracy to think like

³⁴ Magee, Glenn Alexander, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).

³⁵ Maccoby, Hyam, *Antisemitism and Modernity: Innovation and Continuity* (London: Routledge, 2006) p. 68.

³⁶ MacIntyre, Alasdair, ‘Notes From the Moral Wilderness’ (1958), reproduced in Knight, Kelvin, *The MacIntyre Reader* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame

this. As the Hungarian dissident philosopher of science and critic of Communism Michael Polanyi argued, having settled in Britain, that philosophy and other branches of knowledge are in danger of forgetting is the role of tacit reasoning and communities of inquiry which have wonder as their goal.³⁷ Religiously, Polanyi was an agnostic. The kind of doctrinaire attitude pushed by MacIntyre, and easily propounded by Christian thinkers, excludes Polanyi's wisdom from education and marginalises agnosticism as somehow ignoble. MacIntyre is extreme in his exotericism, if unconscious of it. He strongly insists on Aquinas' prohibition on lying, even though Augustine would have been a better candidate for defending his stance. Fourth and last, MacIntyre has been said to espouse a 'patriotism' that is towards a way of life that celebrates practical wisdom and not toward any nation-state.³⁸ The slide from Marxism to Thomism looks as if it was a little too easy, based on an internationalism that is rooted in institutions that themselves command a kind of patriotism. The long and short of this is that not only MacIntyre has not been sufficiently attentive to the role of theological disputes in forming modernity (a criticism made by earlier critics), but specifically that he has sidestepped theological doctrines about church and state that have shaped modernity in Britain and elsewhere. As Britain is the home of the toleration of religious diversity, this omission is a rather serious one. Religious toleration can never occur in a vacuum; it is the product of historical conflicts over doctrine. Continued interaction with those traditions which actually supported toleration and diversity is what is needed to maintain those values.

It is important to recall that Alasdair MacIntyre was a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain until 1956, when he and many of its intellectuals left because they disagreed with the Party's stance over the Hungarian uprising.³⁹ MI5 had in fact infiltrated the CPGB back in the 1930s, thanks to the advanced skills of Britain's cryptographers.⁴⁰

University Press, 1998) pp. 31-49.

³⁷ Polanyi, Michael, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1998).

³⁸ MacIntyre, Alasdair, 'Is Patriotism a Virtue?' in Beiner, Ronald, *Theorizing Citizenship* (New York: SUNY Press, 1995) pp. 209-228.

³⁹ Blackledge, P. and Davidson, N., *Alasdair MacIntyre's Engagement with Marxism: Selected Writings 1953-1974* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

⁴⁰ West, Nigel, *MASK: MI5's Penetration of the Communist Party of Great Britain*

The CPGB and the Fascist Blackshirts were under surveillance from the Security Services. Before the deciphering of the evidence about CPGB, MI5's knowledge of CPGB came from several sources: Special Branch reports of political meetings, surveillance by means of a microphone hidden in CPGB's headquarters at 16 King Street, Covent Garden, surveillance via intercept warrants on the telephones of selected members, and informants and directed agents. CPGB was under the control of the Third Communist International (Comintern), formed in March 1919 to promote the Bolshevik objective of a world-wide revolution. It was set up to support, co-ordinate and direct individual national Communist movements. It was involved in espionage, and its International Directorate communicated in codes to members of the organisation around the world. Agents had often spend up to two years at the Lenin School in Moscow, taking classes in political ideology, tradecraft and clandestine communications. The Soviet intelligence organisation involved in all of this was the OMS, the Comintern's Foreign Liaison Department. OMS had full confidence in its cipher system, and as such its messages were often informal and rather indiscreet, revealing the real names of the communicants. British cryptographers managed to crack the cipher system in an operation condemned MASK, and this material became very useful for MI5 and the then Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin. MASK traffic was very important for two main reasons.

First, it proved that the Soviet government's pretence that the Comintern was an independent organisation outside of its control was nothing more than an artificial sham, and that it was really a covert instrument of the country's undeclared foreign policy...Second, it showed that the Comintern concealed the existence of a clandestine network that extended its activities beyond semi-legitimate political agitation and the dissemination of propaganda, into the field of espionage and the collection of military and political information that would be of use to an enemy.⁴¹

The CPGB was most popular during the Second World War.⁴² At first

(London: Routledge, 2005).

⁴¹ West, (ibid.) p. 2.

⁴² Beckett, Francis, *Enemy Within: the Rise and Fall of the British Communist Party* (London: John Murray, 1995), pp. 108ff.

it opposed the war, but when Stalin joined the War it supported it as anti-fascist. Membership rose to its all-time high in 1942 at 56,000. The postwar leaders were the same as the prewar ones, but they no longer wanted violent overthrow of the state, rather 'a fundamental change in the way society was run'. In the 1945 elections, they had two MPs, lots of local councillors and trade union leaders. When they lost those in the 1950 general election, the general secretary Harry Pollitt travelled to Moscow to get advice from Stalin. He brought back a document that formed the basis for the Party's new manifesto, 'The British Road to Socialism', officially adopted at the 22nd Congress in April 1952. It advocated a peaceful reformist transition to socialism, but only after official personal approval by Josef Stalin!⁴³ This irony, given that Stalin was no advocate of peaceful socialism in his own country, is a clue to the fact that CPGB had not in the 1950s severed its ties with Moscow, and thus not ceased to be an arm of Soviet foreign policy, designed to bring down the British state.⁴⁴ By this time MI5 had the names of roughly 90% of the Party's membership list, and was aware that it was secretly funded from Moscow.⁴⁵ It was only in 1957, after leaving the CPGB, that MacIntyre first published his comparative study of Marxism and Christianity discussed above. He moved on to the Socialist Labour League led by Gerry Healy, a Trotskyist outfit founded in 1959. He left in 1960 and moved on to Tony Cliff's Socialist Review/International Socialists, and was on the editorial board of its new journal International Socialism. He resigned abruptly in the summer of 1968. MacIntyre's view by this time was that the proletariat was irretrievably fragmented, such that revolutionary organisations would inevitably become mirrors of managerialism and capitalist bureaucracy. One recent Communist critic has argued as follows about his subsequent Catholic conversion:

At the end of the day MacIntyre falsified all of his own line of argument on this front by adhering to the Catholic church. The reason is that the Catholic church is a beautiful demonstration of

⁴³ Beckett, (ibid.) pp. 121-123.

⁴⁴ Andrews, Geoff, *Endgames and New Times* (Lawrence and Wishart, 2004), pp. 74 & 90.

⁴⁵ Andrew, Christopher, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (London: Penguin, 2010), pp. 402-403.

the fact that bureaucratic hierarchy and the authority of ‘experts’ is not the product of the attempt to do predictive social science.⁴⁶

Yet the Catholic Church sees itself as the fulfilment of Old Testament predictive prophecy, in being the body of the Messiah. Its authoritative hierarchy and bureaucracy is comprised of priests who inherit the role of the Levitical priesthood, who were also experts in various sciences such as medicine, later incorporated into the esoteric disciplines.

Roman Catholicism has historically preceded Communism in its internationalism and attempts at affecting the policies of nation-states. The difference is that for centuries it aspired to rule over Europe as a sovereign state and had its own territories, army and cryptographers. This only ceased when its army was defeated by the Italian nationalist army in 1870.⁴⁷ The papal army of the Zouaves is commemorated annually in a Mass in Rome. This celebration declined after Vatican II but became popular again under John Paul II. Therefore, to reject patriotism as a vice, as MacIntyre advocates, is not in fact to embrace a virtue, but to embrace the loyalty to a foreign power that typically wishes to influence or subvert sovereign states. Without the break from Trithemius and therefore from Thomism, cryptography would never have developed and thus someone else, an invading power, would have developed it instead of Britain. Without the cryptographic work of MI5, British Communism may have continued to have more credibility and many would have continued to deny that it was a serious problem for the state. Without this basic technique for defending the state, our university culture especially in the humanities would not be what it is in terms of diversity, and certainly Christian theology and ethics would not be taught therein. Theology and Religion would only be taught at the sociological level.

It is highly relevant that Pope Benedict XVI has embraced MacIntyre’s theory, and that he has been behind the reassertion of the Papal opinion that protestants and other Christians only belong to ‘communities’ not churches, as they apparently do not have ‘the valid

⁴⁶ McNar, Mike, ‘Sects and ‘New Left’ Disillusionment’, *Weekly Worker*, 13 April 2010.

⁴⁷ Coulombe, Charles A., *The Pope’s Legion: The Multinational Fighting Force that Defended the Vatican* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

episcopate' or the correct sacramental theology.⁴⁸ Although commentators have tried to soften the blow by arguing that Orthodox churches are considered valid, the real subtext is obvious—the repudiation of Papal authority as theologically valid. Considered in a historical light, his attitude towards church-state relations is ironic. In 2006 he wrote the following:

The Church may not exalt itself to become a state, nor may it seek to work as an organ of power in the state or beyond the state boundaries... 'The Church remains outside the state... [but] must exert herself with all her vigour so that in it there may shine forth the moral truth that it offers to the state and that ought to become evident to the citizens of the state.'⁴⁹

If MacIntyre's story of the decline of western ethics is to be taught to students, we should also teach them clearly that that story parallels very close the story of the decline of Papal power and the rise of modern cryptography. It won't do to stay at the safe level of changes in metaphysics. The Papacy has for most of its history had a state of its own. Its land was donated to it in the first millennium. From about the 8th century—the time of the forgery of the *Donation of Constantine* to invent the granting of lands to the Papacy by Constantine in the 4th century—to the modern period, the Papacy had an army and behaved just like a monarchical and later princely state, i.e. a secular institution wielding temporal power.⁵⁰ Rome was occupied by Italian nationalist soldiers in 1870, weakly resisted by papal soldiers. The papal state was annexed by the new kingdom of Italy, and Rome became its capital in 1871.⁵¹ The question of Rome was a problem for the Papacy until 1929,

⁴⁸ As Cardinal Josef Ratzinger, Benedict wrote the encyclical *Dominus Iesus*, August 6, 2000, for the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith, asserting this position. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html.

⁴⁹ Benedict XVI, *Values in a Time of Upheaval* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), pp. 69-71.

⁵⁰ Fried, Johannes and Brandes, Wolfram, *The Donation of Constantine and Constitutum Constantini: The Misinterpretation of a Fiction and its Original Meaning* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007). Chambers, David, *Popes, Cardinals and War: The Military Church in Renaissance and Early Modern Europe* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006).

when the Lateran Treaties founded the state of Vatican City to guarantee papal independence for the Pope's pastoral ministry.⁵² (The Papacy probably had an eye for the difficulty Orthodox patriarchs had vis-à-vis the Byzantine emperors. Nearly a third (36 out of 122) of Orthodox patriarchs had been deposed by Byzantine emperors between 379 and 1451. They had no state of their own.) The Lateran Treaty of 1929 guaranteed the Holy See's sovereignty in the international sphere, confirmed Catholicism to be the official religion of the Italian state, and made Rome the capital of Italy. The treaty also allowed the Church free exercise of spiritual authority, state protection of Christian marriage and religious communities, and the position and payment of clergy. The Holy See was financially compensated for the loss of the Papal states. The Lateran Treaties were revised in 1984, such that religious pluralism was established as legitimate, and renewed the 1929 stipulation for the Italian state to contribute financially towards the payment of priests and to the maintenance of ecclesiastical institutions. This means that the Roman Catholic Church seems to be the 'established' church of modern Italy. So does the Roman Catholic Church fulfil Benedict XVI's criteria for church-state relations? The Papacy which heads the church has a special state of its own to protect it that is not the Italian state—an extra concession compared to, say, the Church of England or the Church of Scotland. It is literally an organ of power within Vatican City State, and was certainly so in the Papal States. It works as an organ of power beyond state boundaries in subtle ways, by having observer status at the United Nations, and through its many societies. It has a Diplomatic Corps, founded in the 15th century when it was at the vanguard of the development of the modern princely state.

This then is the institutional ecclesiological backdrop to MacIntyre's story about the decline of ethics. It is also the backdrop to Benedict XVI's story about the decline and fragmenting of knowledge. As this is relevant to the short history of cryptography outlined above, it is worth summarising briefly. Tracy Rowland argues that Benedict

⁵¹ Gatz, Erwin, 'Papal States' in Steiner, Bruno and Parker, Michael G., *Dictionary of Popes and the Papacy* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), pp. 227-231.

⁵² Benz, Hartmut, 'Lateran Treaties' in Steiner, Bruno and Parker, Michael G., *Dictionary of Popes and the Papacy*, pp. 210-211.

sees Catholic theology as a 'double helix' of Christian and Hellenistic components.⁵³ (It's significant that she doesn't speak in terms of Jewish and Hellenistic components, which would be the correct way to see things.) Benedict claims there are three moments of severance from this 'double helix': Giordano Bruno's reversal to a divine cosmos, Galileo's supposed equation of knowledge of geometry with knowledge of God, and Martin Luther's alleged wish to purge Christian thought of its Greek inheritance. It is significant that Bruno is at the top of this list, as he was chronologically not the earliest of these figures. He was burnt at the stake by the Church in 1600 for practicing black magic and advocating a return to ancient Egyptian sun-worship.⁵⁴ Most people would consider it bizarre, not to say deliberately insulting, to put Galileo and Luther alongside him. It looks suspiciously like a way of demonising Protestantism. A further problem is that Galileo cannot be characterised the way Benedict characterises him, for the dispute concerning his work was rooted in Biblical interpretation.⁵⁵ As for Luther, he expressed a fondness for alchemy as a model of Christian doctrine, in particular the general resurrection.⁵⁶ This is a far cry from repudiating the Hellenistic heritage, for alchemy is Hellenistic in origin. Anybody who accepts it is implicitly accepting an awful lot of Hellenistic metaphysics as at least worthy of serious attention. So did Benedict put Bruno the magician, Galileo the natural scientist, and Luther the protestant reformer in the same boat? The latter two belong together as drawing on the Augustinian tradition in reading the Bible. The former does not belong with them, being a pagan. All three challenged the authority of the Papacy regarding the production and dissemination of exoteric and esoteric knowledge. Institutionally, currents of thinking derived from these three thinkers understood as types, among others, fed into early Freemasonry. There is a long history of Catholic suspicion of it as heretical and even a counterfeit religion.⁵⁷

⁵³ Rowland, Tracey, *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) pp. 108-110.

⁵⁴ Yates, Frances, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1999).

⁵⁵ Carroll, W. E., 'Galileo and the Interpretation of the Bible', *Science and Education* 8/2, (March 1999) pp. 151-187.

⁵⁶ Luther, Martin, *The Table Talk of Martin Luther*. (Trans. William Hazlitt) (London: G. Bell, 1902) p. 326.

Freemasonry originated in Scotland as a Trinitarian and esotericist response to elements of the Calvinist Reformation.⁵⁸ It soon absorbed elements of Rosicrucianism, which came from Germany, and which falsely claimed descent from Luther's theology on the basis that the rose and the cross were his emblems. Historians and controversialists of Freemasonry have long debated whether the Constitutions of English Freemasonry, written by the Scottish Presbyterian Rev. James Anderson, were inclined towards Deism, and therefore whether this is the basis on which the Catholic Church was opposed to it. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that this is wrongheaded.⁵⁹ British Freemasonry always sought to link itself to the political and ecclesiastical establishments, to defend religious toleration and scientific freedom, and oppose sedition. Anderson's Constitutions of 1723 welcomed Protestant Nonconformists but not Unitarians or Catholics or atheists, in the light of Jacobite campaigning against the Act of Settlement of 1701. His revised Constitutions of 1738, approved by the Grand Lodge of England on 25 January 1738, introduced the Noachide Laws and appeared more latitudinarian. Pope Clement XII issued a papal bull condemning and excommunicating Freemasons and all who supported them on 28th April 1738. He did not distinguish between British and continental Freemasonry, thus revealing that it was the scope of ecclesial authority that was at the heart of the condemnation. As the 18th century progressed, British Freemasons would return to the 1723 Constitutions and draw closer to the Church of England, as well as condemning Deism in 1756 in order to reassure Catholic sympathisers. This trend was supported by Edmund Burke, champion of Catholic emancipation turned hostile to Unitarians. It was in the wake of the French Revolution that British Freemasons would strengthen their

⁵⁷ This kind of argument is made by Anglican priest turned Roman Catholic Walton Hannah in *Darkness Visible: A Christian Appraisal of Freemasonry* (1952) 2nd ed. (London: Chulmleigh Augustine, 1984). Hannah tends to focus on oaths and rituals, without attending a great deal to scholarly debates on their origins, or engaging in theological debate on the relationship of esotericism to Christian theology.

⁵⁸ Stevenson, David, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's century 1590-1710* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

⁵⁹ Révanger, Cécile, 'Franc-Maçonnerie et Religion en Grand Bretagne: vers une religion de l'Etat', in Porset, Charles & Révanger, Cécile, *Franc-Maçonnerie et Religion dans l'Europe des Lumières* (Paris: H. Champion, 1988) pp. 29-41.

loyalty to the monarchy and the British constitution. Revanger points out that the existence of 39 General Regulations in the Constitutions of the United Grand Lodge of England (1813) curiously mirrors the 39 Articles of the Church of England. All of this suggests that Catholic anti-Freemasonry and Catholic anti-protestantism are two sides of the same coin, of opposition to the Reformation as it was played out in the English-speaking world. The opposition to Italian and French Freemasonry, openly Deist and later atheist and revolutionary, was always genuine but also an excuse for this. MacIntyre's exoteric Marxism-turned-Thomism is in sharp contrast to the Freemasonic esotericism that has long lurked within the mainline protestant churches and modern western states. In British politics this conflict can be perceived between the Labour and Conservative parties going right back to the founding of MI5 and the advent of universal suffrage. Labour always suspected MI5 of spying on its members, and always suspected that Freemasonry was rife among the socially conservative. Indeed, along with Anglicanism, it had spread throughout the British Empire. The Conservatives by contrast were not averse to accusing Labour of harbouring secret Communists bent on doing Moscow's foreign policy within the United Kingdom. In other countries, Freemasonry has been patriotic but revolutionary and anti-Catholic, so it has gravitated more towards liberal than conservative politics. Pope Benedict XVI appears to be continuing in the long Catholic tradition of repudiating Protestantism via attacking esotericism. For this argument to work, Martin Luther has to be grouped alongside Giordano Bruno and then written off as anti-metaphysical, and the differences between Martin Luther and John Calvin just have to be ignored. MacIntyre plays a similar game when he assimilates Luther to Macchiavelli regarding the secular autonomy of the state.⁶⁰ There is a slippery slope argument at work, as well as a taint-by-association argument.

The Roman Catholic Church gradually lost control over the esoteric disciplines that were closely related to theology, science and statecraft. The story of the 'decline' of western ethics (and with it of western metaphysics and theology, which runs parallel) is bound up with this at the intellectual, not only the contingent institutional level. It is also the story of the rise of religious toleration and the recognition

⁶⁰ MacIntyre, Alasdair, *A Short History of Ethics*, (ibid.) pp. 121-128.

of diversity. In the medieval era, the Church was the transnational polity that interfered in the workings of states and whose reigning discourse governed cryptography and the arts of war, claiming right to universal assent and obedience. In the 20th century it was Soviet Communism that attempted to fulfil this function. Neither body was tolerant either in theory or in practice of religious or intellectual diversity. The fact that both supported state universities should not blind us to this fact. In theological terms, MacIntyre's turn to Thomas Aquinas in ethics, including on the morality of truth-telling and lying, sits somewhat uneasily with Benedict's general preference for Augustine. MacIntyre defends Aquinas by making the following claim:

Twentieth-century political society, unlike its thirteenth-century counterpart, characteristically lacks...the existence in its midst of any influential body of protagonists of an absolute prohibition upon lying, let alone the presentation of that prohibition as part of a body of thought claiming to merit both its intellectual and its moral allegiance.⁶¹

Yet as Paul Griffiths has argued, Aquinas' approach to lying was purely ethical, viewing it as an offence against justice.⁶² MacIntyre only reads Aquinas in relation to modern ethicists. For Augustine lying was wrong because it was 'a rupture of the divine image'. Aquinas' position is closer to the Greek Patristic tradition. I would argue that this is no accident given that the Greek tradition stretching back to Clement of Alexandria was more hospitable to esotericism and had a closer relationship to the Byzantine Empire, more analogous to Aquinas' relation to the Papacy and its power than to Augustine's critical distance from the Roman Empire. It accords with Aquinas having written dissertations on esoteric themes, versus Augustine's repudiation of such thinking.

⁶¹ MacIntyre, Alasdair, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, cited in Knight, Kelvin, *The MacIntyre Reader* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998) pp. 155-156.

⁶² On what follows see Griffiths, Paul J., *Lying: An Augustinian Theology of Duplicity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2004) pp. 171-184.

Conclusion

The end result of neglecting the history of how the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of theology were separated is that esotericism has come to be seen by many Christians as a style of discourse that is distinct from and mainly opposed to Christian theology. Partly this may have been the influence of Calvinism in some countries, as it was generally opposed to things esoteric, possibly associating them with magic and superstition.⁶³ Apophaticism has become fashionable among theologians in recent years, yet most have not made the connection with the esoteric disciplines, i.e. the way in which an apophatic theology has served to conceal artistic and scientific knowledge from lay people.⁶⁴ Some theologians have turned to apophaticism as an apologetic device to woo students and to ward off what they regard as Biblical literalism.⁶⁵ In practice this often translates into ignoring positive exegesis

⁶³ Thomas, Keith, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London: Penguin, 2001). Cameron, Euan, *Superstition, Reason and Religion: 1250-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). It is worth recalling that both Luther and Calvin were heavily indebted to interpretations of Augustine. Calvin and the Reformed churches seem to have inherited Augustine's hostility to esotericism.

⁶⁴ See for example the anthology of western apophatic texts collected in Franke, William, *On What Cannot Be Said: Apophatic Discourse in Philosophy, Religion, Literature and the Arts* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 2007). On alchemy as conceived and concealed theologically by doctrines of election and priesthood in East and West, see Karpenko, Vladimir, 'Alchemy as Donum Dei', *Hyle: International Journal for the Philosophy of Chemistry* 4, (1998) pp. 3-8.

⁶⁵ John Webster perceptively links Rowan Williams' redefinition of apophasis in terms of 'the indeterminable and unsystematic character of knowledge of God' with his 'curious insistence on polyphony, conflict, and incoherence within the [Biblical] canon.' Webster, John, 'Rowan Williams on Scripture', in Bockmuehl, Markus and Torrance, Alan J., *Scripture's Doctrine and Theology's Bible: How the New Testament Shapes Christian Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008) pp. 108-109, 121. Andrew Moody offers a sharp critique of Williams' reliance on apophasis in dogmatics, but as with many writers on the apophatic/kataphatic distinction, he fails to see the elitism at the core of ecclesiastical handling of apophasis which means that the apophatic theologian is forever warding off kataphatic expressions as supposedly too reminiscent of 'simple piety'. This kind of mentality is traceable to Clement of Alexandria and Origen. Andrew Moody, 'The Hidden Center: Trinity and Incarnation in the Negative (and Positive) Theology of

altogether. Thus the reality is that the modern fad for apophatic theology could be seen as quasi- or pseudo-esoteric, in that unlike its ancestor it is not a double-edged sword both pointing to the ineffable God and the secret things supposedly only known to Him (and of course to His priests!). In being locked in this practice, modern theological apophaticism is blind to its complicity with its historical ancestor's role in keeping knowledge away from lay people, whilst at times functioning to ward students off from close reading of the Biblical texts. In this respect, it may even form part of an academic mode of surveillance against the continued rediscovery of and debate concerning the Biblical texts.⁶⁶

Both cryptography and surveillance are related to state intelligence: the former as hiding it in impersonal form and the latter as gathering of intelligence. The police states of Communist Eastern Europe relied a lot on personal surveillance. In late modernity surveillance and cryptography have come to be closely linked as both have become computerised. The history of the former Communist states shows that it is not technology that is the biggest problem for religious and scholarly liberty, it is state ideology insofar as the majority of the population chooses to assent to it. David Lyon's theory is that the rise of surveillance is linked to the phenomenon of 'disappearing bodies'—we can do things at a distance.⁶⁷ Digital and computerised surveillance arrived quite a bit of time after the social fragmentation that was initiated in the 1960s, so it cannot be held responsible for every ill, any more than 'global capitalism' can be. There is a tendency for some intellectuals to construct conspiracy theories around the two, whilst ignoring the reality of the role of law, public policy and the manufacture of public opinion in secularising and de-Christianising western countries. Unless this reality is grasped, we will not be capable of grasping the depth of

Rowan Williams', in Russell, Matheson, *On Rowan Williams: Critical Essays* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2009) pp. 25-46.

⁶⁶ As with theological criticism of MacIntyre, so with introducing historic debates in theological exegesis to students and congregations—the work is done in the United States more than in Britain. See Thompson, John L., *Reading the Bible With the Dead: What You Can Learn From the History of Exegesis That You Can't Learn From Exegesis Alone* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2007).

⁶⁷ Lyon, David, *Surveillance Society: Monitoring Everyday Life* (Buckinghamshire: Open University, 2001).

the problems involved in being asked to manage the effects of a public ideology of diversity in university classrooms and supervisions. If there is a culture of ‘disappearing bodies’, this is reflected in some pedagogical arguments for using e-learning methods, with individualised distance learning at the extreme end. Parallel to this development in time, but not in nature, has been an increasing disappearance of primary Biblical texts in theological teaching. There is no causal relationship between the two. However, if the culture of learning elects to choose only distance-learning methods, it is preserving reading primary Biblical texts as a solitary act at the expense of communal reading. Thus the very rationale of reading and hearing primary Biblical texts is undermined. It is impossible to *debate* Biblical exegesis if you only read the Bible by yourself. The idea of a reading community, like that of a reading public, cannot survive if teaching becomes merely a method of surveillance of students via computer. Not only that, but the many foreign students who now form a large proportion of our degrees—the majority in many postgraduate courses—find British university culture alienating, atomised and depersonalised. There has been a renewal of scholarly interest in theological exegesis of the Bible, but it has not translated into major programs on the history of theological exegesis spanning the past two millennia. There is one sure way to capture the interests of the diversity of students in theology and ethics, and also to tackle the sundering of the exoteric and esoteric branches of theology, and that is to teach the history of the interrelationship of the two branches, and how this feeds into the history of the theological exegesis of the Bible, as this is the central text that all Christian traditions share, and which has shaped western culture and ethics even when repudiated. Attention to them should help foster a deeper engagement with the theological diversity within Christian theology, exegesis and ethics in the classroom.

A Study of Pupil Understandings of ‘Terrorism’ in Pupil Conversations (aged 16-18) and Questionnaires from a Sample of Warwickshire Secondary Schools

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Abstract

This article aims to investigate pupils’ views of ‘terrorism’, to better understand how they define the phenomenon and to gauge their views

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on whether it should be taught in school settings, in particular within Religious Education (RE) lessons. A survey of 205 pupils from 7 Warwickshire schools was conducted alongside 10 semi-structured group discussions. The results showed that the pupils wanted to know more about terrorism, which they defined as an act of violence (either physical or mental) against civilians, motivated by religion and/or politics. They considered RE to be an important subject for such discussions, but were wary about how such a topic could be broached within the school environment. Through a careful examination of their ideas, this article concludes that the topic could be incorporated in the RE curriculum, only if further research, additional training and classroom materials were made available, because it is such a sensitive topic that it could increase racist attacks rather than encourage community cohesion.

Introduction

Since the 11th September 2001 (9/11) and 7th July 2005 (7/7) attacks, terrorism has become an increasing concern in international and national crime prevention strategies. Alongside the UK’s involvement in ongoing conflicts, counter-terrorism concerns also led to a government document called *CONTEST* (HM Government 2009b), which covers a wide-range of strategies, namely to Pursue, Prevent, Protect and Prepare against terrorist attacks. The Prevent Strategy is particularly interesting because it states that: ‘schools can play an important role in helping young people to become more resilient to the messages of violent extremists’ (HM Government 2008:47), which suggests that education can have a role to play in the government’s counter-terrorism policy. However, there has been a change in government since these documents were released, so this paper has been restricted to documents published before May 2010.

Due to the role education has in the UK counter-terrorism policy, I decided to research pupil views on the matter, to see if they thought terrorism was a topic they would like to discuss in schools. Although the Prevent Strategy uses the terms ‘violent extremism’ and ‘terrorism’ interchangeably, my literature review demonstrated that there are differences between the concepts. Therefore, I felt it necessary to restrict

the focus of my research and chose terrorism due to my previous research and personal interest in the topic. I further restricted the scope of the research by focusing on the links pupils made between terrorism and religion because of my interest in how this topic could affect secondary school Religious Education.

The primary research question was: how do Warwickshire pupils define 'terrorism'? The subsidiary questions included: What actions and motives for such actions do they associate with 'terrorist' behaviour? Do they want to learn about the topic of 'terrorism'? Do they think it is an appropriate topic for the school curriculum? If so, in which school subjects do they think 'terrorism' could be discussed? Do they think that RE can play a role in the introduction of this topic?

To answer these questions, I asked pupils (aged 16-18 years old) to define and explain their understanding of terrorism, using a mixed methods approach of questionnaires and discussion groups. The sensitive nature of the topic and my theoretical position affected my methodological choices and my analysis of the data, particularly the validity and generalisability of results. Therefore I restricted my research to the Warwickshire area to ensure that there could be a degree of generalisability. The nature of the Prevent Strategy also justified the focus on this geographical area; the document is intended as a guide for local councils and each area has a different amount of Prevent funding and can interpret the Strategy according to their needs.

This paper begins with an examination of the literature, specifically how terrorism is defined on an international and national level, as well as the role education has in current UK counter-terrorism policies. This is followed by an overview of the methods and a brief examination of the results, focusing particularly on the links the pupils made between religion and terrorism. For my analysis, I compared the survey results with the group discussions, which then guided my concluding comments on the pupils' understanding of terrorism and the role that RE could play. I have also provided some preliminary suggestions for further research and conclude that RE could be an appropriate subject for teaching about the topic of terrorism in schools, if proper training (from teacher training courses) and classroom materials are made available, because it is such a sensitive and complex topic.

Literature review

1. Historical overview

The phenomenon of terrorism has a complex history; ‘as the meaning and usage of the word have changed over time to accommodate the political vernacular and discourse of each successive era, terrorism has proved increasingly elusive in the face of attempts to construct one consistent definition’ (Hoffman 2006:20). Current definitions are based on a post-1980s ‘fourth wave’ of terrorism (Rapoport 2004), where religion, particularly ‘radical Islam’, is ‘the most important defining characteristic’ (Schmid 1988:82). Religious terrorists see their struggle as good against evil, therefore they dehumanise their victims and consider non-members infidels (Cronin 2003:41). However, some scholars doubt whether this ‘new terrorism’ really exists, because it is difficult to know someone’s true motivation and religious forms of terrorism are not new (for example, the Zealots). The phenomenon may have merely evolved as a result of better technologies, such as better weapons, rather than altered in the modern era.

2. Definitions

There is no universal definition of terrorism, but I think that when the term ‘terrorism’ is used, it is meant pejoratively to demonstrate one’s interpretation of violent acts that have affected a civilian population (Jenkins 1980:10). There are many motivations, actions and actors (both state and non-state) that have been used to support one’s view of terrorism, but all of these ideas only serve to highlight any underlying power struggles that the author (and wider society) have attributed to the use of the term (Hoffman 2006:2).

(a) Schmid’s four arenas of terrorism definitions

(i) The academic arena

The academic discourse on definitions of ‘terrorism’ is extensive, with some scholars simply stating that a comprehensive definition is impos-

sible because terrorism has appeared in many different forms (Laqueur 1977:5). However, Schmid's study involved gathering definitions from academics in the field and resulted in terrorism being defined as 'an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action...for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons...The immediate human victims of violence are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) or selectively (representative or symbolic targets) from a target population, and serve as message generators' (Schmid 1992:8). Another study conducted by Weinburg et. al. (2004:783) used Schmid's categories to guide an investigation into the definitions of terrorism used in journal articles. They found that terrorism was given the following attributes: violence, politics, fear, threat, psychological effects, victim-target, organised activity, method of combat, extranormal behaviour (breaching accepted rules), coercion, publicity, indiscriminate, civilians, intimidation, innocence of victims, symbolic act, unpredictable, covert and criminal (Weinburg et. al. 2004:781). These ideas helped guide the pupil questionnaire design.

(ii) The international and state arena

International and government agencies have different agendas when using the word terrorism, as they tend to focus on security issues and legal matters. In the UK, there are two definitions of terrorism: the Terrorism Act 2000 states that terrorism is when 'the use or threat [of violence] is made for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause'. (Terrorism Act 2000, section 1, part 1,c), but the Reinsurance (Acts of Terrorism) Act 1993 section 2(2) does not include 'religion' in its definition (Carlile 2007:7).

Carlile's report on terrorism has influenced the government's counter-terrorism strategy and he preferred the Terrorism Act 2000 (Carlile 2007:24). He saw religious motivations as important, with the most dangerous ideology being 'violent and lethal jihad' (Carlile 2007:24), which highlights Islamic forms of terrorism above others (no detailed explanation is given for this bias). This legal definition has its advantages: it details the actions and motives that could be categorised as terrorism under British law. However, it excludes certain things, such as how the motives for terrorism may change over time.

(iii) Public debates and the media

The media (via television reports, newspapers or online news) is an important medium by which the general public hears about attacks—thus pupils are likely to have gained their knowledge about terrorism from this arena. Some scholars argue that it is exploited by terrorists to get their cause into the public sphere (Hoffman 1998:142), whilst others think that the portrayal of terrorism (and violence) in the media has a negative psychological effect on the readership (Slone 2000:508). Therefore, I had to be aware that some pupils may demonstrate an exaggerated fear of terrorism and was sympathetic to these concerns.

Due to the volume of news reports available, it is difficult to know why certain topics are reported, whilst others are not. Schmid (1992) attempted such a study and found that the actions most associated with terrorism included hostage taking, assassinations, indiscriminate bombings, kidnappings and hijackings (Schmid 1992:9). However, motivations should not be ignored and over the past year I have found that a meta-narrative appears to exist within the British media: cases of terrorism associated with Islam are discussed more frequently than any other form of terrorism. Although a more extensive study needs to be conducted, this brief examination highlighted how certain motivations (and actions) associated with terrorism caught the media’s attention (see Hoover 1998).

(iv) Those who support or perform acts of violence and terrorism

According to Richardson ‘terrorists don’t like to be called terrorists’ (Richardson 2006:19), but those who have labelled them as such do not consider them ‘a freedom fighter...[or] a guerilla [either]. A terrorist is a terrorist, no matter whether or not you like the goal s/he is trying to achieve, no matter whether or not you like the government s/he is trying to change.’ (Richardson 2006:28). Therefore, perhaps there is something about the term that makes acknowledging the terrorist perspective morally questionable.

There are some scholars who have tried to engage with ‘terrorists’ and one study led the scholar to conclude that ‘having the ‘terrorist’ as the central actor and subject of terrorism research does not offer much if any explanatory value; on the contrary, it...obfuscates rather

than clarifies' (Toros 2008:289-290). This study demonstrated the difficulties facing scholars in the field and further illustrates the difficulties with using the term to describe certain groups.

3. Religion and terrorism

According to Hoffman, religiously-associated terrorism is a distinctive form of terrorism because the violence not only has a moral justification, but it can legitimise the terrorist's cause (Hoffman 1993:2-3). 'As unpredictable and illogical as this violence may seem to outsiders, it falls within a pattern of asceticism leading to the ecstasy of self-sacrifice' (Appleby 1999:91). The concept of self-sacrifice (whether one calls it suicide attacks or martyrdom) is an important aspect of religiously-inspired terrorism, because it is this that gains the most publicity in media. Therefore, it is likely that the pupils will know about this action and associate it with the phenomenon.

Some writers argue that religion is merely an identity label for terrorists; they are actually motivated by political grievances, not religion (Dawkins 2006). Although this view is influential in some circles, I would argue that the very nature of religion being an all-encompassing lifestyle choice means that there must be a degree of religious-inspired motivation for certain groups. 'To interpret acts of violence and terrorism committed in the name of religion as necessarily motivated by other concerns and lacking in religious qualities is an error... [it] misunderstands religion and underestimates its ability to underwrite deadly conflict on its own terms' (Appleby 1999:30). Therefore, to understand this type of terrorism, you need to appreciate the importance of religion to those individuals concerned.

(a) UK Government view: the Prevent Strategy

The Prevent Strategy focuses on Islam and states that there needs to be a better understanding of 'Islam and Islamic culture, society and history across all communities' (HM Government 2008:18), which could be achieved through education. However, this focus on Islam is problematic because both outsiders and insiders to the Islamic faith are told that they need to combat dangerous 'myths and half-truths' (HM Government 2008:18). No examples of these half-truths are given, which makes it difficult to know which teachings in Islam need 'cor-

recting’. In my opinion, stating that one’s community needs to be taught about an archetypal form of ‘Islam’, that is deemed ‘right’ by a government dominated by non-Muslims could be interpreted as patronizing, or even insulting. In religious studies, the phenomenon of ‘Islam’ is often seen as a contested category, with no single definition or definable group; thus to present this ‘world religion’ as having one correct interpretation of the ‘truth’ is too reductionist (Martin 2001).

An-Nisa condemned the Strategy, stating that ‘the most glaring concerns of the Prevent Strategy are the targeting of the whole Muslim community as potential terrorists, the fusion of counter-terrorism with community cohesion and community development initiatives and the mainstreaming of Prevent in the core services of local councils’ (Khan 2009:4). Kundnani agrees, arguing that the focus on Islamic groups could be considered racist, which hinders community cohesion (Kundnani 2009:6-7). However, this latter point has now been recognised by the government: ‘Muslim communities have felt unfairly targeted and branded as potential terrorists. The Strategy has contributed to a sense of frustration and alienation amongst Muslims... Prevent’s focus on Muslim communities has not, therefore, been constructive’ (HM Government 2010:11), therefore there may be some policy changes in the future.

4. The role of secondary school education

(a) The UK government strategy

With respect to the British education system, the Prevent Strategy wants schools, universities and other education bodies to take an active role in dealing with ‘terrorist’ and ‘extremist’ behaviour. Schools in particular ‘can play an important role in helping young people to become more resilient to the messages of violent extremists... through creating an environment where all young people learn to understand others, value and appreciate diversity and develop skills to debate and analyse’ (HM Government 2008:47). However, the Communities and Local Government Committee report states that ‘there is clearly a disjuncture between the stated national aims of the Prevent educational activity and the reality of much of its content...it is not Prevent activity in any meaningful sense’ (HM Government 2010:59).

The Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has provided advice for schools, suggesting that ‘schools should actively challenge such beliefs in a constructive but unequivocal way’ (DfES 2008:2-3), because schools are a safe environment for pupils to discuss terrorism in (DCSF 2008:4). Pupils should not be sheltered from knowing about terrorism, but rather provided with ‘constructive avenues’ (DfES 2008:6) to ‘explore their feelings, fears, curiosity and concerns’ (DfES 2008:6). However, it is questionable how one can discuss terrorism openly when the beliefs of terrorists must be challenged ‘unequivocally’; pupils will not be able to explore the topic in depth if a bias towards government views is given preferential treatment.

I have had difficulty finding what school pupils think about the implementation of such programmes and although a survey was carried out by the UK Youth Parliament, which found that young people did want to know about terrorism (see the Youth Parliament website), more information is needed so that RE advisors and teacher training institutes can write clear curriculum materials that present the data in an appropriate manner to pupils.

(b) The local strategy

The Prevent Strategy is intended to act as a guide for local authorities (HM Government 2008), and according to Warwickshire’s Prevent Co-ordinator, the risk of terrorism is low in comparison to other areas such as Birmingham or Manchester, so the funding here is significantly less. The police have tried to engage young people and teachers through the Warwickshire Learning Platform website (which has restricted access) and through a range of organised events, including Natural Born Leaders (an event for vulnerable young people), Communities against Terrorism (where pupils discuss how to respond to a terrorist threat) and Tapestry (a drama group that engages with young people through an interactive play). However, getting teachers involved has been difficult, with some not engaging with either resource, therefore I predict that my research may reflect some apathy from the teachers and consequently a lack of awareness about terrorism from the Warwickshire pupils.

(c) Religious Education

With these recommendations already impacting on schools, it is important to know when and how teachers are expected to discuss such difficult topics. There have already been some endeavours to incorporate terrorism studies into Citizenship (QCA 2007:29), PHSE and RE (REsilience programme, see Religious Education Council of England and Wales website), but other subjects such as geography, history and sociology could include it (this requires further investigation). The Toledo report states that ‘there is a religious aspect to many of the problems that contemporary society faces, such as intolerant fundamentalist movements and terrorist acts’ (The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights 2007:87). Therefore, it is logical for RE to be incorporated into Prevent strategies because RE focuses on the religious aspects of life.

In my opinion, RE teachers cannot be expected to teach such a difficult and emotive subject without very clear, factual advice about terrorism. This topic has the potential to have a serious and negative impact on pupils if it is not taught correctly, therefore, this study is important because it gives an insight into pupil opinions, which could guide further research and help training institutes and teachers make an informed decision about appropriate materials for RE classrooms. Teacher training courses in the UK could help in these endeavours by providing teachers with the tools to engage with such a difficult topic.

Methods

The methods I have chosen to generate data for my research are questionnaires and semi-structured group discussions. The pupils were aged 16-18 years old, studying A-levels in a random sample of Warwickshire schools. It was impossible to get a completely randomised selection of schools due to gate-keepers restricting access, thus the sample was one of convenience. I aimed to gather data from approximately 200 pupils and achieved a population size of 205 pupils from seven schools.

(a) Ethical considerations

Ethical concerns were important because focusing on the links between

‘religion’ and ‘terrorism’ could lead pupils to discuss one religion above another, which could result in racist comments or attacks. I therefore decided to reduce any problems by taking a covert approach and did not discuss the purpose of my research prior to conducting the survey. However, the teachers were made aware of the research aims beforehand and, once the survey and discussion group were completed, I discussed the research in more detail with the pupils. All results were fed-back to the schools before publication.

Other ethical considerations included: (i) How research can affect and be affected by Government Policy; (ii) the nature of conducting research with children (e.g. informed consent, confidentiality etc.); (iii) how the data was collected (i.e. survey design and semi-structured discussion groups); and (iv) how the data will be disseminated. However, these concerns are beyond the scope of this paper.

(b) Theoretical assumptions

There are three main theoretical positions that have influenced my research methods: interpretivism, (liberal) feminism and postmodernism. My religious studies training has influenced these theoretical choices, particularly the phenomenological tradition (associated with the interpretivist tradition). I attempted to use *epoché*, which means I aimed to ‘bracket out’ my own beliefs when collecting and analysing the data. Aiming for *epoché* was considered the most appropriate approach for a project that involves mixed methods: the data are meant to complement each other, so it would be illogical to use one approach with one data set and a completely different approach with another. Having a single theoretical approach allowed for a universal interpretation of the data.

(c) Design of the survey and discussion groups

The theoretical standpoints and ethical considerations contributed to the decision to use a mixed methods approach. The primary research question aimed to discover an attitude or opinion, which can be best discovered through the use of a survey (Wiersma 1995:5). The survey is also a good practical tool, since it allows for the sampling of a large number of respondents in a short amount of time (Nardi 2003:59). It

allows researchers to test patterns and trends in the data that may not be as noticeable in the qualitative research. However, the discussion groups were important because they provided more detailed information on pupils’ views and helped clarify the meanings they alluded to in the survey.

(d) Data collection

The data collection took place in one hour lessons and I structured it in a manner similar to a lesson; first explaining the purpose of the research and any ethical considerations, before initiating the survey and finally conducting a group discussion with a random sample of six to ten pupils. During the pilot study, pupils stated that they preferred this method and as a trained teacher, I am aware of the importance of helping pupils concentrate in lessons, so conducting the survey in silence was a good way of ensuring that they were focused (Bloor 2001:42-48).

I had originally designed the discussion groups for six pupils, but since a teacher’s presence was required, not all schools were able to provide this additional support (or time). Therefore, I decided to conduct the same style of group discussion in every school, with all pupils present in the classroom. The class was divided into groups of three or four pupils and each group nominated a spokesperson to take part in the discussion on their behalf. The groups were then given five minutes to come up with a combined definition of terrorism that was used as a starting point. The pilot study showed that pupils preferred this method because it meant that anyone who had taken part in the survey could be involved in the group discussion. However, it was not ideal because focus groups can be unpredictable; the shyness of some pupils and the hierarchy within the peer group may have left some pupils feeling unable, or unwilling to take part. I am also aware that my teacher training allowed this style of discussion to take place—it may not have been as successful had I not known how to control large groups of pupils. Conducting the focus group in front of the entire class was appropriate though, because it ensured that participants were provided with early feedback on the results, which was important since they would have no access to academic publications (Bloor 2001:15).

Results

A random convenience sample was taken from seven different schools in Warwickshire: five schools were mixed comprehensive schools, one school was an all-boys grammar school and one school was an all-girls grammar school.

I. Quantitative survey

A total of 205 pupils, 104 boys and 101 girls, took part in the survey (Q1). There was a good range of pupils from both AS and A2 level courses: 57 pupils were aged 16, 97 pupils were 17 and 51 pupils were 18 (Q2). The pupils studied a wide variety of subjects from the sciences, to the arts and humanities, with the largest numbers coming from sociology, psychology and mathematics (Q3).

A high proportion of the pupils wanted to learn about the topic of terrorism in school, with 122 responding positively and 35 responding negatively; 64 were unsure (Q4). The pupils were then asked which subjects they thought were best for teaching about the topic. The highest numbers were recorded in Citizenship and RE, with Politics and History also featuring quite highly (Q5).

The pupils were asked to define 'terrorism' in an open-ended question (Q7). The majority of pupils stated that it caused harm to others, typically in the form of physical violence, but mental or psychological harm could also take place. 65 pupils made a religious link and 22 made a link to politics. Other ideas included making threats, hurting innocent people and fighting for an unjust cause.

To further clarify what the pupils thought about terrorism, rank order and Likert-style questions were asked, giving key examples of the typical motivations and threats/actions associated with the phenomena. For motivations, the pupils were asked to put the following categories in order of importance: anger, a desire to protect their family, hatred, money, personal violent desires, politics, racism or prejudices, religious ideas, revenge and for glory (Q8). Religious ideas were considered to be the most important motivation for terrorists, whilst money and for glory were considered the least important.

For threats and actions, the pupils were given a list of different

activities, based on findings from the literature review (Q10). The results demonstrated that the pupils thought that the actions most associated with terrorism included: intimidation, the killing of non-military citizens, mass murder, suicide attacks and violent threats. However, they were less sure about Internet propaganda, making speeches, protest marches and trying to get nuclear weapons.

Once these questions were completed, two open-ended questions were asked concerning which groups or individuals the pupils had heard of (Q13) and which areas of the world the pupils thought these terrorists might come from (Q14). The majority of responses to Q13 included al-Qaida, Osama bin Laden, the Taliban and the IRA. Only 183 respondents answered Q14, and 67 wrote ‘anywhere’ or ‘no area’. The main regions that were mentioned included the Middle East, Iraq, Asia, Afghanistan and ‘religious areas’. Only 2 pupils stated that terrorists could come from the UK, 5 pupils wrote the USA.

Finally, the pupils were asked if they thought that the topic of terrorism should be taught in schools (Q15). 122 agreed, 19 disagreed and 64 were unsure. In Q16 the pupils were asked to explain their response and 114 pupils said that they thought it needed teaching because pupils wanted to know why it happens. Many saw it as a current issue that could reduce prejudices against the Muslim community. However, 47 pupils were concerned about how the topic could be taught and said that it needed to be handled carefully or sensitively; 22 pupils said it could make the situation worse, and 17 were worried that people might take offence at the subject.

2. Qualitative semi-structured discussion groups

A total of 10 discussion groups took place with 36 girls and 44 boys taking part in 20 minute discussions (totalling 80 pupils). For each discussion, I followed a loose structure of questions concerning definitions of terrorism, before moving onto whether they felt terrorism was a topic they would like to study in school. Due to the broad range of responses gathered, it is difficult to summarise all the data within this paper. Therefore, I will only focus on the links made between religion and terrorism.

Generally, the pupils in the discussion groups did validate the responses found in the survey, with religion featuring very highly.

Other motivations discussed included politics, power, social inequalities and economic concerns. The pupils also discussed the types of actions they associated with terrorism, with the incitement of fear and physical violence being the most discussed.

(a) Religion

Some pupils saw religion as a key feature of terrorism, whilst others declared that terrorists misunderstood the teachings of their faith. All the discussions included some details about Islam, above other faith groups, therefore I shall outline these ideas separately.

Those pupils who thought religion was a motivating factor had a range of views including: a clash of cultures or religion being behind terrorist attacks; the power of religion encouraging the activities, either through the promise of an afterlife or the use of religion to exert superiority; and finally prejudices, either against another religious group or against members of their own faith. Al-Qaeda was mentioned by a few pupils as a group who believed that they would get into heaven if they acted in a particular way for their God.

One female pupil declared that the people at the 'bottom' needed religion because it meant that a greater power was on their side; the people at the 'top' were more motivated by money and power and used religion to brainwash the followers. Another pupil commented that people believe in 'different Gods and things' and they disagree with each other, so 'go around terrorising everyone'. Perhaps different groups use religion in different ways: one pupil thought that the IRA aimed to separate themselves from another religion, whereas al-Qaeda was trying to make theirs the central religion.

An important discussion point concerned prejudices, whether that was a religiously motivating feature of terrorism or not. One pupil declared that religion could cause more prejudices, thus make people perform acts of terrorism against others. Another group discussed the idea that terrorism could be an act against a religion, done to exert a different set of beliefs. One male pupil commented that terrorists were 'all Indians or whatever saying that they wanted to control everything... like ethnic cleansing'. However, other pupils saw terrorist attacks as a cause of prejudices, especially against Islam, rather than the result of them.

(i) Islam

Islam was mentioned in all discussion groups, with many pupils commenting that there was an increased prejudice against Muslims in society. Some pupils said that the media focussed more on Islamic forms of terrorism, which had caused an increase in Islamophobia and incorrect stereotypes. One said that the word terrorism made her instantly think of headscarves and Islam, even though she knew that was not the case. This was similar to other comments on the stereotypical views of terrorists: terrorists were those from the Middle East, with a beard who flew planes or wore a turban. One interesting comment was that the ‘it looks like the media is trying to increase Islamophobia ...[because] it feels like the headlines are trying to give a certain idea or bias’.

However, what concerned a few pupils was what impact this increase in prejudices could have on society. One male pupil thought the media portrayed ‘terrorists as Muslims, so all Muslims are terrorists, which will make more people turn to terrorism and bring terrorism fear’. Another said that ‘now almost anyone with a dark skin is labelled as a Muslim and so called a terrorist’, whilst one female pupil was concerned for her own safety ‘because we all have the same colour face, people link Indians to Muslims’.

When asked further about their ideas, two pupils said that the promises of a good afterlife was a possible reason for some Muslims performing suicide attacks. Other groups discussed how terrorists had ‘warped’ interpretations of their religion. One female pupil said that those who acted in the name of Islam had read the Qur’an in a particular way; they think they are doing right by their religion, but they have not interpreted it correctly. Most groups agreed that it was only a small minority who committed terrorist attacks, with some saying that the most Muslims feel disgusted by the attacks.

(ii) Not religion

Not all pupils thought that terrorism was motivated by religion. Some declared that there was no link between religion and terrorism, whilst others said that religion was misused, misinterpreted or misrepresented by terrorists and the media, perhaps to gain power for political or social reasons. Some pupils stated that those involved in terrorism had been

‘brainwashed’ and other commented that religion was not the motivating factor because other things, such as troops invading a country, might make people act in that way. A different motivation given was politics, particularly for groups like the Tamil Tigers and the IRA.

(c) Education

With respect to education, the pupils were generally split on whether they thought it was a topic that should be taught in a school environment. Those who thought that it was beneficial declared that education could help reduce the problem of prejudice in society. Teaching about terrorism could increase pupil knowledge and awareness, so that they could understand why certain attacks, like 7/7, happened. Religious Education was mentioned as a subject where terrorism could be taught, but (despite the results in the survey) Citizenship/PHSE was rejected because the pupils felt that they did not pay enough attention in that subject.

However, despite this positivity, there were some who were concerned about teacher or government bias coming through the curriculum, with one pupil declaring that it could only be taught if the whole ‘spectrum of terrorism’ was open to discussion, not just Islamic groups. Another said that the government could be considered terrorists, but that aspect would probably be ignored. Some pupils thought that teaching about terrorism may in fact be detrimental to social integration, because some pupils may find it too upsetting or it could cause more prejudice and bullying in schools. It may even encourage someone to act in a negative way or make the situation worse.

Analysis

For this section, I will begin with an examination of the definitions provided by the pupils, making links between the data sets and literature review (particular Schmid’s four arenas), where appropriate. I will then discuss how my findings could affect RE before suggesting areas for further investigation.

I. Definitions

In the survey and discussion groups, the pupils made links between terrorism and violence (both physical and mental/psychological), as well as to religion and politics. However, due to the nature of open-ended questions, there were many different styles of response, which could not be accommodated in this brief overview. I consequently chose key words or common phrases to summarise the answers.

(a) Religion and terrorism

Religion was considered a key aspect of terrorism in both data sets, but politics, racism, revenge and hatred were also discussed. Considering the impact the ‘fourth wave’ of terrorism (which focuses on religion, Rapoport 2004) has had in the academic, state and public/media arena, it is understandable that the pupils linked religion to terrorism. With respect to terrorist actions, the pupils thought that intimidation, mass murder, the killing of civilians and suicide attacks were good descriptions (Q10), which was similar to the foci in Schmid’s study of the media arena (Schmid 1992:9). However, due to the limitations of this paper, I will only focus on suicide attacks because some pupils linked this action to religiously-motivated terrorism.

An important concept that came through both sources was the clash of cultures. In the group discussions one pupil stated it was East versus West, which is like a simplified version of Huntington’s clash of civilisations theory, that basically states that there are a few world civilisations that differ on economic, military and ethical grounds, with Islamic and Western civilisations being the most prominent (Huntingdon 2002). This idea has probably seeped into the public arena as a simple explanation for such extreme actions.

The power of religion featured highly, with one survey respondent declaring that terrorists were ‘willing to do anything for their religion as they believe it that strongly’. Some pupils used the phrase ‘brainwashed,’ which suggests that they think the terrorists may have been manipulated into behaving in that way. Popularised images of brainwashing support this idea; television programmes like Derren Brown’s *Trick of the Mind* (2005) demonstrate the loss of control over actions. However, ‘brainwashing’ is more complex than these popularised images suggest, but this discussion goes beyond the scope of

this paper.

Some pupils stated that terrorism was a religious action, performed by 'religious people trying to force their ideas on non-believers'. The most discussed action was self-sacrifice or martyrdom and 87% of all survey respondents associated suicide attacks with terrorism. These results were expected because suicide attacks are considered a feature of 'new terrorism' (Rapport 2004:62), with groups such as al-Qaeda and the Tamil Tigers employing these tactics, thus gaining publicity in the media. However, there is a subtle difference between the terms suicide attacks and martyrdom; the latter has religious overtones and suggests that the participant's death was not in vain but rather that they suffered (and died) to aid a cause, a group of people, a country or an organization. It is likely that the pupils associate the suicide attacks with terrorism because these gain the most publicity.

The concept of self-sacrifice or martyrdom is a crucial element that explains how the pupils perceive the nature and style of terrorist attacks. According to Appleby, self-sacrifice was an important element of this type of violence (Appleby 1999:91) and groups such as Hamas believe that 'with the first drop of his blood the martyr is said to go straight to Paradise' (Appleby 1999:25). Therefore, the promise of an afterlife helps to explain why someone might commit an act that is so contrary to human nature. However, there may be other reasons behind such attacks, such as responding to a perceived threat or attack on a community (see Girard 1972:259 and Juergensmeyer 2000:12), but these reasons were not discussed in detail by the pupils.

The perceived prejudices between religions (or in a religion) are linked to the clash of cultures idea (mentioned earlier) because it is the differences between people that cause conflict. However, this may be more complex than simply a difference of beliefs, as one pupil mentioned 'ethnic cleansing' in the group discussions. According to Weber, ethnic divisions do encourage conflicts, in particular the idea of a 'chosen people' (Weber 1978:239). This links into the notion of (religious) purity, with one pupil calling Hitler a terrorist because he wanted a pure race and another pupil defining terrorism as 'religiously backed form of cleansing'.

(i) Islam

The most frequently mentioned religion was Islam, which was predicted because the Prevent Strategy states that Islam (rather than any other religion) requires better understanding, particularly within the education sector (HM Government 2008:18). It is also a topic discussed in the local and national media—some pupils had noticed a media bias and said that some stories made them associate Islam with terrorism, even though they knew that was not necessarily the case. However, one pupil said that this media focus was ‘their own doing’, which suggests that some pupils may have thought the links made between Islam and terrorism were justified, but were unwilling to speak out in the classroom. Therefore, although the majority of comments concerned the view that terrorists were a minority group who had a ‘warped’ interpretation of Islam, there may have been alternative views that did not surface, due to the nature of the data collection.

The fear of expressing prejudice was highlighted by a number of pupils, with some noting that they thought teaching about the topic of terrorism would lead to a government bias being highlighted in the curriculum. As the Communities and Local Government Committee stated, the Prevent Strategy had focussed too greatly on Islam (HM Government 2010:11), therefore before such a topic can be broached in schools, the Prevent Strategy needs to be altered so that schools are better informed about the topics that they should discuss.

(b) Religious Education

The results from the survey showed that a high proportion of pupils wanted to learn about the topic of terrorism, with Citizenship and RE being the two most popular subjects for such studies. Post-16 Citizenship is taken by every pupil, but RE is primarily an optional subject, therefore it is possible that the pupils thought that terrorism was a topic that could be discussed by all pupils, as well as in more detail within specific subject areas. However, it is more likely that the pupils did not consider the difference between secondary and post-16 education when they chose the subjects, therefore these two subjects could have received the most positive results because pupils thought that the topic was best suited for general curriculum areas. More detailed questions about subject choices were included in the group dis-

cussions, but some of the results contradicted the quantitative data; some pupils stated that Citizenship was not appropriate for the topic.

Interestingly though, RE was still considered a key subject in the group discussions, but the pupils did not specify which age group they thought was appropriate. The surrounding discussion on those occasions focused on 14-16 secondary school education, so it is likely that they were referring to the more general RE teaching rather than the A-level subject. However, if this is the case, it is interesting that no pupil highlighted a concern with their attitude towards RE—particularly considering the recent OFSTED report that stated RE Education is inadequate in many schools (OFSTED 2010). After carefully examining the definitions the pupils provided, I would speculate that the pupils may consider RE teachers more appropriate sources for such discussions because they should have a better knowledge base of religion, making them more trustworthy sources. The pupils were concerned that terrorism could be misrepresented and therefore they may have felt better being taught about such a controversial issue by someone who should be aware of these difficulties. As the RE Council of England and Wales reported, RE can help pupils appreciate diversity and explain the religious links made to extremist behaviour, which were areas discussed by the pupils in both the survey and the group discussions. However, due to time constraints, I was unable to question the pupils further on the matter and future research will be conducted to gather more detailed data on how they think RE could be used for this subject matter.

(i) Suggestions for future research

Areas for future research could include replica studies conducted with younger pupils (participants of my study suggested pupils aged 14-16) in other local authorities, to get a broader range of views. Teacher surveys could also be conducted, to see what RE teachers know about the topic and what resources they would like to have prior to introducing it into their classrooms, which could also help provide further information to teacher training institutes about what needs to be discussed with those going into classrooms. I would also recommend action research projects, to try different methods of introducing the topic into RE lessons. One method could be to give pupils a wider knowledge base through an historical overview of the topic (demonstrating how

the links to religion are considered a relatively recent construct), prior to discussing more specific details on the subject. Examples of terrorism could also be discussed, but the teacher would have to be confident with his/her knowledge on the subject and discuss a variety of examples from different religions (and non-religious groups), to ensure that pupils did not simply associate such actions with members of one religion (in this case, Islam). An action research project could also show the affects of including terrorism studies into RE; hopefully, it will help reduce the pupils’ fear of such attacks and make the subject more current and interesting, but it could also have a negative impact and increase pupil prejudices. Such studies would also help teacher training courses because they would provide institutions with more information on what teachers need to know about the subject and also help them present the data to the pupils in the best way possible.

Although I found that pupils want to know about terrorism, associate terrorism with religion and consider RE an appropriate subject for studying the topic, additional research needs to be conducted to see if RE can indeed be used in this way. Once such studies have been completed, better guidelines can be established, more teacher training made available and classroom materials produced.

Conclusion

As this paper demonstrated, terrorism is a complex phenomenon, with no single definition. The term is used in a pejorative manner to describe certain actions that are considered criminal by one group trying to gain power over another. It is used in different ways by academics, the state, the media and by those groups who have been labelled ‘terrorist’, therefore it is difficult to know exactly what is meant when someone uses the term.

However, in UK law, the term describes certain criminal activities, such as suicide attacks and assassinations, that are linked to particular motivations, including religion and politics. This makes it a controversial and sensitive topic for schools to be engaging with, particularly since one religion, Islam, is generally considered the inspiration for the negative criminal behaviour that the government wants to prevent. Furthermore, despite the Prevent Strategy suggesting that edu-

cation could be used to help combat terrorism and violent extremism (HM Government 2008), there is little advice for how schools could incorporate the topic into the curriculum. Consequently, local authorities have been encouraged to interpret the plans and use them appropriately for their areas, which has led to some difficulties. For example, Warwickshire (an area with low Prevent funding) has only been able to engage with teachers through police initiatives such as a free website and training courses, so this region focuses on the criminality of terrorism rather than answering the questions that the pupils have about the topic, which restricts its usefulness to teachers and pupils.

After collecting data from 205 pupils for the survey and 80 pupils for the group discussions, I found that the pupils did think the topic of terrorism should be taught in schools and it was something they wanted to know about, but they were concerned with how this could be implemented because teachers may show a certain bias (either their own or government), which could lead to racist attacks. They generally defined terrorism as acts of violence, either physical or mental, that had been motivated by religion and/or politics. The actions of terrorists included mass murder, the killing of civilians and suicide attacks, and they thought that terrorists were mainly motivated by religious ideas, politics and racism.

The pupils thought that in principle the subjects which could include such teaching included Citizenship/PHSE, Religious Education, Politics and History, but in practice the pupils were unsure if Citizenship was appropriate because they did not pay attention in that subject and thought that the topic may be too sensitive for their schools. However, RE was deemed appropriate both in principle and in practice, therefore, it is important to understand the role that RE could have in countering terrorism. An action research project could be conducted to test how RE could be used to help alleviate pupil fears of terrorism or reduce prejudices. Perhaps providing them with a detailed historical overview of the topic, or informing them of multiple examples from a variety of religious and non-religious groups, could help combat any misunderstandings they have about terrorism. However, further research needs to be conducted and additional teacher training in higher education facilities needs to be provided to ensure that RE teachers are able to teach the topic without accidentally increasing prejudice.

Overall, this paper has tried to demonstrate the difficulties with

understanding the topic of terrorism by highlighting the complex nature of the phenomenon and the problems with using the term. Despite these problems though, it is a topic that pupils want to know about and therefore, I would argue that schools can incorporate it into their curriculum, for pupils over the age of 14, after further research has been conducted and additional classroom materials or training has been made available. Terrorism is an interesting subject matter for pupils, but it is also a very sensitive topic and needs to be dealt with appropriately before it can be introduced.

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Teaching Critical Thinking Beyond Philosophy

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Introduction

This article is about the practicalities of teaching critical thinking to a varied undergraduate audience. Ostensibly it is the case study of a particular course that the author has taught on and helped develop over several years, but its fundamental aim is to contribute ideas about how we might generally approach the teaching of critical thinking ‘beyond philosophy’. To achieve this, the main challenges identified are, firstly, to make it accessible and engaging; secondly, to clearly demonstrate its broad relevance to everyday and professional life, and thirdly, to abet students’ recognition of its rele-

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vance to their other subjects, and to their development as learners (in terms of a) analytical skills, b) a learning tool, and c) substantial connections with other subject matter). The undergirding conviction is that these are all achievable and, indeed, that amongst the subdivisions of philosophy, critical thinking (or informal logic) has some of the most widespread and *immediate* benefits and applications.

The evidence that informs the claims made is mostly experiential; the result of half a dozen years teaching in this subject area; trying a variety of methods and course content; facing a wide range of compliments, constructive criticisms, and indifference from students, (and colleagues) and observing those involved undergo transformation and trauma. In the small campus setting in which the author works, informal feedback is easily elicited and, in fact, hard to avoid. In addition, as teachers we soon come to know the signs of whether a lecture or seminar is working or not, and with a combination of careful reflection, experimentation and intuition, we can, in varying degrees, fathom what is behind successes and failures. Further, non-experiential, sources of data drawn on are feedback from course evaluation forms, and formal research carried out into student learning experiences at the campus.¹

Context

The teaching of critical thinking at the University of Glasgow's Dumfries Campus² primarily occurs in the level 2 (2nd year) course Argumentation-Rhetoric-Theory (A-R-T). This is termed a 'core course'³ within the School's Liberal Arts curriculum,⁴ but can be understood more straightforwardly as a critical thinking, or informal

¹ See Hanscomb, S. 'The Critical Being of the Liberal Arts Student', *Discourse*, Vol.7, no.2, 2007; Harvey, Pattie and McFarlane-Dick, *Reflections on Employability: Current Strategies for Employability in Higher Education, Interim Report* (University of Glasgow, internal document, February 2007).

² Now officially referred to as the 'School of Interdisciplinary Studies'.

³ A 'course' at the University of Glasgow is what is elsewhere called a 'module'

⁴ For further details see See Franks, B., 'Philosophy and Interdisciplinarity', *Discourse*, Vol. 6, no.2, 2006; and Hanscomb, S., 'Philosophy, Interdisciplinarity and Critical Being', *Discourse*, Vol. 7, no. 1, 2007.

logic course that must appeal to students from a range of disciplines. This will be a recognizable challenge for philosophy teachers at institutions where a 'breadth' component has been integrated into some or all of their degrees,⁵ as well as in places where critical thinking constitutes a subsidiary module offered by philosophy departments.

In such circumstances the three aims identified—to capture students' interest and imagination; to communicate the broad relevance of critical thinking, and to engender a recognition of its value in other disciplines and as a learning tool—become all the more urgent. I will discuss how the A-R-T course addresses each of these, and then conclude with some critical and speculative comments about the relationship between critical thinking and the wider academic context.

The basics of the course

The first half of the A-R-T course coalesces around two components: the process of 'argument reconstruction and evaluation', and the film (and play) *Twelve Angry Men*. Argument reconstruction and evaluation is adopted from Tracy Howell and Gary Kemp's book *Critical Thinking*.⁶ The method, described briefly, involves accessible and short written texts—such as passages from books, transcriptions of speeches, and columns and letters from newspapers—are unpacked and analysed with the aim of exposing the arguments they contain. They are then assessed in terms of the strengths and weaknesses of these arguments and the use of rhetorical devices.

These steps employ a significant range of skills: identifying premises and conclusions; removing extraneous material; re-ordering and formalizing arguments in terms of explicit and implicit premises,

⁵ For example Melbourne, Harvard, Aberdeen and Chichester. The Melbourne model, for instance, requires students to take 25% of their courses from subjects, potentially in other faculties, that are different from their main subject. Of particular relevance to the Dumfries Campus curriculum are their newly developed 'breadth subjects'. These deliberately focus on 'big questions' (such as climate change, health, and the Internet) and generic knowledge (such as critical thinking, logic, statistics), and most require interdisciplinary learning and teaching. See http://www.futurestudents.unimelb.edu.au/about/m_model/index.html

⁶ Now in its third edition (2009).

conclusions, and sub-conclusions (using P1, P2 ... C1 etc.); identifying argument types (deductive, inductive, plausible); identifying vagueness and ambiguity; re-wording, and spotting fallacies.

In the latter case the course differs in its approach from Bowell and Kemp and sides with philosophers like Douglas Walton and Christopher Tindale⁷ (themselves influenced by the Amsterdam school of argumentation (or pragma-dialectics)). According to this perspective *ad hominem*, *ad verecundiam*, *ad populum* arguments (and so on) are not necessarily regarded as fallacious, but are instead described as argument forms that *can be* fallacious, but always depending upon the context in which they appear. The upshot of this is that an extra level of uncertainty is added to the already inexact art of argument reconstruction and evaluation. Rarely will the wider context of a particular set of arguments be fully understood, and therefore a reconstruction and evaluation requires a significant amount of conditionality; of ‘this could be a strong argument if ...’ type clauses.

This conflict is also useful for highlighting a central principle of the course, namely the importance of context for accessing the strength of arguments. Although an extremely useful method for both teaching and applying critical thinking, argument reconstruction and evaluation has its limitations. The restricted context surrounding the passages used is one of these, but in A-R-T the very exposing of these limitations is part of the course’s aims. In this way the student can be primed for the more holistic and context-sensitive post-modern and feminist challenges to traditional approaches to logic and informal logic that are addressed in the ‘Theory’ part of the course.

The context problem is also mitigated by the other central component, *Twelve Angry Men*. Its value as a teaching resource is perhaps better known to social psychologists (as a demonstration of processes of social influence), but from the point of view of argument analysis and evaluation it is also of immense use.⁸ There are several reasons for this. One is that it provides much of the necessary context needed for

⁷ Whose textbooks are the main recommended course texts (Walton, D., *Fundamentals of Critical Argumentation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Tindale, C., *Fallacies and Argument Appraisal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)).

⁸ The 1957 film is shown to the students during the course, and they are strongly encouraged to buy a copy of the book.

developed discussions surrounding the argument forms and fallacies exhibited. In essence it is a feature length ‘persuasion dialogue’ concerning the young defendant’s innocence, with twelve protagonists and numerous arguments of varying complexity and quality. Another is the sheer range of argument forms and fallacies that are in evidence. These are well into double figures (and the number of individual arguments must be in three figures). There are several examples of valid and strong arguments, and multiple instances of fallacious *ad hominem*s, *ad verecundiam*s, *ad populum*s, and slippery slopes. There are also weak analogies, straw men, false dichotomies, perfectionist fallacies and a number of others. A third reason for making this text pivotal is the clear connections the film makes between argumentation and, on the one hand, psychology, and on the other, ethics and politics.

In the ‘Rhetoric’ section of the course Plato’s criticisms of rhetoric are explored, Aristotle’s *Art of Rhetoric* and the modern psychology of persuasion are compared and contrasted, and the overarching question of whether argumentation and rhetoric can be clearly distinguished is debated. In this way the context issue remains relevant, and deeper questions can be asked concerning the relationship between reason and emotion. The ‘Theory’ segment, as mentioned, serves to further situate argumentation, and raises deeper questions still about the nature, status and application of reasoned thinking.

Having provided this overview of the A-R-T course, there now follows a more detailed description and discussion of how it attempts to meet the demands as a critical thinking course for non-philosophers.

Making it accessible and engaging

In this section the use of examples (including the use of humour in teaching argument forms and fallacies), and the link between fallacies and psychology are discussed.

I. The use of examples

Even a hardened anti-critical thinker is likely to both enjoy *Twelve Angry Men* and appreciate the relevance of argumentation to its plot. As well as being a helpful resource in the ways described, the film helps

to make the course more interesting and relevant. It is one thing to know that argumentation is vital to legal proceedings, another to see it in action (albeit in fiction).⁹

The judicious use of examples is of course fundamental to good teaching, but critical thinking is perhaps more reliant on them than other subject areas. It both runs the risk of being dry (and thus losing the audience's attention), and of being off-puttingly formal and abstract (and thus undermining the audience's confidence). The concentrated employment of examples is also necessary because critical thinking is as much a skill as it is a body of explicit knowledge, and so students need constant practice. A prime arena is the process of describing and explaining the many arguments forms and fallacies. Examples—perhaps a few for each of the (many) types—are of course necessary, and a useful exercise is to hand students a list of fallacious arguments prior to any other input, and to ask them to explain in everyday language what is wrong with them.

Everyday exemplars are relatively easy to come by or to concoct (although this is significantly time-consuming). The most effective are those which, according to studies in rhetoric, the modern psychology of persuasion, and common sense, the audience can best recognise and relate to, and those that are most entertaining. A recent incident at the World Cup finals, for example, provides an excellent case of a slippery-slope fallacy. As a result of Frank Lampard's overlooked goal against the Germans, Fifa's ruling against the use of goalline technology came under scrutiny. Amongst the arguments that had contributed to their decision was the following from Fifa general secretary Jérôme Valcke:

If we start with goalline technology, then any part of the game and pitch will be a potential space where you could put in place technology to see if the ball was in or out, and then you end up with video replays. The door is closed.¹⁰

This is somewhat tragic, but fortunately, from a teaching perspective, argument forms and fallacies also lend themselves quite readily to

⁹ I have also used scenes from US TV drama *Boston Legal*, although more to demonstrate rhetoric than argumentation.

¹⁰ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/football/2010/mar/06/fifa-rejects-goalline-technology>

humour. It is not hard to see why since humour thrives on the recognizable but not fully articulated errors and absurdities of everyday life. Question-begging arguments are an excellent case in point, for example:

God exists
How do you know?
The Bible says so
How do you know that what the Bible says is true?
Because the Bible is the word of God

Or,

I have psychic powers
How do you know?
My psychic aunt told me, and only a psychic can know if you're psychic.
How do you know she's really psychic?
Well, because I'm psychic of course.

Generalizations are, in the words of Henry Rollins, 'never right, always fun',¹¹ and both Charlie Brooker and Mark Steel have an excellent knack for exaggerated and absurdist analogies, such as:

the govt admits tax avoidance in 2006 was somewhere between £97 billion and £150 billion, whereas benefit fraud amounted to less than £1 billion. So their obsession with benefit fraud makes about as much sense as if, after the Great Train Robbery, the police had said, 'We have excellent news. The robbers have got away and are a vital part of the economy. But we DID catch three passengers who didn't have a valid ticket.'¹²

2. Fallacies and psychology

The majority of students might not have much immediate interest in informal logic, but many do have an interest in psychology. Plenty of

¹¹ *Talk is Cheap Volume 3* (audio recording, 2004)

¹² Steel, Mark, *What's Going On* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2008) pp. 197-8

work has been carried out by cognitive psychologists on reasoning (such as the Wason selection task,¹³ and the ‘Linda problem’¹⁴), but surprisingly few critical thinking textbooks refer to such research. If we then take notice of the relationship between fallacies and emotion, and fallacies and social psychology, it is perhaps even more surprising that authors like Douglas Walton and Christopher Tindale are content to restrict references to psychology to the casual armchair variety.¹⁵

There seems to be three discernable ways in which the critical thinking-psychology link can be and, to varying degrees, is handled by texts that are student-friendly. The first is the highly informal (‘armchair’) approach just mentioned. The second is books and articles which address reasoning and, in particular, reasoning errors from a psychological perspective. The particular kind of approach I have in mind here is one which is applied, and potentially interdisciplinary. The advantage of these texts is that they do not assume any prior learning in cognitive and social psychology, and are therefore accessible to students from all sorts of backgrounds. The art, then, is to produce something which avoids superficiality and popularism; which contributes meaningfully to the student’s contextualised knowledge of the significance of reasoned thinking and constructive communication, but which does not require specialist prerequisites. Two books which seem to fit this bill very well are Stuart Sutherland’s *Irrationality* (1992), and Scott Plous’ *The Psychology of Judgement and Decision Making* (1993). The former includes chapters on, among other things, causal mistakes, overconfidence, ignoring and distorting evidence, obedience and conformity; the latter on many of these, as well as, among others, attribution theory, availability and representativeness heuristics, cognitive dissonance, framing and anchoring.

The third species of text is one where the primary orientation is towards critical thinking in the way that is familiar to philosophers, but which incorporates robust psychological theory and evidence as well.

¹³ Wason, P. ‘Reasoning’, in Foss, B. M., (ed.) *New Horizons in Psychology, I* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966)

¹⁴ Tversky, A. and Kahneman, D., ‘Extensional Versus Intuitive Reasoning: the Conjunction Fallacy in Probability Judgement’, *Psychology Review*, 90.

¹⁵ For example, when discussing *ad hominem* arguments Tindale says that ‘they build on our natural tendency to connect what is said with the person or people saying it.’ (*Fallacies and Argument Appraisal*, p.86)

A lot of interesting research has been carried out in this area in pursuit of a naturalistic theory of rationality,¹⁶ but in terms of accessible texts to supplement broad-based courses like the one being described, I know of no such examples. What I have in mind is a work that places psychological evidence alongside the argument forms and fallacies in a way that serves to deepen understanding through the introduction of wider contexts, and through a wider and more thoroughly researched range of examples. It is, say, Walton, Sutherland and up-to-date research into naturalistic approaches to rationality, spliced together.

To use Richard Dawkins' terminology,¹⁷ psychological evidence can provide 'proximal' explanations for the types of fallacies we are prone to, but this still leaves us with the 'but why are we this way endowed?' question; the need for 'ultimate' explanations. Evolutionary psychology has attempted to provide answers.¹⁸ For instance, the following question could be posed: The fallacies typically discussed in critical thinking books are common errors of reasoning. Some, though, are more common than others; for example fallacious appeals to authority and to popular opinion; *ad hominem* arguments; causal fallacies, and hasty generalizations. Since the kinds of errors found in reasoning are potentially limitless (as the ever increasing number of fallacies attests to), why do these stand out? One reason could be that they are linked to hard-wired cognitive and emotional tendencies that serve particular adaptive ends.

Hank Davies¹⁹ has written on the evolutionary origins of causal fallacies, and several other common argument forms and errors could potentially be linked with other principles of psychology.²⁰ For example, appeals to authority and to popular opinion correspond to obedience to authority and to conformity, which are among the central

¹⁶ For example, see Saunders, Clare and Over, David, 'In Two Minds about Rationality?' in Evans and Frankish (eds.) *In Two Minds: Dual Processes and Beyond*. (Oxford: OUP 2009).

¹⁷ *The God Delusion* (London: Bantam Press, 2006)

¹⁸ See, e.g. Tooby and Cosmides' Foreword In Baron-Cohen, S., *Mindblindness: An Essay on Autism and Theory of Mind* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1995).

¹⁹ *Caveman Logic* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2009).

²⁰ I say 'could potentially be', but I am conscious that this is research I am yet to come across. I would be interested to hear of any leads readers might have.

phenomena studied by social psychologists. Another example is the ‘halo effect’; our tendency to automatically extend known positives in a person (e.g. that they are physically attractive) to a range of other, unrelated, positives (e.g. that they are kind and intelligent). This could also account for the frequency of fallacious appeals to authority (the assumption that expertise in one area implies expertise in others), and its opposite—the ‘horn effect’—is easily associated with the abusive *ad hominem* arguments.

The claim, then, is that certain argument forms and fallacies feature heavily in critical thinking texts, not because of the arbitrary preferences and traditions of philosophers, or even the localised tendencies of a certain culture, but because they are symptomatic of wider bio-psycho-social forces. If this holds any water then it is hopefully both interesting and illuminating, and serves to provide a foundation (and motivation) for the study of thinking and logical errors that is more extensive than what is otherwise on offer. Moreover, such work is clearly interdisciplinary, and thus can be especially enriching of a curriculum, and aligns itself with aspects of current educational policy.²¹

The connection between fallacies and emotions is another area of critical thinking where these kinds of explanations can be illuminating, but where explicit links are thin on the ground in critical thinking textbooks. Many of these include categories of ‘emotional appeals’²²—to fear, guilt, pity, indignation etc.—and broadly speaking we are prone to commit more fallacies when in an emotional state. Some errors, however, seem more typically to result from strong emotions than others—notably false dichotomies, slippery slopes, hasty generalizations, and the perfectionist fallacy²³—all of them might be called ‘fal-

²¹ *Scotland 3-18 years Curriculum for Excellence* places a great deal of emphasis on interdisciplinarity.

²² For instance *Bowell and Kemp* (op cit), *Walton, Informal Logic* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), *Pirie, How to Win Every Argument* (London: Continuum, 2006).

²³ Many of these map onto Aaron Beck’s illogical thought patterns (see, e.g., *Cognitive Therapy and the Emotional Disorders* (New York: International University Press, 1976), and ‘a belief in our profound inadequacy unless we are perfect in everything we do’ is one of Albert Ellis’ central ‘irrational beliefs’ (see *Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy* (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1970)).

lacies of exaggeration’.

The cognitive changes that emotional states engender are well recognised in psychology.²⁴ Like part of Milgram’s explanation of our perverse sensitivity to authority figures, the problematic impact emotions have on clear thinking can also be explained by evolutionary pressures. When in states of fear and anxiety, for example, attention and recall become more narrow-beamed and selective as our adaptive psychology focuses us on immediate threats. With judgements and decision making, emotions can quicken the process. Perceptions and interpretations become more black and white, and short cuts are taken. Emotions, in effect, function as heuristic devices. Keith Oatley and Jennifer Jenkins concisely summarize the situation, understanding emotions as:

structuring the cognitive system into distinct modes of organization. The effects of this structuring are to modify perception, to direct attention, to give preferential access to certain memories, and to bias thinking. ... Emotions function to manage our multiple motives, switching attention from one concern to another when unforeseen events affecting these concerns occur.²⁵

At this point it is worth returning a final time to *Twelve Angry Men* again so as to acknowledge how well the play illustrates the inseparability of argument and emotion. Up to a point at least, the title is the give-away. Most of the jurors are angry at one time or another, some are angry all the time (even if it’s displaced), and there is a clear correlation between heightened emotion and poor argumentation (including, in this setting, frequent use of *ad baculums*). Moreover, it provides plenty of examples of cognitive dissonance and the ‘magical thinking’ process that Sartre discusses; of how, in bad faith, we subintentionally employ emotion to transform situations which we don’t like and which are beyond our control. His discussion of the ‘motionlessness’ and preference for solitude associated with sadness provides a good example. In ‘sorrow’ he says:

²⁴ See, for example, Oatley and Jenkins, *Understanding Emotions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) pp. 263-77.

²⁵ Op cit, p. 252.

one of the accustomed conditions of our activity has vanished, yet we are still required to act in and upon the world without it. Most of the potentialities of our world (work to be done, people to see, duties of the daily round to be accomplished) remain the same. Only the means of realizing them ... have changed. If, for example, I have just learned that I am [financially] ruined, I no longer dispose of the same means (a private car, etc.) to accomplish them. I shall have to substitute means new to me (taking the bus, etc.), which is precisely what I do not want to do. My melancholy is a method of suppressing the obligation to look for these new ways ... I make the world into an affectively neutral reality ... In other words, lacking both the ability and the will to carry out the projects I formally entertained, I behave in such a manner that the universe requires nothing more from me.²⁶

Refracted through the emotion, the meaning and value of the world changes, providing some (temporary) comfort.

Also of interest in this regard is Aristotle's recognition of the power of emotions to distort our judgements. He says, for example, that 'things don't seem the same for those who love and those who hate [etc.] ... but either altogether different or different in magnitude';²⁷ that 'we do not give judgement in the same way when aggrieved and when pleased, in sympathy and in revulsion ...',²⁸ and, 'to the man who is enthusiastic and optimistic, if what is to come should be pleasant, it seems to be both likely to come about and likely to be good, while to the indifferent or depressed man it seems the opposite.'²⁹ This underlines the relative timelessness of some aspects of the psychology of argument and persuasion, and opens the door to a consideration of other enduring tendencies and principles found in Aristotle (and other ancients), and as explored by modern psychologists like Robert Cialdini and Howard Gardiner.³⁰ What use that can be made of these connections in the teaching of critical thinking? With the exception of the effects of emotion on cognition, in A-R-T there is currently no

²⁶ *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* (London: Methuen, 1971) pp.68-9.

²⁷ *Art of Rhetoric*, p. 141.

²⁸ Op cit, p.75.

²⁹ Op cit, p. 141.

³⁰ Cialdini, R., *Influence* (New York: Collins, 2007); Gardiner, H., *Changing Minds* (Harvard Business School Press, 2006).

robust theoretical exploration of the psychology of reasoning errors. This is the result of the limitations of the staff's knowledge, as well as (and related to) the (apparent) absence of much relevant interdisciplinary research in this area. As should be apparent from the preceding discussion, many of the associations are, to us, only tentative. However, mention in passing is made of the kinds of things discussed here, and such speculation can serve as an interesting aside, and as a catalyst for the interesting (but inevitably speculative) question 'Why these fallacies?'

At the very least, reference to psychology gestures to the interdisciplinary significance of critical thinking (see further comments below under 'Recognizing its value in other disciplines'). It points also to the importance of studying argumentation in so far as it reveals potentially deep and wide-ranging things about human thought and behaviour. In many ways it serves as a convenient viewing point for surveying various academic terrains; as well as casting light on the psychology of reasoning (and vice versa), the study of argumentation can help to construct taxonomies of epistemology (authority, analogy, consequences, causes etc.), and it can help explain vital mechanisms of politics and ethics (for example the importance of reason, clarity, and rules of dialogue to a healthy democracy).

Communicating the broad relevance of critical thinking

The communication of the general relevance of critical thinking has clear ties to the business of making it accessible and engaging. If teaching this subject in a non-alienating way requires a strong emphasis on context and examples, then everyday and professional relevance will follow suit. Examples, as we have seen, are drawn from current affairs, politics, law and so on, and similarly case studies (such as *Twelve Angry Men*, but also the use of political speeches and wider persuasive practices (in politics and marketing) in the 'Rhetoric' section, and political negotiations and debates in the 'Theory' section (e.g. Michael Freeden on political conflict,³¹ and Christopher Tindale on

³¹ Freeden, M. 'What should the "Political" in Political Theory Explore?', *Journal*

Shell's defence of its actions after the death of Ken Saro-Wiwa in Nigeria)).³² In sum, students should be left with little doubt about the role of argumentation and rhetoric in the majority of communicative acts.

In terms of students' *personal* sense of the significance of these practices—a direct appreciation of how they do and can impact on their interactions with other people in all kinds of situations—a few things are important to mention. Firstly, previous research at the campus presents clear evidence that A-R-T has influenced students' argumentation and negotiation behaviours beyond the classroom.³³ Secondly, the extent and depth of this impact—which has the potential to affect a wide range of psychological, social and practical domains—must be partly up to the student. The detailed characterisations and dialogues of *Twelve Angry Men* ought to encourage reflection on how we tend to behave in various argumentation forums, especially when we are emotional, but aside from the occasional generalised comment in this direction, there are limits on how far can and *should* go in this respect.

Nevertheless, opportunities for personal development are certainly latent in critical thinking courses, and this does not have to be with regard to especially deep characteristics and tendencies. A straightforward example might be pointing out to a student that they have used (and perhaps often do use) a form of fallacious reasoning in a seminar discussion (perhaps one about fallacies (oh the irony)). Again, it would be inappropriate to force it, but perhaps the majority would be more ready to reflect on their argumentation styles when the forum in which it is exposed is focused on precisely this topic.

A similar argument can be made about the potential for these courses developing, and encouraging reflection upon, other graduate

of *Political Philosophy*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2005.

³² *Acts of Arguing* (SUNY, 1999).

³³ See Hanscomb, S., 'The Critical Being of the Liberal Arts Student', especially pp. 106-7. Research has also indicated that in some cases students come to recognise the benefits of the course in question (Argumentation-Rhetoric-Theory) only after graduating (Harvey, Pattie and McFarlane-Dick, op cit.) This effect seems to have something in common with what psychotherapist Irvin Yalom calls 'time-delayed interventions'; certain benefits of therapy only making themselves felt months or years after the therapy took place. *The Schopenhauer Cure* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2006), p.61.

attributes such as open-mindedness, tolerance, humility, and healthy scepticism. With respect to the latter, students have often commented on how the study of both the fallacies, and the psychology of persuasion (especially the 'contrast effect'), have an immediate impact on the way they listen in everyday conversations, to political interviews and radio phone-ins, and of course to advertising and sales people.

The third point regarding the personal impact of A-R-T on students concerns the role of the formal debates, which comprise part of the formative and summative assessment of the course. The debating process is relatively familiar (although teams tend to contain at least four people), topics chosen are pertinent to the course content (so that they are congruent, and students are motivated to learn them deeply and therefore debate better), and it is expected that students demonstrate formal processes of argumentation and rhetoric. Among the challenges they face is the need to include several argument forms and/or fallacies that are prescribed for them in advance. Marks are awarded for clever usage of these devices in the context of the debate in question.

As a form of assessment, debates have some obvious benefits: they tick PDP/employability boxes regarding the development of presentation skills and performing in front of an audience; they encourage students to think on their feet, they encourage ownership of course material, they involve teamwork, and they demand forms of civility that can be hard won in tense, competitive and emotional environments. If resources like *Twelve Angry Men* should serve to encourage students to reflect on their own 'real world' behaviours, then the doing of it themselves should magnify this effect. The emotions generated by attempting to function in teams, deliver convincing arguments in front of audiences, respond to the unexpected arguments and stylistic devices of the opposition etc. are now more than product of thought and imagination.

Recognizing its value in other disciplines

I. Learning to learn

a) The broad benefits of critical thinking in terms of becoming a better learner shouldn't need spelling out in too much detail. In one sense a course like A-R-T ought to hone a student's critical abilities in a way that will have a generalised, holistic, effect on their engagement with most academic texts and tasks. They might realise this by themselves, but there is presumably no harm in letting them know it explicitly when explaining the ILOs, and then once or twice afterwards.

b) The analytical tools students learn on courses like this are clearly defined: identifying, categorizing, and evaluating arguments; sensitivity to the blurry boundaries between rhetoric and argumentation; sensitivity to contexts and audiences, and so on. Some disciplines will employ some of these more than others, but not many will make their use of these tools and perspectives as explicit as they must necessarily be on critical thinking courses. The result is insights that penetrate the 'everydayness' of academic writings; that X-ray otherwise opaque methodologies, and critical styles that are often taken for granted (or at least not fully explained) by the practitioners themselves.

c) Experience and evidence indicate that students are poorer than we might imagine at close reading and summarizing. In higher education in the UK the emphasis on critical assessment can marginalize skills in communicating accurately and succinctly the content of a text, but critical thinking courses need not exclude this skill. In A-R-T (and other core courses) students are made well aware that argument reconstruction is a form of summarizing, and is thus plainly transferable to other subjects and courses. Regardless of the result being formalized in terms of premises and conclusions, to do it well requires a close reading and careful unpacking of what is presented.

d) A technique that has been used in A-R-T tutorials requires students to reconstruct and evaluate arguments found in their own essays (usually from other courses). This helps instil the idea that essays are arguments (or series of arguments), encourages reflection and more careful scrutiny of their work, and underlines the value of this

method as a learning to learn tool.

A similar kind of angle is taken by the convenor of the introductory philosophy course at Glasgow University's main campus. Whilst spending some time offering essay advice in a lecture, he associates typical errors with fallacies recently taught in the critical thinking part of the course. For instance, avoid misrepresenting those you are writing about (straw man fallacy); avoid expressions like 'everyone knows that ...' (vagueness and *ad populum*), or 'it's always the case that ...' (hasty generalization), and make sure that the reasons and sub-arguments included are all relevant to the overall conclusion.³⁴

2. Substantive content

It is clear from much of what has been discussed that some of the elements of critical thinking commonly found in textbooks are variations on phenomena that are the subject matter of other disciplines, particularly psychology, media and communication. In this way, not only is critical thinking enriched by these disciplines in this substantial manner (as discussed), but these disciplines are enriched by critical thinking.

At a more formal level, learning in critical thinking can transfer to other disciplines in terms of the kinds of arguments and epistemologies they utilize. For instance, appeals to authority are always relevant (especially so in subjects like history and theology), and causal fallacies are particularly pertinent to social science. The use of academic examples from a range of disciplines is a fairly straightforward way of reinforcing this type of connection.

It should also be mentioned that critical thinking, as elucidated here, is a properly interdisciplinary subject. Argumentation and rhetoric are phenomena that can, with relative ease and significant benefit, *themselves* be illuminated via a number of disciplines. Interdisciplinarity, for good or bad, is currently receiving a lot of attention in UK higher education, and courses like this, as well as serving as exemplars of its virtues, can also be politically expedient. For example, there is no reason why contributions in terms of ideas, resources and teaching expertise can't be corralled from a number of departments (or schools)

³⁴ 'Philosophy 1K', convened by Chris Lindsay.

and faculties (or colleges).

Further comments

1. A critical point to emerge from this is the importance of knowing your audience. Since multiple examples are required to teach critical thinking, then the more that these resonate with students' interests and world views, the more effective they are likely to be. With philosophy students examples from philosophy itself (like the Cartesian Circle, or slippery slope arguments in the euthanasia debate) ought to regenerate recognition and enthusiasm, but when teaching critical thinking beyond philosophy, too much of this will be alienating.

Aside from the *Twelve Angry Men* type case, the obvious fall-back is the news stories etc. that have been discussed previously. What this ideally requires, however, is not just keeping up to date with current affairs, but with the stories and cultural phenomena that are holding the interest of young adults (assuming that's the majority of our audience).³⁵ It's not being suggested that all our examples come from trendy blogs and *Big Brother*, but more that references restricted to things middle aged academics know and like could fail to stimulate.

2. A related issue concerns situations where certain students (especially older ones) are more familiar with the subject matter being addressed in the passage to be reconstructed and evaluated. Do they have an advantage? In one sense yes, since they can thus be more alive to the types of reasoning errors that can occur in particular topics and forums (climate change, democratic processes, health issues etc.). However, this sort of thing is a problem for the teaching of quite a few arts and social science disciplines, and shouldn't necessarily be a source of particular angst for critical thinking. Also, there is a sense in which this background knowledge (and views/opinions) can bias

³⁵ This might not be as hard as we might think. Last year I was in a situation where it was relevant to ask a class of 16 year olds which comedies they watch and like. Among a mostly familiar set of answers were *Mock the Week* and *Friends*. (Apologies here to UK readers with teenage children to whom this is hardly news.) Also, a recent article in the *THE* on what students like in a teacher mentions 'the growing popularity among students of "infotainment" shows such as *The Daily Show* and *QI*.' (Cunnane, S., *Times Higher Education*, 15.7.10, p.7)

mature students' reading of the arguments put forward, and/or distract them from analysing what is actually in front of them.

3. There are some issues to do with the use of debates worthy of further discussion. For a critical thinking course an additional benefit of debates is that they provide a live forum for engaging in argumentation; in other words they progress, in certain respects, from the *static* discipline of argument reconstruction and evaluation. There are, however, some potential weaknesses as well:

a) One is their artificial and formal nature (including the role of the chair, and time limitations of the delivery of arguments). As such they are perhaps not the best method for exploring and practicing many of the intricacies of argumentation. On the other hand they are far more practical to manage and assess than, say, a scenario in which we observe pairs of students generating persuasion dialogues. Also, it can be said that their weaknesses are also their strengths: formality, the presence of an audience, the time restrictions etc. all have valuable extraneous benefits in terms of generic skills and personal development.

b) A number of participants over the years have commented on not just the artificiality of debates, but their combative and 'masculine' nature. One benefit of this is that when we reach the feminist/coalescent argumentation section of the course they are all the more ready for, and welcoming of it. The contrast is all the more vivid because they have had to do it, not just read about it. In debates, coalescence is not the name of the game (and nor can it be since although debates *are* a kind of game, coalescent argumentation is very much not), and there's a strong case for saying that that's just okay. Argumentation is usually competitive, so it's a taste of an important feature of everyday civilian and professional communication. Also, as indicated, the formal demands of the debating process—even if always somewhat repellent and alien for some students—foster a number of useful skills.

c) For debates to be a fair and thorough form of assessment, students need practice. Formative as well as summative debates will be necessary, and this is a time-consuming process. Rarely will it be practical to use whole-class time, so the appropriate forum is tutorials or seminars. If, say, a group of twelve is divided into teams of three, and each team needs to take part in two debates (a formative and a summative), that's four class hours devoted to debates. All the time they are

debating topics pertinent to the course this time is all the more justified. However, with assessment there is a potential staff-time issue if it is felt that the summative debates should be marked by two tutors. (Aside from the moderation/second marking factor, the reason is that it is very hard to catch everything that goes on in complex oral presentations (and indeed marking them effectively requires a lot of practice). Two sets of ears and eyes are considerably more reliable than one.) If this causes budget and other logistical problems, then, if debates are felt to be important enough, mitigation measures might include dropping, or shortening, one of the other assessments.

4. The final point to raise concerns the way and extent to which critical thinking is generic across academic disciplines, and the associated question of whether, even if this is significantly the case, it is best taught in this top-down manner rather than within the context of individual subjects. There is not the space here to do justice to these complex issues, but what can be said is that it is congruent with, and well within the remit of a course like A-R-T to discuss this issue as well. The ‘top-down’ question is, after all, addressed in part by the ever-present question of context, and to raise this, and the matter of broad applicability, is to extend the course’s interdisciplinary range to include education as well.

To the extent that A-R-T is a success as a critical thinking course that works beyond the boundaries of philosophy, our belief is that this is due to careful attention paid to the how its content is selected and communicated, and how its ideas and techniques are contextualised in terms of their relevance beyond disciplinary boundaries and beyond educational settings. There are no doubt courses out there similar to, and better than this one, but it is hoped that some of the theory, resources and techniques that have been described and assessed here will be relatively distinctive and appealing, and be of practical use to others. As you would expect, the course continues to develop, and as part of this process the author is welcoming of suggestions and comments from other practitioners.

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On Written Dialogue as Form of Assessment

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The setting: a rather grubby kitchen. In the sink a number of milk bottles with varying degrees of mould. The floor is sticky and dirty dishes and empty beer bottles are piled up on the counter. The window has a crack. Hazy light filters through. In the background the sound of a radio upstairs.

A man sits at the table, which is scattered with books. On a piece of paper in front of him only one line: 'In my last lecture ...' He picks up his pen, when the door opens.

Two women enter the kitchen. Tallis Brown rises when they do.

'Miss Sayers, Mrs. Woolf.'

'The door was open.'

'Yes, of course. It was.'

The women cannot but notice the rancid smell and both light a cig-

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arette. The scent of burning tobacco slowly overwhelms all others.
'Please, take a seat. Would you like anything to drink. There is beer, I think, and water.'
There is also the sink and its dirty glasses. Tallis sits down again.
'There have been complaints about your classes, Mr. Brown.'
'I see.'
'Your students are confused about the purpose of these classes. It is just not what they expected. Ah, and one said you failed to mention ... I am afraid I can't read this name.'
'What did they expect?'
'They were not very clear. What did you tell them to expect? Why did you decide to teach this class?'
'They asked me, the people from the workers education society, I was not sure, but well I need the money. I should have taken a different approach, and read other works.'
'We all need money, Mr. Brown. The pressing question is how badly you need it.'
'Well...'
'What is the purpose of these classes, Mr. Brown. Why do you teach?'

The following reflections follow from a project on the written dialogue as form of assessment, which has been sponsored by the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies.¹ The project allowed me to critically rethink the assessment of the written dialogue, through a study of distinct resources (pedagogical, philosophical and literary), the involvement of creative writing, and by eliciting feedback from students. The project has raised a number of concerns which go beyond the specificity of this assessment, such as persistent habits in philosophy and current thinking in higher education in Britain. This article is a first attempt to present these in writing.

Originally, I had a much longer title in mind: 'On Written Dialogue as Form of Assessment, or How to Do Philosophy in a (Grubby) Kitchen'. The kitchen is found in Iris Murdoch's thirteenth novel, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. It must be one of the filthiest

¹ I would like to thank the Subject Centre for the grant which made this project possible, and especially Clare Saunders for her support at its various stages. Thanks also to Geoff Case, for his generous contribution to the project, to staff at St. Mary's University College for their interest and suggestions, and most of all thanks to the students for their ready participation.

kitchens found in literature and houses the novel's saint, Tallis Brown.² The kitchen's state forces a response from most of the characters as well as from Murdoch's readers.³ I too have been fascinated by this kitchen, in particular for the challenge it poses to philosophical habits. Reading Murdoch's novel as a commentary on her philosophical work—*A Fairly Honourable Defeat* is published only a few months before *The Sovereignty of Good*—I understand the image of the kitchen as a reflection on the clarity expected from philosophical thinking.

I would assume most will recognise the desire to have thoughts clear in one's head, as well as the related expectation of salvation ('When I have it clear in my head, I can finish this essay/write that book/live my life properly etc.'). This longing is a great motivator, and the clarity a virtue of many texts. Yet, they can also create difficulties. Too strong a longing for clarity can lead to disregard for the muddle and ambiguities of everyday reality. This is certainly Murdoch's concern in *The Sovereignty of Good*, when she struggles with a form of philosophy that prides itself on clarity, but fails to acknowledge the moral virtues of mothers of large families.⁴

² It is introduced as follows (Iris Murdoch, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) p. 68): 'It looked much as usual. The familiar group of empty beer bottles growing cobwebs. About twenty more unwashed milk bottles yellow with varying quantities of sour milk. A sagging wickerwork chair and two upright chairs with very slippery grey upholstered seats. The window, which gave onto a brick wall, was spotty with grime, admitting light but concealing the weather and the time of the day. The sink was piled with leaning towers of dirty dishes. The draining board was littered with empty tins and open pots of jam full of dead or dying wasps. A bin, crammed to overflowing, stood open to reveal a rotting coagulated mass of organic material covered with flies. The dresser was covered in a layer, about a foot high, of miscellaneous oddments: books, papers, string, letters, knives, scissors, elastic bands, blunt pencils, broken biros, empty ink bottles, empty cigarette packets and lumps of old hard stale cheese. The floor was not only filthy but greasy and sticky and made a sucking sound as Hilda lifted her feet.'

³ See for instance Jo Brans' interview with Murdoch, 'Virtuous Dogs and a Unicorn: An Interview with Iris Murdoch', Dooley, Gillian, (ed.) *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction: Conversations with Iris Murdoch* (University of South Carolina Press, 2003) pp. 155-166, see esp. 165-166.

⁴ See for instance Murdoch, Iris, 'The Idea of Perfection', in *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997) pp. 299-336.

In contemporary higher education, an analogous kind of clarity which obscures can be created by learning outcomes. Understood as exact descriptions of achievable goals, they do not allow for an understanding of learning as continuous, or for the experience that rereading a text can challenge as well as confirm existing knowledge. It is this assumption about learning that I have become increasingly aware and wary of when working on this project. In what follows I present the argument that the assessment of the written dialogue can provide some necessary counterbalance.

My argument proceeds as follows. I first outline the origins of the project. I then reflect on written dialogues in both the history of philosophy and contemporary practice. Next, I present some of the findings of the project and I end with a brief reflection on the relevance of the project for contemporary practice in higher education.

First, however, a brief note on the form of this text. When first presenting this project I was asked why I had not written a dialogue myself. My initial response to this question was twofold. First, as I shall explain later, I do not think that philosophical dialogue is limited to those texts featuring two or more people speaking. Even seemingly straightforward articles can be of a dialogical nature. Moreover, while I intend to promote a wider use of the written dialogue for philosophical writing, I do not think it suitable for all philosophical writing. Again, more specific reasons will be given below.

Yet, I have since come to reconsider the question, and decided to include (only) the beginnings of a longer dialogue in this article. This dialogue is situated in Tallis Brown's kitchen and features a conversation between him, Dorothy Sayers, and Virginia Woolf. The work of each of these women, created against the background of women's recent access to formal education, presents an important challenge to contemporary thought on higher education.⁵ I have more than once returned to the pivotal scene in Shrewsbury's common room, in Sayers' *Gaudy Night*, where the women discuss a case of a male scholar who concealed a document that undermined this theory. Every time I am struck by the final verdict: 'A man as undependable as that is not only

⁵ See in particular Dorothy Sayers' *Are Women Human?* (Eerdmans, 1971), and *Gaudy Night* (New English Library, 1996), and Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* (Vintage, 2001).

useless, but dangerous. He might do anything.’⁶ I also teach now and again the visit to the British Museum in Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*. Both texts raise the question of accepted practice, and as such have inspired my thoughts about this.

The excerpt only introduces the question of education. It does not really present or question Sayers’ position, or Woolf’s. However, I have included these reflections to begin this article in a different tone. I hope the excerpt itself may start a dialogue with the rest of the text and with its reader.

I. Written Dialogue as Assessment

Before embarking on this project I had been using the written dialogue as assessment for some years in a module called ‘Philosophy and Gender’. The original idea was not mine, though I was the first to put it into practice in a relatively young programme. Being blessed with small classes enabled me to actively involve students in the realization of this assessment. Throughout the semester we looked at dialogues and worked on a number of exercises (create a setting, and characters, write the first 500 words, submit a bibliography), which were discussed in class.⁷ Reflecting on these, we designed the criteria for this assignment, and decided to add the requirement of a commentary to account for resources consulted.

That first year followed a pattern, which returned in later years. At first, students are apprehensive about this assignment, most of all because they do not know how to start, how to end, and how to introduce philosophical argument into this assignment. This uncertainty is experienced by some as a problem. Throughout the module, when they start working on their dialogue, students start to feel more confident and to enjoy the assignment. In the end, the dialogues are almost all very enjoyable to read. I often find myself laughing out loud. Second markers are rarely far off in marking, and external examiners are generally satisfied. The use of dialogue was commended in the recent val-

⁶ Sayers, *Gaudy Night*, p. 416.

⁷ These included Plato, *Republic V*, and Roger Scruton, *Xanthippic Dialogues* (St. Augustine’s Press, 1998).

idation.

Thus, the assessment can be considered successful according to quality assurance criteria such as student satisfaction, and peer review. It was not until I found myself preparing for a symposium on creativity in theology and philosophy in Glasgow that I realised how limited my understanding of the assessment was.⁸ ‘It works’ seemed no longer sufficient. Yet, at the same time the symposium suggested a way to proceed, by underlining how the present project is imbedded in its own tradition.

2. Dialogue in the History of Philosophy

A first clarification of the notion of dialogue can be found when looking at the word’s original meaning. The Greek *dialogos* literally means *through-talking* or *through-thinking*. The word more commonly denotes a conversation between two or more people. The literal meaning makes clear that a dialogue aims at further understanding of the topic under consideration by thinking it through. Ideas are questioned and challenged. People involved in a dialogue do not need to come to an agreement about their topic. Sometimes it may be more truthful to only acknowledge the complexity of a problem.⁹ A dialogue, then, is not a debate. The objective of a debate is to convert others to your point of view, hence the frequent use of words like ‘I agree’, ‘I disagree’, and ‘winning’ or ‘losing’. A debate, Plato would grumble, is about opinion. It is sophistry—not philosophy.

The difference between debate and philosophical dialogue is suggested by an important characteristic of a Platonic dialogue: *elenchus*. *Elenchus* literally means *shame*. Someone involved in a dialogue can feel shame when finding that his or her knowledge is not as certain as initially assumed. This feeling of shame is an essential part of the dialogue. Unless the limitations of knowledge are recognised it

⁸ Glasgow, January 2009. Presentations by Heather Walton (Glasgow), Sue Yore and Richard Noakes (York St. John), Kei Miller (Glasgow), and Marije Altorf (St. Mary’s University College).

⁹ Cf. Kristof van Rossem, ‘Wat is een Socratisch gesprek?’, http://www.socratischgesprek.be/teksten/wat_is_socrgesprnieuwe_tekst.pdf [last consulted 29 July 2010].

is impossible to come to a deeper understanding.

Thus, what would be considered ‘losing’ in a debate, is a positive and necessary element of a philosophical dialogue. It is, of course, not always pleasant, as Plato’s dialogues testify. In *The Republic* Thrasymachus responds very angrily to Socrates’ constant questioning.¹⁰ In the *Euthyphro* young Euthyphro does not know how quickly he should stop the conversation when his initial definition is discarded and they are about to start on the question ‘what is piety’ afresh.¹¹

Dialogues have always been part of the history of philosophy. Plato is without doubt the most famous of all dialogue writers, but certainly not the only one. In antiquity he is joined by authors like Cicero, and Augustine; in modern times by René Descartes, George Berkeley, and David Hume, and even more recently one could include the plays by Jean-Paul Sartre as well as the Platonic and Xanthippic dialogues written by Iris Murdoch and Roger Scruton. Yet others, while not writing actual dialogues, have emphasised the importance of dialogue and proposed particular theories of dialogue (for instance Leonard Nelson, Martin Buber, and Hans-Georg Gadamer).

Dialogues from philosophy’s history differ significantly. Plato, for instance, rarely appears in his dialogues. He is mentioned twice in the *Apology*, but notoriously absent in the *Phaedo*, the dialogue that depicts Socrates’ death. Plato missed this conversation, because—it is explained—he is believed to be ill. Moreover, the accepted interpretation that the early dialogues depict the historical Socrates, and that in later dialogues Socrates is Plato’s mouthpiece, is increasingly challenged.¹² The dialogues by Descartes, and Berkeley, in contrast, do feature clearly defined positions. For instance, the two characters in Berkeley’s dialogues are Hylas (meaning matter) and Philonous (lover of mind). *Nomen est omen*—the latter is an obvious defender of Berkeley’s position, the former the materialist who will be shown to be wrong.¹⁴

¹⁰ Plato, *Republic*, 336aff.

¹¹ Plato, *Euthyphro*, 15e-16a.

¹² Plato, *Phaedo*, 59b.

¹³ See for instance Charles H. Kahn’s *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue: The Philosophical Use of a Literary Form* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹⁴ Berkeley, George, *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (Hackett Pub-

Yet, notwithstanding the omnipresence of dialogues in the past, they seem to be less prevalent today.¹⁵ Apart from a few exceptions professional philosophers do not write dialogues. What is more, with the exception of the treatise, essay and commentary, the same applies to the various other genres one finds in the history of philosophy: autobiographies, novels, aphorisms, meditations, scholastic questiones, myth, etc. . Moreover, as Jonathan Lavery argues, given these various genres in the history of philosophy, there exists comparatively little research on philosophical genres.¹⁶

Part of the reason for this lack of interest in genre is that philosophy, especially in the English speaking world, takes its cue from science rather than art of literature. Form is considered of secondary importance, and comes ‘logically and temporally’ after the philosophical thought, as ‘a container into which the distilled thought is poured, as if one were filling different glasses under a tap.’¹⁷ What that means for the practice of philosophy is shown in the following example.

In a programme called ‘Men of Ideas’ made for the BBC in 1978, Bryan Magee engaged in conversation with various philosophers and thinkers. The conversations have also been published, *Men of Ideas: Some Creators of Contemporary Philosophy* (1978). One of the thinkers was the British philosopher and novelist Iris Murdoch—out of fifteen the only female Man of Ideas.

Magee had invited Murdoch to talk about the relationship between philosophy and literature. However, in his introduction he puts a decisive spin on the conversation by stating: ‘[i]f a philosopher writes well, that’s a bonus—it makes him more enticing to study, obviously,

lishing Company, 1979). Cf. Lavery, Jonathan, ‘Philosophical Genres and Literary Forms: A Mildly Polemical Introduction’, *Poetics Today* 28:2 (Summer 2007), pp. 171-189. See in particular p. 178.

¹⁵ i.e. in their written form. Spoken dialogues are still part of contemporary practice, and should be so. Cf. Hutchinson, Phil and Loughlin, Michael, ‘Why Teach Philosophy?’, in Kenkmann, Andrea, (ed.) *Teaching Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2009), pp. 38-54, see especially p. 49. Cf. too MacDonald Ross, George, ‘Electronic MCQs with no Right-or-Wrong Answers as a Means for Developing Dialogic Thinking’, *Discourse* Vol. 8, no. 3 (2008).

¹⁶ Lavery, ‘Philosophical Genres and Literary Forms’, p. 171; cf. p. 180.

¹⁷ Jordan, Mark D., ‘A Preface to the Study of Philosophical Genres’, *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 14 (1981)pp. 199-211. The quote is taken from p. 202, as in Lavery p. 173.

but it does nothing to make him a better philosopher.’ He goes on to presume that Murdoch’s literary and her philosophical writings are of a very different nature and that the sentences in her novels are ‘opaque, in the sense that they are rich in connotation, allusion, ambiguity’, while those in her philosophical writing are ‘transparent ... saying only one thing at a time.’¹⁸

These are remarkable comments—not in the least because Murdoch can be understood to concur with these statements, and the interview has created considerable confusion in the interpretation of Murdoch’s work.¹⁹ Yet, at present, I am interested in the presuppositions behind Magee’s initial declaration: ‘[i]f a philosopher writes well, that’s a bonus—it makes him more enticing to study, obviously, but it does nothing to make him a better philosopher.’ Writing *well* may make for more enticing study, but not for better philosophy. Magee here affirms an understanding of the actual wording of any text as additional to the thought, rather than intrinsically related. A good writer merely makes reading more enticing, but this is of no philosophical consequence. Indeed, philosophers should be immune to any such temptation for otherwise they may miss out on the ‘great philosophers’. Mere mortals may be seduced by well written words, but the philosopher is trained to distil thought whatever the form.²⁰

Magee exemplifies a kind of thinking, for which the assessment of the written dialogue would be a mere gimmick. Even though the

¹⁸ ‘Literature and Philosophy: A Conversation with Bryan Magee’. Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics*, pp. 3–30. See p. 3 and 4 in particular.

¹⁹ See for a discussion of this Altorf, Marije, *Iris Murdoch and the Art of Imagining* (London: Continuum, 2008), pp. 2–6.

²⁰ Cf. Bassett, L., ‘Blind Spots and Deafness’, in Deutscher, M., (ed.) *Michèle Le Doeuff: Operative Philosophy and Imaginary Practice* (Humanity Books, 2000), pp. 105–125. See especially her comments on the myth of the Sirens, used by Michèle Le Doeuff in ‘Philosophy in the Larynx’ (*The Philosophical Imaginary*, Continuum, 2002, pp. 129–137): ‘The voice of the Sirens is perilous if you are open to its seduction, but if you are a philosopher, you are projected by rigor and thus able to be seduced without charm. On the other hand, if you are the philosopher, you are also able to utilize this seductive singing voice to charm the mere mortals who listen to you. They are not shipwrecked, either, because the philosopher retains control of reason and is not led and does not lead the mortals to madness.’ (Bassett, ‘Blind Spots and Deafness’, p. 106).

interview is more than thirty years old and things have changed since, its remains still linger. In what follows I argue against that kind of thinking. My argument begins by considering the module for which the assessment has been designed, 'Philosophy and Gender'. This module considers a number of thinkers for whom reading habits and form are of great importance.

3. Philosophy and Gender

The module 'Philosophy and Gender' considers classical texts on gender, ranging from Plato's *Republic V* on the education of women, and Christine de Pisan's *City of the Ladies*, to Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, Simone De Beauvoir's *Second Sex*, Iris Marion Young's *Throwing Like a Girl*, belle hooks' *Ain't I a Woman*. In the first classes we consider the marginal position of most of these texts. Students will find that the library's classification system has placed most of these books not in the philosophy section, but under sociology or literature. Moreover, the authors rarely appear in other philosophy modules, or in textbooks. Or, if they do, it is usually at the very end, and under the heading of 'Other X'. Thus, Simone de Beauvoir sometimes appears in a list of most important thinkers, and Mary Wollstonecraft occasionally enters a textbook of modern philosophy.²¹

The marginal positions raise questions about the creation of the history of philosophy. By discussing Nancy Tuana's 'Reading Philosophy as a Woman' we reflect on prevailing reading habits.²² Tuana explains what it is to read as a woman—for which one does not need to identify oneself as a woman in daily life. Her starting-point is the alienation a woman can feel when reading philosophical texts, which often assume

²¹ For instance, Mary Wollstonecraft is included in both Radcliffe, Elisabeth S., McCarty, Richard, Alhoff, Fritz and Vaidya, Anand Jayprakash, (eds.) *Late Modern Philosophy: Essential Readings with Commentary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007) and Cottingham, John, (ed.) *Western Philosophy: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008). The latter includes one more text by a woman, the former does not.

²² Tuana, Nancy, *Woman and the History of Philosophy* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Paragon House, 1992), pp. 1-12. See also the work of Le Doeuff 'Preface', and 'Long Hair, Short Ideas', both in *The Philosophical Imaginary*.

the reader to be a man (as well as often of a certain class, race, or even religion). This assumption becomes even more apparent when the topic of woman is addressed, which is often presented as Other.

In contrast to this tradition, and through a reading of the Biblical story of Susanna and the Elders, Tuana exemplifies and promotes a kind of reading which calls attention to the construction of woman and the feminine in a text. She considers what is said as well as what is not said, and what is not questioned. (E.g. the lack of any praise for courageous and faithful Susanna, who prefers death and dishonour over rape.) This kind of reading often goes against the grain of the author, and the tradition. Tuana's recommendations explicitly ask the reader to take 'control of the reading experience.'²³

Throughout the module it becomes clear that most of the authors find themselves in a tradition that barely allows them to express their argument and raise their questions, thus compelling them to reconsider forms of argument and of writing. Confronted by misogyny Christine de Pisan invokes the aid of ladies Reason, Rectitude, and Justice to help her build a City of Ladies. Yet, the best illustration is found in Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. Having experienced the difference between men's and women's education in Oxbridge in the first chapter, the narrator visits the British Museum, to find some truth. For, she muses, if 'truth is not to be found on the shelves of the British Museum ... where is truth?'²⁴ While waiting for her books, she regards the young man next to her who, being 'trained in research at Oxbridge has no doubt some method of shepherding his question past all distractions till it runs into his answer as a sheep runs into its pen.' She is sure the man's 'little grunts of satisfaction' indicate that he is 'extracting pure nuggets of the essential ore every ten minutes or so.'²⁵

What is a woman without the proper training to do? Yet, in the course of the chapter a clever and funny play on the notion of truth, fact, and fiction unfolds, which leaves Woolf in the end with no facts, no truth about women and fiction. The woman that appears from the scholarly books ('an odd monster ... the spirit of life and beauty in a kitchen chopping up suet') is a product of the imagination.²⁶ The

²³ Tuana, *Woman and the History of Philosophy*, (ibid.) p. 7.

²⁴ Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, (ibid.) p. 20.

²⁵ Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, (ibid.) p. 22.

British Library has failed to provide facts. Had she been armed with a method she would have plenty. Now, she can provide her own and original argument in the story of Shakespeare's sister.

The texts and authors of this module thus challenge customary ways of reading and writing. They make the students reflect on the tradition of philosophy, its perceived habits, as well as on questions which can and cannot be raised. In what follows it will become clear that the assessment of the written dialogue further supports this reflection.²⁷

4. Returning to Plato

All philosophy may be footnotes to Plato, as the worn quotation goes.²⁸ Yet, the exercise of imagining the explicit questioning of one person by another as exemplified in his dialogues has slowly disappeared from that same history. While the assessment of written dialogue does not aim to replicate or revive Platonic dialogues, it still takes its cue from an understanding of Plato's early dialogue—specifically from an understanding of Socrates as going around Athens questioning whoever wanted to talk to him.²⁹ It also seeks the help of creative writing.³⁰ In what follows it will become clear how creative writing

²⁶ Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, (ibid.) p. 36.

²⁷ I thus start from an understanding of assessment as a tool to promote effective learning, and not just an instrument to measure what learning has taken place. Cf. Toohey, S., *Designing Courses for Higher Education* (Buckingham [England] ; Philadelphia, PA : Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press 1999) p. 180.

²⁸ Whitehead, A.N., *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), p. 63.

²⁹ This understanding is based on my readings of Plato's dialogues, and close to the interpretation of Leonard Nelson (see for instance Nelson, L., 'The Socratic method' in Saran, R. and Neiser, B. (eds.) *Enquiring Minds: Socratic Dialogue in Education* (Stoke on Trent, UK ; Sterling, USA : Trentham 2004), pp. 126-165) and Hannah Arendt (in particular *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt, 1978)). Other resources are mentioned in footnotes.

³⁰ It can be argued that 'the closest we come in the 21st century to Plato's dialogues are plays or transcripts of conversations.' Dorbolo, J., 'Philosophical Dialogue', http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl201/general/papers/philosophical_dialogue.pdf. [Last consulted 29 July 2010]. Cf. too Nickolas Pappas on the relation

exercises can be exercises in philosophical skills.

Socrates, especially in the earlier dialogues, can be understood to presume an understanding of education as examination of beliefs.³¹ This is evinced by his famous ‘The unexamined life is not worth living’ and by his practice.³² Unlike the sophists, Socrates does not teach a method, but questions whoever is willing to start a conversation with him. Learning happens, for Socrates, through students considering and questioning beliefs—more than by representing, however ably, those of others, or by creating one’s own.

The conversations in the early Platonic dialogue illustrate these characteristics best. They all start from the compliance of the different participants. It is a discussion amongst friends.³³ Thus, in the *Euthyphro* the conversation begins when cocky young Euthyphro reassures Socrates that he is more than happy to explain what piety is, and thus help Socrates in his imminent trial. It ends when he is no longer interested in the conversation.³⁴ Throughout the conversation, Euthyphro is made to rethink his knowledge, until none of his answers is left standing. Socrates expresses eagerness to continue, but Euthyphro claims no longer to have time. Euthyphro may seem the teacher at the start, with definite knowledge to impart, yet the practised reader will distinguish the various jokes which warn against any such conclusion from the very beginning of the conversation.³⁵

The written dialogues allow students to take up such Socratic questioning in a number of ways. Indeed, some immediately grasp this opportunity to bring themselves into the conversation. Thus, one finds Socrates dragged into Starbucks, Wollstonecraft and Plato summoned in séance in a sorority, and Plato and Aristotle taking the 65 bus to the Benthall shopping centre in Kingston. Philosophers are thus subjected to all sorts of questioning by a group of friends, or a by-passer.

The majority of students need some encouragement to start

between Plato’s dialogues and plays. (Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Plato and the Republic (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 9-14).

³¹ Cf. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: Thinking*, (ibid.) p. 172ff.

³² Plato, *Apology* 38a.

³³ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: Thinking*, (ibid.) p. 189.

³⁴ Plato, *Euthyphro* 4e, 5c15e.

³⁵ See for instance Plato, *Euthyphro* 2cd, 4ab.

such questioning. The initial uncertainty about the exercise often expresses itself in stilted beginnings: dialogues in unspecified places where thinkers exchange treatises. Of course, such dialogues have also been written in the history of philosophy. However, the assignment as designed for this module aims for not just any dialogue written by philosophers, but more specifically a more Socratic dialogue as described.

Creative writing exercises have proven to be helpful in taking away students' concerns. In one such exercise students are asked to first write down for five minutes what they dislike about the exercise, followed by five minutes of solutions.³⁶ The difficulties can be kept private or they can be shared. Next, students are asked to reconsider the place of the dialogue. Significantly, students who at first suggested some sort of heaven or some other nondescript background—for, it is argued, where else could Plato meet Aristotle and De Beauvoir?—will now think of more specific settings, which suddenly allow them to express philosophical ideas, or introduce new questioners, thus encouraging unusual and Socratic questions. Other possible exercises could involve the creation of character, which students mention as an important factor in writing the dialogue. In all these, these solutions are the students', and the final result almost always surprises.

A more particular setting, and more developed characters allow for the acknowledgement of knowledge as incomplete, for thoughts to be left unfinished, and questions unanswered.³⁷ Such incompleteness is promptly created by the entrance or exit of characters, or by interrupted conversation, but it is also a feature of reading the dialogue. When taking the dramatic aspects of a dialogue seriously, it becomes more difficult to distil a single meaning from it. The setting, the characters all suggest that the arguments are created within a specific context, where a reader takes part in the decision how the context questions the words. This aspect will not be appreciated by all. It certainly unnerved Plato—if the 'Seventh Letter' is considered authentic.

It is this element of the limitation of knowledge that distin-

³⁶ This exercise is taken from Julia Cameron: *The Right to Write: An Invitation and Initiation into the Writing Life* (London: Pan, 2000), p. 136-137.

³⁷ Cf. Nelson, 'The Socratic method', (ibid.) p. 148: 'To Socrates the test of whether a man loves wisdom is whether he welcomes his ignorance in order to attain better knowledge.'

guishes the better dialogues. Their authors do not mind the odd questions or directions a conversation can take, but indeed explore them. Thus, incidental remarks or entrances are not ignored, and the setting becomes as an additional conversation partner. Weaker dialogues, in contrast, are less likely to enter into unknown territory. They also show a greater need to agree to disagree at the end.

The surprising nature of the dialogues also affects marking. These dialogues reveal the enjoyment of the students writing them. They are funny, and as examiners agree, they often make you laugh out loud.³⁸ The enjoyment is not just 'enticing', but indicates that the dialogues surprise. I am often impressed by the inventiveness of students. This surprise is important and, I have to confess, also unsettling. It challenges an understanding of assessment as measuring clearly defined learning outcomes, and of the lecturer as the omniscient impartial assessor.

5. Higher education today

It may be objected that this kind of project does not suit the present climate in Higher Education, with its ever growing numbers of students, and dwindling contact hours. The writing exercises, it could for instance be argued, would reduce the limited contact time even more. The assignment of the written dialogue gains by individual attention and generates highly individualised texts. Thus, the project does not tally with an understanding of university as a business, with the dominant terminology of transparency, and accountability.³⁹

These objections are not without grounds. I assume that it would have been difficult to run this project in a larger university, or with considerably larger classes. Yet, this does not imply that the findings cannot be adopted for use in larger groups. Moreover, the

³⁸ Cf. Kenkmann, A., 'Creativity and Enjoyment in Philosophy Teaching', *Discourse* vol. 7, no. 2 (Spring 2008), pp. 207-220. See esp. pp. 214-215 on the importance of humour in teaching.

³⁹ On university as a business, see for instance Howie, Gillian, 'Teaching Philosophy in Context: Or Knowledge Does Not Keep Any Better Than Fish', esp. p. 7ff, and Hutchinson & Loughlin, 'Why Teach Philosophy?'. Both in Kenkmann, *Teaching Philosophy* (ibid.) pp. 5-22 and pp. 38-54 respectively.

highly individualised nature of the dialogues has the great advantage of making plagiarism almost impossible. Yet, most importantly, I dispute the claim that such writing exercises—time-consuming as they may be—take time away from teaching philosophy.

This objection seems to be based on an understanding of philosophy, which—not unlike Magee’s—distinguishes thinking from writing. If that distinction no longer holds, as I have argued, the writing exercises *are* (or *can be*) philosophy. The written dialogues as conversations with oneself exemplify what Plato considers ‘thinking’, ‘the discourse that the mind carries on with itself about any subject it is considering.’⁴⁰ It is an exercise in ‘difference and otherness’ which, according to Hannah Arendt, is both the characteristic of the conversations we have with others as well as ‘the very conditions for the existence of man’s mental ego as well, for this ego actually only exists in duality.’⁴¹ The writing exercises then can encourage the kind of thinking central to philosophy.

Yet, this explanation does not answer the last and possibly major objection. This project, with its emphasis on the limitations of knowledge, the notion of *aporia*, and the unique dialogues, runs counter to the ever-increasing demand for transparency in higher education. What this demand means for the written dialogue can be explained by returning to the notion of learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are now widespread in education—with an unintentional consequence that students are often more accustomed to them than their lecturers, and as a consequence often can have significantly different expectations from their lecturers.⁴²

Learning outcomes are taken to identify the ‘relatively specific

⁴⁰ Plato, *Theaetetus* 189e. (The translation is by F.M. Cornford, and taken from Hamilton, E. and Cairns, H., (eds.) *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1996). Cf. Le Doeuff, Michèle, ‘Women in dialogue and in solitude’, *Journal of Romance Studies*, volume 5.2 (2005), p. 10. Apart from the passage from the *Theaetetus*, Doeuff mentions two other passages in Plato: *Philebus* 38c-39b and *Sophist* 263e.

⁴¹ Arendt, (ibid.) p. 187.

⁴² Cf. Crome, Keith, Farrar, Ruth and O'Connor, Patrick, ‘What is Autonomous Learning?’, *Discourse* vol. 9, no. 1 (Autumn 2009), pp. 111-126; ‘students are nowadays prone to treat their tutors as repositories of information, whose job is to tell them what they need to know’. (p.121)

and long-lasting change in the students who achieve it',⁴³ and the major difficulty with them is at the same time their asset. Learning outcomes ask for clarity in teaching. They compel lecturers to reflect on their teaching habits, rather than continue in the customary fashion. What is the purpose of a class, and what would be the best way to reach that? This reflection should ideally expose implicit messages, which in the past were only understood by the initiated few. In that sense, they can be a tool for inclusion.

The difficulty arises when it is assumed that learning outcomes allow for complete clarity. This happens when they are 'hijacked by managers' and used as indicators for performance. It is also detectable in the learning attitude of students and even teachers, when learning outcomes are considered as exhaustive. Such 'commodification' of knowledge does not acknowledge that, as Trevor Hussey and Patrick Smith argue, no exhaustive description is ever possible.⁴⁴ Knowledge does not come in neatly defined units, because 'learning ... is part of a continuum.'⁴⁵ Moreover, what is learnt always depends on a student's existing knowledge and abilities. A good teacher will recognise this and adjust his or her teaching when finding that students are not engaged, thus teaching an excellent class without meeting any of the objectives. Seminars provide here particularly appropriate examples, as they often improve by diverging from plan.⁴⁶

It is obvious that the written dialogue defies the commodification that is desired by managers, and increasingly present in students' and lecturers' understanding of education. This may make it more difficult to advocate the assessment, though the strong tie to tradition may help here. It may also complicate implementation in certain contexts, and opposition from managers, students or even lecturers.

This *also* means that it proposes an important contrast to prevailing thinking. This last claim is supported by Paul Standish's distinction between two different economies of learning: the economy of

⁴³ Hussey, Trevor and Smith, Patrick, 'Learning Outcomes: a Conceptual Analysis', *Teaching in Higher Education* vol. 13.1 (2008), pp. 107-115. The quotation is taken from p. 108.

⁴⁴ Hussey & Smith, (ibid.) p. 107.

⁴⁵ Hussey & Smith, (ibid.) p. 109.

⁴⁶ Hussey & Smith, (ibid.) p. 110.

exchange and the economy of excess.⁴⁷ The former considers education in terms of exchange and treats learning as a commodity. The image of exchange ('You lend me ten pounds today, and I agree to pay it back tomorrow. I pay it back and the debt is settled') can be applied to both lecturers⁴⁸ and students.⁴⁹

This kind of approach is favoured by managerial considerations, if not by all managers. Yet, of course, neither lecturer nor student may fully believe in this system or act accordingly. The lecturer may refute the idea that all learning can be fitted into precise learning outcomes, which will be tested in assignments—as it was not in most lecturers' education. The student may take out more books than necessarily needed for doing the coursework and passing the module. The lecturer and teacher thus surpass the economy of exchange to enter, what Standish calls, the economy of excess, in which 'the subject of study comes to be understood as deepening and expanding the more one pursues', rather than 'a body of knowledge or skills to be mastered'.⁵⁰

Yet, Standish argues, there is a crucial difference between lecturer and student. The student who supposes that there is more to the course than learning outcomes is also still in the process of learning what education is about. The lecturer then gives the student mixed messages. Such mixed messages may keep a student from achieving well, i.e. from achieving well in the closed economy.

Standish does not recommend complete abolishment of the closed economy. He does not provide reasons, but merely assumes that

⁴⁷ Paul Standish, 'Towards an Economy of Higher Education', *Critical Quarterly* 47.1/2 (2005), pp. 53-71.

http://eprints.ioe.ac.uk/2180/1/standish_Towards_an_economy_of_higher_education.pdf [Last consulted 29 July 2010].

⁴⁸ 'I undertake to teach a particular class, which involves marking the essays the students write, being available to them during my 'office hours', attending the examiners' meeting, collecting course evaluation forms, and so on, and I do all this meticulously. At the end of the year my work is completed'. Standish, (ibid.)

⁴⁹ 'So too we might think of students, who enrol on a module, identify the assessment requirements, complete the necessary coursework assignments and revise sufficiently to answer the requisite numbers of questions in the examination, and satisfy expectations of attendance. They return their library books, and the course is completed, leaving them ready to proceed to the next module'. Standish, (ibid.)

⁵⁰ Standish, (ibid.)

such abolishment would be ‘absurd’.⁵¹ The present political climate would certainly prove him right. I would suggest another reason why complete abolishment is not so much ‘absurd’ as wrong. For the economy of exchange is an important tool—however inadequate—to instigate a more diverse student body. It is more difficult to differentiate by implicit messages to the initiated. Such implicit messages are often detrimental for the achievement of women, and other minorities within higher education.

Nevertheless, it is important to cultivate an understanding of an economy of excess, even though it may seem naïve or impractical to retain such a notion in the current educational climate. It can be argued that it is difficult if not impossible to retain such a notion of philosophy, when departments are primarily judged in terms of production: the number of students delivered, the number of publications produced. Yet, Standish provides some important suggestions to sustain an economy of excess, relating to the content of the curriculum, ways of teaching, assessment etc. It becomes, moreover, increasingly important to present the argument that the economy of excess is not just important in itself, but also from the perspective of the larger society or even the economy.⁵²

Coda

Back to the kitchen in which it all started. Sayers’ question, ‘Why do you teach?’, still lingers. I don’t think Tallis Brown has answered it to anyone’s satisfaction, but in a second attempt to offer his guests something to drink he has started cleaning some glasses. The conversation has moved to Sayers’ understanding of learning, which the others consider too elitist. Whom is she trying to outdo, Woolf wonders?

I am not sure yet how the conversation will end. I do think it is one worth having.

⁵¹ Standish, (ibid.)

⁵² Cf. Hussey & Smith, ‘Learning Outcomes’, and Hammershøj, Lars Geer, ‘Creativity as a Question of Bildung’, *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 43.4 (2009), pp. 545-558.

Gardner-Inspired Design of Teaching Materials:

A Logical Illustration

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This piece serves as a discussion article based around a project funded by the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Philosophical & Religious Studies, entitled ‘Design of teaching materials informed by consideration of learning impaired students’.¹ The general aim of this project was fundamentally to re-think the design of teaching materials in the light of what is now known about cognitive deficits and in light of what Howard Gardner has termed ‘multiple intelligences’, and to construct more effective, more attractive teaching materials as a result. What emerges is certainly not an

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algorithm but is a suggested recipe for designing innovatory teaching materials that potentially promote deep (as opposed to superficial) learning, and engage the different ‘intelligences’ of the learner, right across the age spectrum, from nursery to university. This is an important enterprise. The dumbing down of education in the UK means not only that this country is in danger of becoming less competitive internationally, but, more importantly, implies risk that our young people will become trained only in the feeble sort of knowledge-acquisition such as what enables them merely to pick the right answers in simple multiple-choice tests. They would not acquire the love and respect for learning that would make their lives enriched and themselves competitive on the global careers market.

The project aimed to contribute to reversing this sorry decline. In this piece, we describe how the project developed, not only in terms of the generating of findings but also in terms of how more theoretical considerations have come to bear. We consider in the next section how Gardner’s framework provides inspiration for this work and consider one of the main critics of his theory. The following section introduces what we term the ‘dog-legged’ approach to designing teaching tools and materials, how attempting to design new tools to teach learners with a specific impairment provides the clue to alternative tools to teach everyone more effectively. We then discuss what are the important dimensions of ‘effectiveness’, the deeper rather than the more superficial levels of learning and the more refined ‘SOLO taxonomy’. With the more general and theoretical backdrop established, we can describe the stages specific to the project on the teaching of syllogism, the production of the prototype device (in the section ‘Design for the blind: Sylloid’) and the device derived from it (in the section ‘Sight restored: Son of Sylloid’). Having listed the *prima facie* advantages and disadvantages of each of the new devices in relation to using Venn diagrams for teaching syllogism, we describe what happened with the testing of Son of Sylloid. The concluding section is able, in light of the

¹ See <http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/view.html/prsfundedprojects/48>. We would also like to thank Kevin Smith of the Kent School of Architecture Workshop for building six Sons of Sylloid and for suggesting some refinements of the design. For help with diagrams and photographs, we thank, respectively, Justin Mahone and Charles Young and, for helping to set up the instruction/testing sessions at Simon Langton School for Boys, Charlie Artingstoll.

testing, to return to the question of what we mean by deep and superficial learning in the context of teaching logic.

What Gardner has to offer

The vehicles of traditional academic learning are principally reading and writing. Knowledge is generally stored in written form (in a variety of media) either in natural language or in an ordinary language supplemented with a specialist vocabulary or in some symbolic system (e.g. the language of mathematics) and is accessed through reading—a wide variety of reading tools are now available to complement our eyes. The knowledge which is encoded in written form paradigmatically is propositional knowledge ('knowledge-that') and there is a considerable philosophical literature on how this kind of knowledge is to be distinguished from 'knowledge-how'. The latter is typically acquired by means other than reading. For example, although there are manuals about flying an aircraft, the relevant know-how is optimally acquired by practice, either in real aircraft or in a flight simulator. Nobody learns to ride a bike just by absorbing a set of instructions. A research question suggests itself: Are there means other than the linguistic (reading and writing) that can profitably replace, in certain areas, traditional means of knowledge acquisition, emphasizing that the areas are more about 'knowledge-how'?

Linguistic intelligence is but one of the several 'intelligences' identified by the psychologist Howard Gardner: the others are logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalist intelligences, and the pattern of attainment over all of them will vary from one individual to the next. Someone who has good mathematical intelligence, for example, may not be nearly so strong in (say) interpersonal intelligence. To avoid bias towards one of the intelligences, in the sense of directing teaching towards developing and assessing attainment in it, where some learners will already be more proficient in it, it is important to design materials that engage a range of intelligences, thus answering to the diversity of student learning needs. Then, where a student suffers an impairment that inhibits the exercise of one or other of these intelligences (or where

a student is just weak in some area), they will not be so disadvantaged in the progress of their learning overall.

There will be limits to this, since some subjects, according to their nature, will have to be understood only in certain ways and not others, at least without in effect changing the nature of the subject in the process. So removing numbers from the study of arithmetic would mean that the result was not arithmetic. But we suggest that there is scope for some creative imagination in devising alternative means to teach a subject within these logical bounds. Just within the linguistic medium, different textbooks appeal to different tastes and different types of learning materials appeal to different talents. A student weak in (say) maths may find the traditional teaching of maths difficult and unappealing. But design a learning task in maths that draws upon (say) a student's talent in music and that student may become instantly engaged and may develop an entirely better attitude to the study of mathematics. Gardner-inspired teaching is now practiced world-wide. In Mike Fleetham's words:

The theory of multiple intelligences (MI) shows that there is much more to intelligence than high IQ, good spelling or quick mental maths; in fact there's a whole variety of ways to be clever, including musically, verbally, interpersonally, kinaesthetically and naturalistically. MI is a powerful tool that helps you to appreciate and enrich the talents of all your learners, whatever their age. Creating an understanding of MI in schools has been shown to improve pupils' self-esteem, self-motivation and independence, and to help under-achievers realize their potential.²

Part of the inspiration for the present project sprang from the success that the first author had in leading a team charged, some fifteen years ago, with the task of producing a bilingual (Cantonese-English) young society in Hong Kong; to bring it about that 30% of secondary school leavers in Hong Kong were genuinely bi-lingual. The scheme was known as the 'Bridge Programme', helping students to cross the bridge from learning in Cantonese to learning in English. The team constructed a suite of texts and audiotapes, in which elements of what students

² From the blurb for Mike Fleetham's useful and amusing book: Fleetham, Mike, *Multiple Intelligences in Practice* (London: Continuum Education, 2006).

had learned in seven school subject areas using Cantonese as a medium of instruction in their final year of primary school were re-taught and enlarged in the first term of secondary school, with these subjects supplying the content for exercises and activities in English. The design of these communicative exercises and activities was informed by the Gardnerian taxonomy, in that it engaged the different intelligences, giving a student the opportunity to 'shine' in those exercises and activities that called upon the particular intelligences in which he or she is strong.³ Apart from anything else, this gives a tremendous boost to student confidence.

There are controversial aspects of his theory, picked up on by, for instance John White, who questions the rationale, beyond arbitrariness, for settling upon just the eight types of intelligence, since there are many more headings describing human action and thought under which we ascribe aptitude. Indeed Gardner is not entirely decided whether he does settle for just eight: his original list numbered seven. Rather than assuming his is the last word on the metaphysics of mind, we are happy, for current purposes at least, to use Gardner as heuristic inspiration for the project and for other ongoing work assuming differences in learning approach, as well as differentials in learning aptitude, by whatever cause, and this is the main point to take forward.⁴

The dog-legged approach to the design of teaching materials

The second source of inspiration for the recent project was a request to construct specialized equipment for teaching elementary logic to blind students. The logic in question was the theory of syllogisms, and one standard method for testing syllogistic arguments for validity is to use

³ Goldstein, Laurence and Liu, N.F., 'An Integrated Approach to the Design of an Immersion Program', *TESOL Quarterly*, 28/4, (Winter 1994) pp. 705-725.

⁴ For further synoptic discussion of Gardner, see White, who is supportive of the idea that individuals manifest intelligence in different ways and that MI can be used heuristically, or figuratively at least, as part of a good approach to teaching: White, John, 'Illusory Intelligences?', *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 42/3-4, (2008) pp. 611-630.

diagrams named after their inventor, the 19th century logician John Venn. It hardly needs to be pointed out that the Venn-diagrammatic technique is unavailable to a blind student—someone who in Gardnerian terms is deficient in the visual dimension of spatial and other ‘intelligences’—so a substitute apparatus needs to be invented that taps into a different dimension of the ‘intelligences’ of the blind person. And then the question arises as to whether this apparatus, or some successor of it that re-engages with the visual, will provide a richer learning experience for *non-impaired* users. If it does then one can reasonably expect this dog-legged design process to be just as applicable, in generalized terms, to other areas of learning.

Let us elaborate just a little. The problem of designing teaching equipment tailored to the needs of a group of individuals whose access to certain modes of learning is restricted, for example because of impairment or weakness in one or other ‘intelligence’, ought to confront designers with the challenge fundamentally and creatively to re-think questions such as ‘What is the real nature of what is being taught (and why is it important, if it is, that it be taught at all)?’ and ‘What type of learning experience will best promote real, deep understanding of the subject matter?’. Such questions, when addressed seriously, inform the design of the new equipment and so benefit the target users. But the pedagogically important consideration is this: If the piece of equipment is a sophisticated solution to educational questions that have not previously been raised, then it will supply a superior means of learning *not just for the group for whom it was designed, but for all students*. And this will be true right through the age spectrum. The equipment will, however, typically need to be reconfigured so that a learner who is *not* restricted is not *disadvantaged*. For example, if braille letters are used in a device designed for blind subjects, then the braille would be replaced by standard letters or some other visible substitute in versions of the device to be used by the non-blind. And the reconfigured apparatus could also, for example, make effective use of colour. In summary, the dog-legged design process is this:

1. Identify some part of the syllabus that is taught by some traditional means, e.g. by book learning, where you feel the traditional teaching methods to be stodgy or ineffective. One relevant sense of lack of effectiveness might be that the students’ learning tends to be of a ‘surface’, or superfi-

cial, nature.

2. Construct learning material X (it may be a piece of apparatus, a competitive or collaborative activity for two or more students, an interactive computer game, etc.) for a target group of students that suffers some real or imaginary cognitive deficit. The use of X will engage a range of intelligences different from that invoked by the traditional teaching method.
3. Construct a new apparatus, Son of X, that preserves all the pedagogical advantages of X but which also features elements that enhance the learning experience of students who do not suffer the cognitive deficit mentioned in 2.
4. Test the effectiveness of the new apparatus against traditional methods of teaching. Effectiveness is measured not just by the speed at which the student successfully solves various problems, but by the depth of the knowledge imparted.

The recent project focused on stages (3) and (4) of this design process. The area of learning under review was syllogistic logic but it must be emphasized that this was for illustrative purposes only. We suggest that the dog-legged design process, if effective, can be employed in any area of teaching to deliver deep learning.

Deep versus superficial learning

As suggested in the listed points in the section above, an important dimension of the effectiveness of teaching is the facilitating of deeper levels of learning. In this section we consider this and the SOLO taxonomy in particular.

There is a clear intuitive distinction between learning that is 'deep' or rich and learning that is 'surface' or shallow or, perhaps more informatively, superficial. The distinction originates from empirical studies in the 1970's by F.Martin and R.Säljö. 'The surface approach arises from an intention to get the task out of the way with minimum trouble while appearing to meet course requirements.'⁵ A typical realization of this includes rote learning in order to memorize factual

content for reproduction, or rules of procedure for application, in an exam, with the aim primarily to maximize grades rather than engage with the subject. Deep learning, such as it happens or is sought by students, by contrast involves engaging more with the meaning of the subject, or at least with the topic, at issue. It aims to determine its rationale or purpose, or how it functions at more fundamental levels, and then to see how its salient facts and its rules for application supervene on the more fundamental. This then will facilitate understanding the facts and rules more thoroughly and effectively for future engagement with the subject. Adopting the alternative surface learning approach, students would rely upon being presented with and then memorizing the facts and rules in their particular salient formulations, rather than making the intellectual links between them and the more fundamental aspects which govern them.⁶

It is important not universally and simply to equate ‘deep’ with good and ‘surface’ with bad across all areas of all subjects.⁷ This is because, in some cases, memorizing the rules and facts may be just what should be achieved for getting through an important stage, or getting on top of an aspect, of the subject. So, in the sciences, for instance, objects with different electrical charge attract each other and those with like charge repel each other, whereas all objects (with mass) attract each other gravitationally: that is just the way that it is. Expanding your vocabulary in the first new language which you learn at school is to a significant extent, arguably, just a matter of learning which words are equivalent to those in your native tongue. However, where we as teachers are intending to foster in our students ‘proper’ understandings of the topics and engagement with the subject, i.e. our

⁵ Biggs, John, *Teaching for Quality Learning at University: What the Student Does*, 2nd edition (Maidenhead, UK: The Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press, 2003) xii+309pp., p14.

⁶ This discussion may already remind the reader about John Searle (1990) and his ‘Chinese Room’ thought-experiment. In his envisaged situation, someone has a set of instructions in English for receiving instructions or questions in Chinese and for responding to them in Chinese. Searle argues that the correct output response (as in the writing) is not a sufficient condition for understanding, in the sense of this person understanding Chinese as a language. Can testing for validity, or otherwise following the procedural rules of deduction, be like this for some students who nonetheless get the right answers?

⁷ Arguably Biggs (ibid., p.31) himself succumbs to this facile mantra.

curriculum aims to achieve those learning outcomes in our students, we need to ensure that we align our course design, including assessment tasks, and our approach to teaching the course with each other and with producing those outcomes.

It has proved difficult to operationalize the concepts of deep and of surface/shallow/superficial learning in both teaching design and research on learning. However, by way of providing a reasonably firm basis, we shall rely upon the work undertaken by John Biggs. He has produced a more sophisticated taxonomy, employing a number of levels rather than just the two of deep and surface, christened SOLO (Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome).

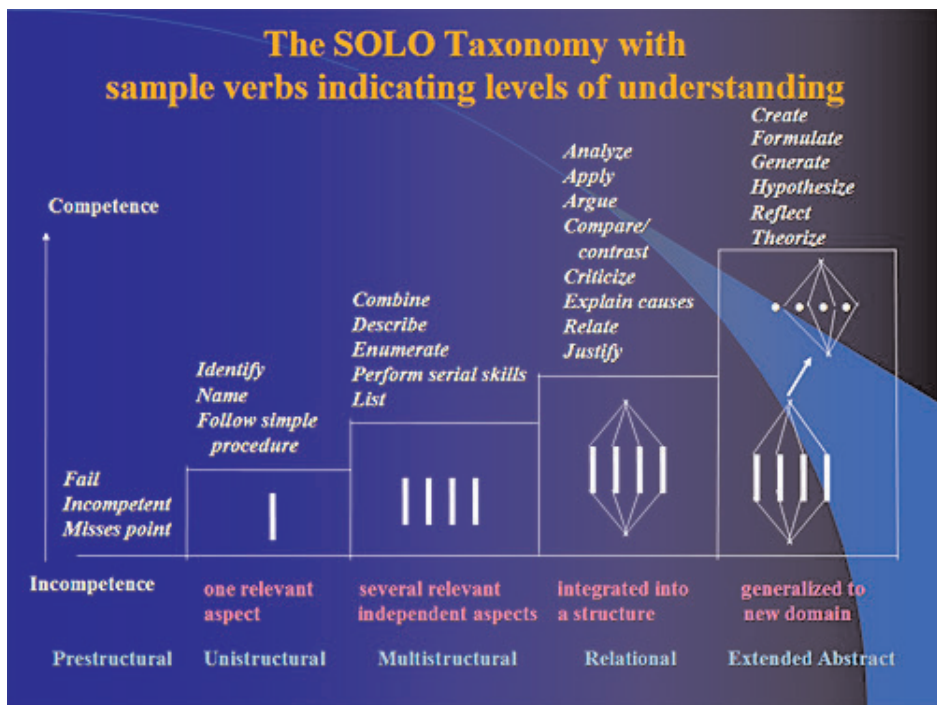


Figure 1: The SOLO Taxonomy⁸

⁸ This representative diagram is available on John Biggs's website and we reproduce the image with his permission:

http://www.johnbiggs.com.au/solo_graph.html. The taxonomy is explained in Biggs (ibid., chapter 3, including another version of this diagram on p. 48).

Examples of other sites which introduce the taxonomy:

<http://www.adelaide.edu.au/clpd/assessment/design/>; and Atherton (2010).

Websites accessed: 5th October 2010.

If students can produce correct answers to questions without understanding fully enough the bases for how they do so, testing their performance in tasks alone does not show us where there is deep understanding and where there is not. Elementary logic, indeed much philosophy, requires the honing of procedural rather than propositional knowledge. Yes, we need to know, depending upon the context, what Plato, Heidegger or Davidson have claimed in their writing but the assessment process in the discipline is geared much more towards the construction of good argument.

Elementary logic, even though dealing in the currency of propositions, especially is a matter of understanding techniques, of achieving know-how. If a student gets (the solution to) a task wrong then we can say that there is some gap in understanding. So it would be fair, and one of the planks of the methodology of the recent project, at least to start with assessing performance at tasks. If students fail at them, we may place them at the ‘incompetence’, or ‘prestructural’, level in the SOLO taxonomy illustrated above. It becomes less clear how deep an understanding they have if they succeed with tasks which are based on certain basic rules. Yet we could still maintain that there is important understanding happening (as well as important attainment in the sense of the progress, in marks attained, towards their overall degree programme performance!), even if they reside only at the ‘one relevant aspect’, or ‘unistructural’, level. Likewise, with being introduced to a suite of rules, good performance in a test involving all of them would indicate, defeasibly, that they are at the ‘several relevant independent aspects’, or ‘multistructural’, level. Ultimately, we would hope that they attain the ‘integrated into a structure’, or ‘relational’, level of understanding. The level above that, ‘generalized to new domain’, or ‘extended abstract’, would be nominally beyond the introductory level for logic, beyond the how-to-do-it(-well), and into the domain of the philosophy of logic.

We shall return to the question of understanding, in the course of analysing results towards a conclusion of the recent project. We turn now to an account of the development of the project.

Design for the blind: Sylloid

In this section, we recount the evolution of the design of some equipment for teaching elementary logic. The idea of constructing apparatus for reasoning is not new. A distinguished precursor is ‘a colorful medieval polymath and sometime poet, rake, and martyr named Raimundus Lullus, or Ramon Lull (ca. 1232-1316). Lull’s chief invention was a so-called *Ars Magna* of encoded, inter-rotating wheels developed in the latter decades of the thirteenth century and articulated in a treatise called the *Ars Generalis Ultima*’.⁹ The first phase of the recent project consisted of designing a piece of apparatus for the use of blind students; the second phase consisted of designing a new piece of equipment that preserved all the advantages of the apparatus designed for the blind but also incorporated features that took advantage of the full range of perceptual input available to the sighted. This is thus a paradigm case of ‘dog-legged’ design. The final phase was to test the utility of the teaching apparatus that emerged at the end of this process.

Logic is a subject that features in almost every tertiary philosophy curriculum. Syllogisms are a particularly simple type of argument originally investigated by Aristotle, and the theory of syllogisms was the core of logic right up to the last quarter of the nineteenth century. It is still regarded as an important and rather beautiful part of logic, and in recent times has been developed most notably by Fred Sommers. A syllogism consists of two premises and a conclusion, with three noun phrases (or ‘terms’) each occurring twice over, and each sentence in the syllogism has to be of one of just four allowable types. In the following example, the first premise is of type I, the second premise is of type E and the conclusion is of type O. Type A sentences are of the form ‘All Xs are Ys’, for example ‘All ducks are elephants’. The following particular example is infamous for eliciting conflicting verdicts from people asked to say whether it is valid or invalid:¹⁰

⁹ Nowvickie, Bethany Paige, *Speculative Computing: Instruments for Interpretative Scholarship* (doctoral dissertation, University of Virginia Department of English, May 2004), pp. 328; available at <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:UsadeajNsl0J:www2.iath.virginia.edu/bpn2f/diss/dissertation.pdf+%22use+text+and+those+that+use+diagrams%22&cd=3&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=uk>. Accessed: 5th October 2010.

Some tax cheats are parliamentarians.
No blue-eyed people are tax cheats.
Therefore
Some parliamentarians are not blue-eyed.

This alone shows the usefulness of an objective method for determining the correct answer. The validity or invalidity of any syllogism is usually established via algebraic (Boolean) equations or graphically via Venn or Euler diagrams (and makes use of the notion of a set (or class), e.g. the set of parliamentarians corresponding to the common noun ‘parliamentarians’). Neither technique is readily available to the severely visually impaired student. It is easy enough to design software such that the student could input a coding of the premises and the conclusion of a syllogism, hit a button and receive instantaneously a correct verdict on that argument’s validity. But, of course, the intellectual/educational value to a user of such a device, visually impaired or not, would be close to zero. This would be an illustration of no better than the ‘incompetence’, or ‘prestructural’, level in the SOLO taxonomy illustrated above as regards understanding syllogisms, even if it was satisfying the ‘one relevant aspect’, or ‘unistructural’, level as regards how to operate the piece of software. Hence, we can see the need, identified above, to raise the question of just what it is about the nature of syllogisms that makes them a fascinating object of study, to confront questions about the nature of classes (sets) and the relations between them, and questions about what it is to inculcate an understanding of these and of entailment and validity. Such questions are important if one cares about deep learning.¹¹

A Venn diagram (see figure 2) consists of three intersecting circles, each (if your imagination is sufficiently vivid) to be thought of as containing all of the objects, if any, corresponding to a noun-phrase occurring in the syllogism (e.g. if we were representing the above

¹⁰ Logicians are not concerned primarily with the truth or falsity of the propositions occurring in an argument, but with whether or not the conclusion follows from (*aliter*: is entailed by) the premises.

¹¹ The underlying pedagogical theory, and a technical discussion of the particular case of logic learning has been disseminated in Goldstein, Laurence, ‘Making a Virtue of Necessity in the Teaching of the Blind’, *Journal of Teaching Academic Survival Skills*, 1, (1999), pp. 28-39.

argument Venn-diagrammatically, one circle would ‘contain’ all the tax cheats, another all the parliamentarians, so that the intersection of these circles contains all the parliamentarians who are tax cheats, if there are indeed any.¹² With three circles intersecting, there are seven distinct areas, as shown in the diagram. There are two basic operations when representing premises on a Venn diagram: (i) shading areas to show that they are empty (contain no objects) and (ii) using a heavy short line (a ‘bar’) to show the presence of objects where the bar lies.¹³

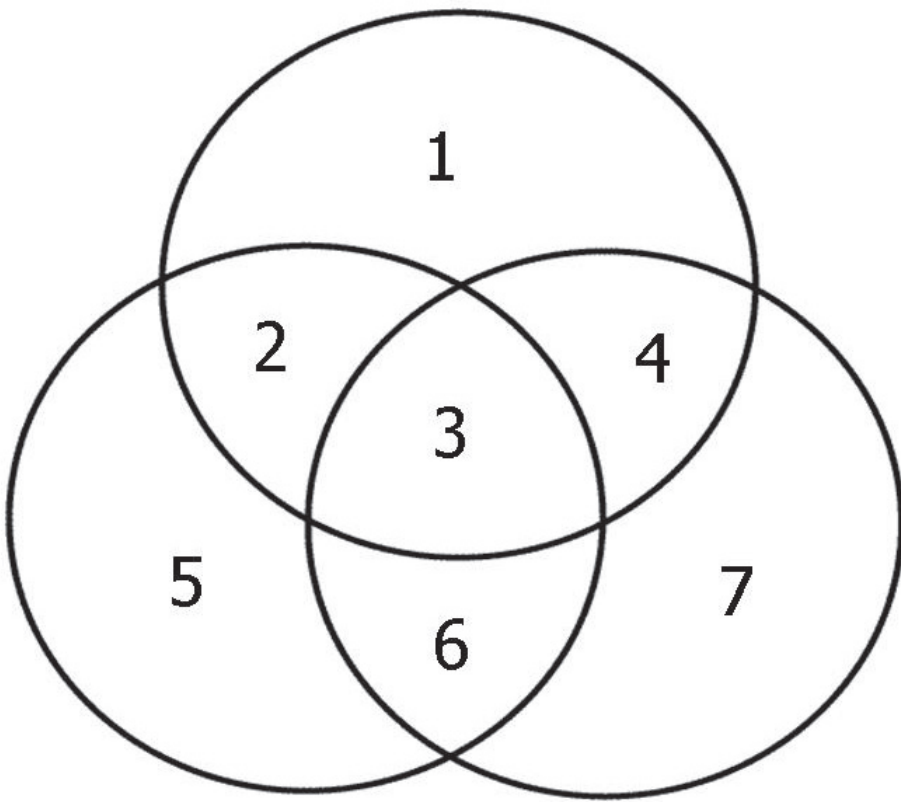


Figure 2: Venn diagram

¹² As Private Eye would say: ‘Shurely not’!

¹³ Interestingly, the invention of the bar was due not to Venn but to Charles Sanders Peirce.

The Venn Diagram consists simply of three intersecting circles (without numbering) and premises are represented by appropriately shading certain areas (to indicate that the class of things represented as being in that area is empty) or by using a solid bar to indicate non-emptiness of the corresponding class.

Jon Barwise and John Etchemendy have done more than most to establish that ‘there is no principled distinction between inference formalisms that use text and those that use diagrams. One can have rigorous, logically sound (and complete) formal systems based on diagrams’.¹⁴ But, we ask, why not go up a dimension and produce a physical, highly tactile three dimensional model?

The apparatus (called ‘Sylloid’) designed by the first author for the use of blind students exchanges the seven areas of a Venn diagram with seven solid tetrahedra. The counterpart to shading an area (in Venn) is to remove a tetrahedron from the core by pulling it off. The counterpart to drawing a bar between two areas (in Venn) is slapping a hinge in the valley between two tetrahedra. If, in the course of representing another premise, one of the tetrahedra on which the hinge is resting is removed, the hinge is folded back, revealing a differently textured surface and remains attached to the tetrahedron that has not been removed. This corresponds, in a regular Venn diagram, to part of a bar being eclipsed when one of the areas in which it lies is declared empty (so the objects that the bar represents as existing must lie in the area where the bar remains, uneclipsed).¹⁵

¹⁴ Barwise, Jon and Etchemendy, John, ‘Heterogeneous Logic’, in Glasgow, J., Hari Narayanan, N. & Chandrasekaran, B. (eds), *Diagrammatic Reasoning: Cognitive and Computational Perspectives* (Cambridge, MA: AAAI Press/The MIT Press, 1995), pp.209-232, p214.

¹⁵ The idea of switching from traditional media has, to some extent, been anticipated by Barwise and Etchemendy in their logic software ‘Turing’s World’ and ‘Tarski’s World’, which makes use of 3-D graphic techniques for inference.

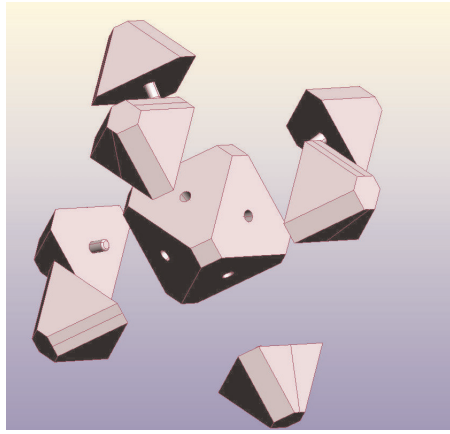


Figure 3: Sylloid

Note that, just visible in the picture on the left, the steel buttons are embossed with the braille equivalent of ‘X’, ‘Y’ and ‘Z’. Note also the textured metal hinge. The device consists essentially of seven tetrahedra that plug into a central core—see the computer deconstruction on the right. Small round magnets are embedded in the exposed faces of the tetrahedra. Sylloid is supplied with an audiotape containing instructions for use.

The task of designing an apparatus for the sight-impaired presented the opportunity not just to produce a device by means of which blind people can test syllogisms for validity or invalidity but to think about what a deep understanding of syllogism involves, and to ensure that it is this kind of understanding that will be promoted, for the user to develop while working with the apparatus. Sylloid was a response to this opportunity and among its *prima facie* pedagogical advantages over Venn diagrams are the following:

1. A solid tetrahedron is a slightly more intuitive representation of a set of objects than is a two-dimensional shape.
2. Each tetrahedron in Sylloid visibly represents a discrete set. In Venn, the intersection (lens) between sets is clearly depicted on the diagram, but the lens has two parts and it is

- by no means clear what set each part represents. (It is a pedagogically useful exercise to explain to students using Venn just which sets each of the seven areas in turn represent.)
3. Physically removing a tetrahedron from Sylloid is a much more natural and attractive way of demonstrating the absence of the relevant set of objects than is shading an area in Venn.
 4. The smooth side of the hinge represents the *possibility* of the presence of objects, the textured side (revealed when one side of the hinge is folded back on the other) represents their actual presence. Venn does not support any counterpart to this useful feature.
 5. There is a strong element of play in Sylloid—pulling out blocks, slapping on hinges etc; Venn is not quite so much fun.
 6. Sylloid is a beautifully crafted object, compared to uninspiring pen and paper.¹⁶

Sight restored: Son of Sylloid

Having, as in the above section, considered the advantages of Sylloid as a device, an intriguing possibility now presents itself. Sylloid is probably a better learning tool than Venn, and if we modified it slightly (e.g. by replacing the brailled letters with regular letters) then it could be used to advantage by sighted students. But why not go one step further and produce a radically new design primarily for the sighted, a Son of Sylloid, that incorporates all the virtues of Sylloid and of Venn and that makes maximum use of the visual sense? A useful first step in this process is to take a hard look at the defects of Sylloid to ensure that they are not transmitted to its heir. These defects are:

¹⁶ One can thus take advantage of the Hawthorne effect, i.e. the participants may respond just to the knowledge that care is being taken to satisfy their needs, that they are at the centre of an innovation aiming to assist them: whether or not what you do for them inherently produces a good effect, the fact that you have taken trouble to do this may improve their performance.

1. It is difficult to get a firm grip on the sloping sides of a tetrahedron made of perspex, especially with clammy hands. Dropping one of the pieces on the floor is obviously a nightmare for a blind user.¹⁷
 2. There is no representation of class intersection in Sylloid. This was pointed out to me by Jon Williamson at a workshop I gave about the present project on 14 October 2009, and it is a major strike against Sylloid, since part of the deep learning of syllogistic logic is understanding the connection (which so excited George Boole, when he discovered it) between the four types of Aristotelian sentence and their counterpart class relations, that can be captured in algebraic equations.
 3. The tetrahedra are of equal size, and this may create the false impression that the classes they represent are equinumerous.
 4. This piece of equipment, the prototype of which was constructed at the Ho Tung Engineering workshop, University of Hong Kong, needs to be built to fine tolerances and is therefore expensive to produce.
 5. It is also very heavy since, at a height of about 25cm, it requires a broad metal base to prevent it toppling over when in use (see figure 3), although an alternative would be to screw it down to the workbench.
- The resultant new design, Son of Sylloid, is illustrated in figure 4.

¹⁷ ...and causing the wrong sort of 'impact', perhaps... This hazard would have been apparent, at the outset, to a competent designer, but was not to yours truly, first author!

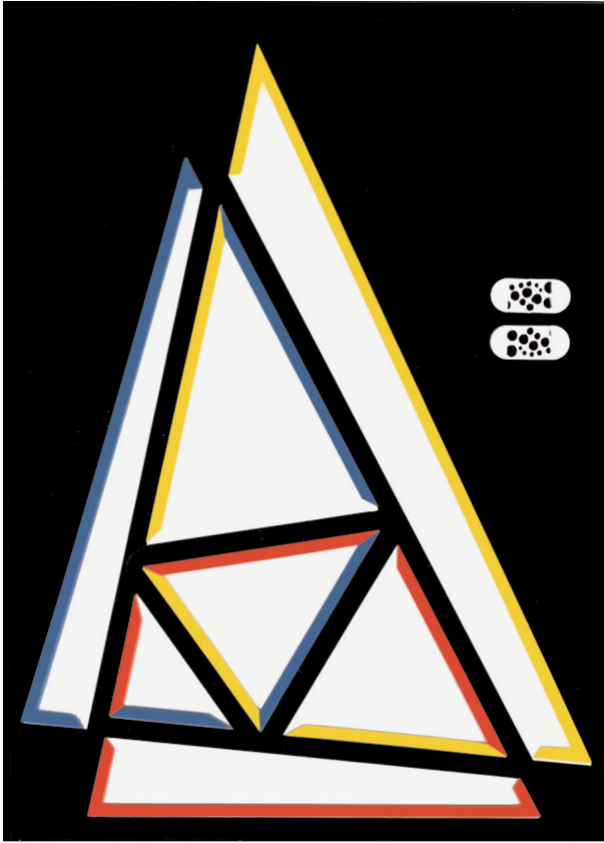
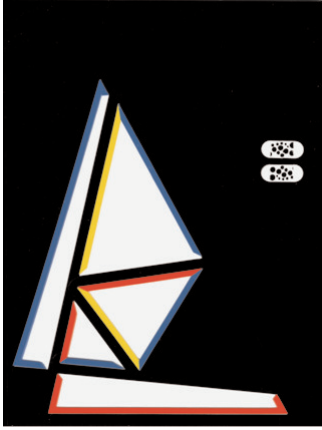


Figure 4: Son of Sylloid

The image represents this two-dimensionally but it is a plastic board about 2cm thick. Each of the seven coloured pieces can be removed from the black housing, though typically, when representing the premise of a syllogism, only one or two pieces are removed. The bridging bars are stored as shown (top right); they are used when representing existential premises on the model.

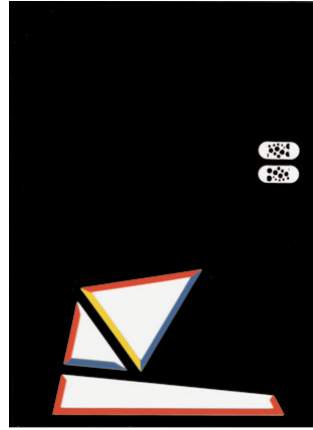
The apparatus is very simple to use, as is illustrated in the pictures opposite.

First example



All Ys are Bs

FOLLOWED BY



All Bs are Rs

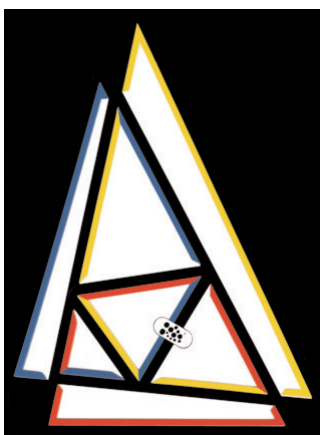
This illustrates testing for validity the syllogism:

All humans are mortals
 All mortals are arachnophobes
 Therefore all humans are arachnophobes.

Use the variables 'Y', 'B' and 'R' as stand-ins for, respectively, the nouns 'human', 'mortal' and 'arachnophobe'. The form of the first premise is 'All Ys are Bs'. Read this 'All Yellows are Blues', then simply remove from the apparatus each piece that has a yellow edge but no blue edge. For the second premise, of the form 'All Bs are Rs', remove any of the remaining pieces that have a blue edge but no red edge. By inspection of the mutilated apparatus that survives, one notes that the only piece with a yellow edge also has a red edge, hence the conclusion 'All Ys are Rs'. In the course of representing the two premises, all those pieces with yellow edges but no red edge were removed. In representing the premises, we *eo ipso* represented the conclusion, hence the argument is valid. Somewhat metaphorically, a deductively valid argument is often characterised as an argument the conclusion of which is contained in the premises. This notion of containment is made vivid in all three primarily pictorial methods of testing described in this paper, but not in the primarily linguistic

methods, Aristotle's original deductions nor their mediaeval refinements nor in Boolean algebra. The invalidity of a syllogistic argument can be immediately read off a diagrammatic representation, for the conclusion is visibly not contained in the premises. Note, for example, that the conclusion 'All arachnophobes are humans' (All Rs are Ys) does NOT follow from the original two premises, for, in its final configuration (right hand figure, above), the mutilated apparatus contains red edged pieces that are not also edged in yellow.

Second example



Some Rs are Ys

FOLLOWED BY

No Rs are Bs

The first premise is represented, just as in Venn, by placing a bar (signifying the presence of one or more objects) in the area where the red and the yellow quadrilaterals intersect. The bar must therefore lie on each of the two pieces that has a red and yellow edge. Since we do not, at this stage, have information as to which, if any, of the objects signified by the bar is blue and which, if any, is not blue, we use the bar to bridge the two pieces, one of which lies inside the blue quadrilateral, the other outside. The second premise says that there is nothing that is both R and B. Hence, to represent this, we have to remove any piece that has both an R and a B edge. There are two such pieces. There are no objects in those places, so the bridging piece (which shows the presence of objects) must be slid so as to sit on the one available piece,

as shown. From the final configuration, we can validly infer ‘Some Ys are not Bs’. (We could also validly infer that some Rs are not Bs, but that is trivial, since we already know, from the second premise, that no Rs are Bs.) Note that we cannot validly infer ‘Some Bs are not Ys’, nor ‘Some Bs are Ys’. This is because, although in the final configuration there is a piece with just a blue edge and a piece with a blue and yellow edge, these signify the areas where objects that, respectively, are just B and, respectively, are both B and Y belong, if there are any. The definite presence of one or more objects in an area is indicated by the bridging bar resting on that, and only that, area. As with many linguistically codified instruction manuals, this may sound terribly difficult; it is when you start playing with the apparatus that you realize how utterly simple it is.

We summarise the *prima facie* advantages of Son of Sylloid over both Sylloid and Venn as methods:

1. The Son of Sylloid apparatus is visually attractive (certainly if you appreciate Piet Mondriaan!) and its operation makes essential use of colour.
2. The three main classes and the seven subclasses are represented by pieces of different shapes and sizes in Son of Sylloid, reflecting the differences between the associated classes.
3. Coloured ridges round the sides of the ‘jigsaw’ pieces in Son of Sylloid give an immediate indication of the class represented by that piece. Thus a piece edged only in yellow indicates the class that contains objects, if any, that are just Y (i.e. they are not also R or also B).
4. Son of Sylloid, like Venn but unlike Sylloid, visibly represents class intersection. In Venn, the intersecting circles need to be labelled; in Son of Sylloid intersecting quadrilaterals are identified by the colours of their edges: so the piece edged in red, yellow and blue indicates a class of objects that are R, Y and B
5. As in Sylloid, the emptiness of a class is signalled by physically removing the relevant piece, but this operation is easier, since hollows have been gouged out to create space for prising fingertips. With Venn, the area would be shaded out but remains ever visible as an area in the midst of the

- diagram with which you are working.
6. The operation of showing the presence of objects is enhanced. For instance, in Venn it is a simple line but Sylloid's bar being pitted allows the light to show through from the surface of the class piece underneath, as if more realistically representing actual objects in the class.
 7. The jigsaw pieces are not contiguous (contrast Venn); the world of parliamentarians and tax cheats and blue-eyed people also contains 'all the rest', goats, planets, prime numbers, etc., represented by the housing surrounding all the pieces.
 8. When a bridging bar traverses two pieces, the subsequent removal of one of those pieces removes the support for one side of the bridge and there is just one place for it to go – onto the remaining piece. This is a more natural operation than the eclipsing of a line bar by a shaded area as in Venn, since the half of the line on the paper, as well as the shaded (empty set) area covering it, remain as strong traces on your paper.
 9. When representing in Venn a type A sentence of the form 'All Bs are Ys', one first has to paraphrase this, mentally at least, as 'There is nothing that is B that is not Y' and, accordingly shade as empty the area of the B-circle lying outside the Y-circle. Arguably, understanding why 'All Bs are Ys' is equivalent to 'There is nothing that is B that is not Y' is part of the deep learning of syllogism. A lot of students find this mental manipulation difficult, and get it wrong. With Son of Sylloid, we anticipate that the required mental manipulation is facilitated more readily and successfully. You see a B that is not Y (e.g. a piece with a blue edge but not a yellow) and you take it out; then you see another piece with a blue edge but not a yellow, and you take it out. Removing the pieces is functionally equivalent to the shading of two areas in Venn. We declare that Son of Sylloid and Venn are functionally isomorphic but the former is more kinaesthetic on top of being visual. So we anticipate that doing this operation in two stages, with demonstrative identification of the physically distinct

pieces to take out by more pronounced physical action, would be a more emphatic action than shading on paper and so ultimately more intuitive to carry out correctly, reinforcing the deep learning.

10. As illustrated in the two examples of argument-testing above, the process of testing in Son of Sylloid is quicker, easier and more fun than in either Venn or Sylloid, BUT it is so only once you have got used to it. In his original proposal, the first author badly underestimated the time it would take a student new to the subject to learn about syllogisms and how to test them for validity. It was simply unrealistic to suppose that this could be done in one hour.
11. Unlike Venn, Son of Sylloid is re-usable; unlike Sylloid, it is light, not cumbersome, cheap and easy to produce.

There is certainly a disadvantage of Son of Sylloid. Since, in Sylloid (and in Son of Sylloid), pieces are physically removed from the apparatus, compared with Venn, it is difficult (unless you have an exceptionally good memory) to remember what classes the removed pieces represent. This defect can be remedied in a variety of ways at a cost of making the apparatus a little more expensive, but this defect (if it is one) is so minor that it is not worth bothering about. Another design defect, noticed after the apparatus was constructed, was that, although the surface under the seven pieces should be black (so that the removal of a piece reveals a black void) the space surrounding and flowing between the seven pieces should be some other colour, representing everything in the world, except the Ys, Bs and Rs.

If the conjecture that Son of Sylloid is more effective than traditional methods for non-visually impaired learners proves correct, then the design methodology outlined here is likely to be applicable right across the board and will have a profound impact on the design of all kinds of teaching material. We have used, merely as an illustration, the teaching of a very narrow aspect of logic. We turn now to an account of how we went about empirically testing the usefulness of the new device.

The testing

For the empirical phase of the recent project, we devised a simple experiment to test the relative effectiveness of three separate approaches to teaching syllogism. The status of the testing is highly exploratory, piloting the prospects of a statistically more rigorous test using more people in more locations. The experimental plan passed successfully through the process of consideration of the UELT Research Ethics Committee at the University of Kent. The three approaches are, respectively, by means of Boolean algebra, of Venn diagrams and of Son of Sylloid. Students acting as participants in the experiment were set a brief paper test. There was a pre-test (on 3 March 2010) with eight philosophy students and two lecturers, to gauge whether the test paper was comprehensible and usable in the relevant context and to inform the subsequent approach.

The pilot testing proper was carried out on 29 March with participants supposedly innocent of the ins and out of methods of logic and especially of the three teaching methods. They were sixth form school pupils taking their A levels that year. They were assembled in three groups, instructed separately respectively in one of the three methods and not the other two, and given the paper test correspondingly. The test (with the same three syllogisms for all¹⁸) was as follows:

¹⁸ There was a bit more to the test paper. The following was extra working for those finishing the main questions quickly, and an additional but not systematic check on their understanding of logic:

Examine the following personality sketch:

Bill is 34 years old. He is intelligent, but unimaginative, compulsive and generally lifeless. In school, he was strong in mathematics but weak in social studies and humanities.

Which statement is more probable:

- A. Bill is an accountant that plays jazz for a hobby, or
- B. Bill plays jazz for a hobby?

Answer:

What is it for premises to entail a conclusion?

Answer:

Explain the intersection between two sets.

Answer:

Check your knowledge of syllogisms

[One of the three following rubrics displayed, according to which group they were in:]

- Test the following arguments for validity using Boolean algebra. Show your working on the right.
- Test the following arguments for validity using Venn Diagrams. Show your working on the right.
- Test the following arguments for validity using Son of Sylloid.

No bees are wasps.

Some wasps are carnivores.

Therefore

Some carnivores are not bees.

Answer: VALID / INVALID (delete whichever does not apply)

All karts are vehicles.

Some vehicles are not toys.

Therefore

Some karts are toys.

Answer: VALID / INVALID (delete whichever does not apply)

Some roads are links between famous cities.

Some links between famous cities are motorways.

Therefore

Some roads are motorways.

Answer: VALID / INVALID (delete whichever does not apply)

There were seven test papers submitted having used Boolean, seven test papers submitted having used Venn, six test papers submitted having used Son of Sylloid. As regards the three questions per participant asking them to test for validity:

- The Boolean group collectively scored 9 correct answers out of a possible 21.
- The Venn group collectively scored 14 correct answers out of a possible 21.
- The Son of Sylloid group collectively scored 9 correct answers out of a possible 18.

It would appear that the Venn Diagram method is most effective, if by that we mean precipitating the correct answers more readily. A major caveat is that there is evidence that the students were familiar with Venn Diagrams in another context, since some who were instructed to use one of the other two methods used Venn diagrams in working on their paper sheets. So the Venn group may have had a head start in a certain familiarity in this method.

Conclusions

What we can conclude with confidence from the testing is that we cannot conclude that Son of Sylloid clearly has potential for more effective learning but, on the other hand, neither is it clearly inhibiting learning. There is a clear case, then, if we wish to determine which method is most effective, for rolling out a larger funded project comparatively testing the teaching methods more rigorously, using a much larger population of participants over a range of ages, geographical areas and types of school.

By way of some evaluation of the testing component of the project, we recognize that there should have been more direction by the tutor as regards appropriate presentation of working on the test papers; furthermore, there could usefully have been more questions for participants to answer. Also, there should have been more time set aside generally for preparing the participants for what they had to do (see point 10 in the list of ‘advantages of Son of Sylloid over both Sylloid and Venn’). A more subtle problem with the test may have been that, even if the 3-D manipulations are intuitive for some, the mindset encouraged is still one of language and notation. This is, in the first place, because there is a sheet of paper and answers were to be recorded on the sheet. The questions were asking the students to state whether an argument written is valid or invalid. But could a depiction of the visual end result of manipulation of Son of Sylloid be the ‘answer’ (even if that would also be translatable into language) to certain other types of test questions, for instance asking what is the conclusion to a set of premises?. Finally, a larger project would usefully include a significant qualitative component to gauge what the participants think they are doing while they are doing it, to uncover what thought processes triggered by what

situations might be crucial in their learning.

As indicated in the previous sentence above, we ought to turn attention back to the question of proper understanding, the deep versus surface learning matter and what these involve in their nuances. Overall, this project has produced by way of findings, rather than simple answers to simple questions, instead further useful questions for further enquiry. If a rigorous test still shows the Venn diagrams method precipitating more correct responses, then we could speculate that 2-D diagrams are more intuitive than 3-D object manipulation, perhaps since secondary school age pupils are no longer infants learning how to use their bodies by means of moveable objects and have developed to become more used to writing and drawing meaningfully. What would this tell us about understanding, however? Perhaps knowing intuitively how to proceed without having to puzzle about it is reasonably deep understanding. Such a position would reinforce our point above that the two stages of the SOLO taxonomy which are deeper than incompetent/prestructural, i.e. the uniststructural and multiststructural levels, circumscribe adequate learning at this level.

On the other hand, Wittgenstein's illustration in *Philosophical Investigations* of knowing how to proceed concerns understanding how a quasi-linguistic formula works and so perhaps getting the answers right on the Boolean method is circumscribed even more thoroughly by these levels of SOLO. We might say that, except that we notice that the performance of this group in the test was the worst. This might be because more in this group missed the point and did not understand. If so, this might be, in turn, be because the method is simply not as intuitive for most humans, or because it is less good at encapsulating what syllogism is 'about'. Or, by contrast, arguably, perhaps with the linguistic/symbolic notation, you have to understand more deeply (more relationally in SOLO terms) what it is about before you can put your answer together. Whereas for Venn diagrams it may be more a matter of following a sequence of instructions, which produces the answer quasi-automatically, such that deeper understanding would be less a factor in working using this method. Paradoxically, the more a group seems to have struggled to get the correct answers, given the equal (and equally short) tuition time, the more it may be a matter of requiring deeper understanding to get anywhere, and the more automatic methods would produce the correct answers more readily. This relates

to a (contestable) point made above about the learning of logic being a matter of acquiring techniques. After playing with it for a while, Son of Sylloid does become very easy to use, so assessment of its true efficacy would require a much extended testing time.

Our conclusion is becoming increasingly hesitant and speculative but the point is to encourage further discussion of what we want to be happening for deeper understanding in our students. We need to consider whether it can practically possibly be the same for all students, who between them may display differences in learning aptitude (for whatever reason, an intelligence differential, or upbringing-fostered prejudice, etc.). Insofar as they have these differences they demand sensitivity from teachers in the interests of fairness to them as regards the appropriate method of teaching, with one method unlikely to suit all. This is then in the interests of a call for consideration of Son of Sylloid as one such method for teaching syllogism and for production and experimentation of further variations of the tool, and, indeed, whole new methods.¹⁹

Perhaps the repeated usage of the more mechanical device would facilitate deeper understanding than linear notation can: you keep doing it and then how it works, what it means, ‘clicks’ with you. As reported above (in the list of ‘advantages of Son of Sylloid over both Sylloid and Venn’ point 9), some moves in the manipulation are not so intuitive to new learners: and consider the first example illustrating Son of Sylloid, above; the conclusion to the example is ‘All B’s are R’s’ but you cannot read that alone off the diagram, as opposed to ‘Some Y’s are R’s’, for instance. Rather than it being too obvious initially for them, forcing learners to have to think about what they are doing and what it means may be our most promising clue to the fostering of the deeper understanding we seek.

¹⁹ The recent project seeks as a coda to put in train workshops for, for example, secondary school teachers where they learn the dog-legged design technique and come back in, say, 4-6 weeks with innovatory materials of their own. The first author ran a pilot for such workshops at the University of Kent on 21st September 2010, the audience consisting mainly of language teachers. The two pieces of logic apparatus described above were used as illustration. Teachers were so enthused that they volunteered to return with innovatory language-teaching materials inspired by the dog-legged approach to design. This was an unexpected, but very gratifying, response.

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Sustainability in Philosophy:

a Survey of Education for Sustainable Development Teaching in Philosophy and History and Philosophy of Science

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In 2005 the United Nations launched the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. According to UNESCO's website,

The overall goal of the DESD is to integrate the principles, values, and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning. This education effort will encourage changes in behaviour that will create a more sustainable future in terms of environmental integrity, economic viability, and a just society for present and future generations.

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There's a lot going on in those two sentences, but the aim seems laudable: to bring about good things for human beings and the environment, both now and in the future. This is to be accomplished, at least in part, by teaching sustainable development across the curriculum. As we'll see in due course, some philosophers have reservations about this, but for now let's simply keep UNESCO's definition in mind: sustainable development is 'seeking to meet the needs of the present without compromising those of future generations'.

One would have thought that education for sustainable development (ESD) lies in part on philosophical turf. For a start, philosophers certainly have a contribution to make to reflection on principles and values, thoughts about the nature of a just society, conceptions of the human relationship to the environment, understandings of obligations to present and future people, and to careful thinking about environmental rights and wrongs. The sciences can give us a grip on the facts about our changing environment, economics can inform us of the cost of action—certainly other disciplines have further contributions to make. But more than this is needed if we are to come to humane conclusions about ourselves and our world. The humanities, and no doubt philosophy, can make a real contribution to reflection on environmentally responsible action. However, it's not clear how or even where the notion of sustainability is addressed in the UK by philosophers at work in higher education.

The Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies has therefore undertaken this survey of ESD in philosophy and history and philosophy of science programmes.

I. Aims and methods

The main aim of this project is simply to identify existing ESD provision and use the resulting map to inform future work. I should say at the start that it's my hope to slink into the background and confine myself mostly to reporting. This is, after all, a report on what's going on, not an attempt to think things through.

According to the project proposal, making this information widely available might well raise the profile of existing philosophical contributions to ESD, facilitate the sharing of good practices and

resources, identify teaching issues associated with ESD, and promote further curriculum developments and improvements. Philosophers are under-represented in debates about the environment in the wider world, and part of the hope behind this project is to identify and in some sense promote the distinctive contribution philosophy can make to larger discussions about our world.

The project began with a short online survey, consisting of three parts. The first asked general questions about courses taught, for example: 'What modules or courses with a sustainability component do you teach, how many students do you have, and what degree course are they following?' There were questions about other courses with a bearing on ESD which are also taught in the home institution by other philosophers, and other questions about the numbers of students involved the classroom as those supervised and working towards higher degrees.

The second part of the survey focused on the teachers themselves. Where do they teach? How long have they been teaching? What are their areas of specialisation and competence?

The final section sprung entirely unfair questions on respondents, inviting them to say something about their understanding of sustainability and the contribution philosophy might make to ESD. How do you characterise sustainability when you introduce it to students? What distinctive contribution do you think philosophy can make to ESD? Assuming they should, how should philosophers become more involved in wider debates about sustainability? What would help them to do this?

A much more detailed case study survey was also prepared, consisting of nineteen questions broken down into four sections. The first covered the content of courses—what courses are taught, what topics are covered, and what courses might be added to the curriculum. The second section dealt with teaching as such—what is the general approach to the subject, what is the mode of delivery, what works well in the classroom, what is difficult to teach, how are these difficulties overcome, what feedback have students given, and so on. The third section attempted to identify good resources for teachers, such as books, websites, professional bodies, conferences, courses and workshops which have some bearing on ESD. The final section called for reflection on the role philosophy and the history and philosophy of

science might play with regard to ESD, as well as details of anything that might help philosophers make this contribution.

In the summer of 2010 requests to take part in the survey were sent out on PHILOS-L, a large philosophy email distribution list, and personal emails were directed to philosophers known for their work on the environment. Recipients were asked to circulate the requests to anyone they knew who might be interested. While this sort of thing can never be comprehensive, the hope just was to have something of an initial picture of the provision, with further web-based research filling in the details.

Twenty-nine people responded to the main survey, and just one completed the case study survey—I see now that the case study was too large and demanding. Some left the survey blank—having a look out of curiosity—and many others who filled it in were not UK philosophers working in departments of philosophy. We'll consider them in a moment. In the end, nine of the responses came from UK philosophers. More web-based research was therefore required.

A web search was conducted of every philosophy department and history and philosophy of science department in the UK. Again, this can't be taken as comprehensive, as some academics engaged in ESD do not mention this on their profiles—and some departments do not have profiles at all. However, based on information gleaned from listed interests and courses taught, more than sixty additional emails were sent directly to philosophers, inviting them to take part in the survey or pass the request on to someone who might take part. More emails were sent which asked philosophers to take part in a much shorter version of the case study survey. Another round of emails was sent to heads of departments, enquiring informally about ESD provision.

Based on the original survey, replies from various requests for information, and an examination of departmental websites, a draft outline of the provision was prepared. A final e-mail was sent to PHILOS-L, outlining the current provision as I had it, requesting corrections and further information.

2. Main results

It turns out that many philosophers wouldn't say that they are directly

engaged in ESD—as we’ll see in section six. Bearing this in mind, here is as close as we can get to the project’s main aim: a snapshot of work in UK departments of philosophy which might be thought to have at least a bearing on sustainable development.

Aberdeen offers a lecture course called ‘Global Justice’. A contact reports that ‘A third [of the course] will be devoted to the ethics of climate change. There will be a heavy focus on questions that relate to sustainable development. Specifically: What is an adequate response? Is the potential sacrifice in economic welfare justified by the prospects of future climate harms? How should we distribute these burdens across nations or future generations? I know that the department is planning to offer a postgraduate seminar on ecology and the environment.’

According to a contact at the Centre for the Study of Global Ethics in **Birmingham**, a unit of the School of Philosophy and Religion, there is a module there on ‘development ethics that takes this up’.

The philosophy department at **Bristol** contributes a lecture on intergenerational justice to the university’s interdisciplinary unit on sustainable development.

A contact in the philosophy faculty at **Cambridge University** reports that, ‘The Political Philosophy paper in Part II (third year) includes a number of topics directly related to sustainability, in particular ‘Justice Between Generations’ and ‘International Justice’, both under the broader heading of ‘Distributive Justice’. The Ethics paper in Part II includes a ‘Corporate Responsibility’ section under the broader heading of ‘Ethics and Organizations’, aspects of which are directly related to issues of sustainability insofar as they connect with Corporate Social Responsibility.’

The **University of Central Lancashire** offers an MA in Values and Environment. Courses include Environmental Ethics, Aesthetics and Environment, Phenomenology and Environment, Science and the Domination of Nature, Goethean Science: A Qualitative Approach to Nature, Deliberation and Public Consultation, Enhancing Nature, and Introduction to Bioethics.

The Centre for Environmental Attitudes and Management in the Department of Philosophy at **Durham** offers both Applied Ethics and Ethics and Values. Applied Ethics includes four lectures on environ-

mental ethics.

The **University of Edinburgh** Department of Philosophy offers a course called ‘Philosophy and the Environment’. There is also a course called ‘Values and the Environment’ which is taught by a philosopher working in the Geography Department but is open to philosophy students.

The **University of East Anglia** has several philosophers working on the environment and runs a research seminar called ‘the Environmental Philosophy Reading Group’. UEA offers a course called ‘Environmental Philosophy’ which takes up questions about the value of nature, environmental policy and concepts in ecology. I’m told it ‘is related to issues of sustainability insofar as it discusses questions about the value of nature, environmental policy and problems in the philosophy of ecology.’ UEA is also setting up a new MA in collaboration with Environmental Science, Philosophy, History and Literature, starting in September 2011. I’m also told that ‘this interdisciplinary course combines approaches in the humanities and the environmental sciences in order to think about the natural environment and our relationship as humans with it. The new course ties in with the concurrent development of a monthly research seminar in collaboration between the humanities and environmental sciences which will enable candidates to follow, and take part in, the research that is currently being undertaken in their subject.’

The department of philosophy at **Glasgow** has a course called ‘Environmental Ethics’.

The department of philosophy at the **University of Hull** offers a module called ‘Environmental Philosophy’. According to the module description, the course ‘explores a relatively new area of concern in philosophy and examines the philosophical (metaphysical, ethical, applied ethical) issues that arise in the environmental debate...It examines many of the distinctive concepts in the environmental debate and examines how they relate to each other and broader philosophical concerns.’ Hull also offers a module called ‘Values and the Environment’ as part of the MA in Applied Ethics.

Keele University is in the process of developing an MA pathway in Environmental Ethics. This will be based in the School of Politics, International Relations and Philosophy.

The department of philosophy at the **University of Liverpool**

offers a course in Environmental Philosophy.

The department of philosophy at the **University of Leeds** offers an elective module in Environmental Ethics. I'm told that it 'certainly touches on sustainability, particularly in connection to the lecture on intergenerational justice and the environment, and the lectures examining the ascription of intrinsic value to the environment.'

The BA (Hons) Philosophy course at **London Metropolitan University** has a second year module entitled 'Nature/"Nature"', which 'involves some examination of environmental ethics and related issues.'

A contact at **Nottingham** says that one of the topics in the module 'Distributive Justice' is intergenerational justice and climate change.

The **Open University** has a substantial component in environmental philosophy as part of its second level course, 'Philosophy and the Human Situation'. It also has interdisciplinary courses on the environment which include some philosophical content. I'm told that none of the latter deal in any detail with sustainability as an explicit topic.

A contact at **Oxford** says that the Faculty is exploring the possibility of developing a new finals paper on the environment, for PPEists, to be offered jointly with the Department of Economics. Discussions are still at an early stage. 'Sustainability' was also discussed in a graduate seminar on the ethics of climate change last summer, and another graduate seminar about climate change is planned.

Queen's University Belfast offers an Applied Ethics course which, a respondent reports, 'touches on the environment'.

The **University of Reading** offers a course called 'Environmental Ethics' and lists 'the ethics of sustainability' in an outline of course content.

The Philosophy Department at **St Andrews** does not offer courses on sustainability itself, however the university has a degree course in Sustainable Development, coordinated from the School of Geography and Geosciences, and some students take joint degrees in Sustainable Development and Philosophy.

Stirling's philosophy department offers an Environmental Ethics module. According to their website, the 'module will cover all the main approaches in contemporary philosophy to environmental ethics. Students will study theories on what the right moral attitude to the envi-

ronment should be, and on what we all as individuals are morally obliged to do to conserve the environment; as well as on global environmental issues, such as population pressure.’

The department of philosophy at **Warwick** offers a course dealing with issues of international and intergenerational justice.

At **York University** an MA in practical ethics contains a module called ‘Environmental Philosophy’. According to their website, the ‘module explores philosophical issues arising out of reflection on the value of nature.’ There is also a module on environmental philosophy for undergraduates.

3. ESD in History and Philosophy of Science (HPS)

This project aims to identify existing ESD initiatives in both philosophy and departments of history and philosophy of science. Despite a reasonable look around—which turned up so much in departments of philosophy—no HPS programme dealing with ESD was discovered. While ESD might not appear in the classroom, there is evidence of HPS academics engaging in research which might have some bearing on sustainable development, in particular on climate change and history. A 2008 conference in Manchester, for example, brought together various academics to ‘discuss whether history, social sciences and science studies can provide a clear perspective on what climate anxieties are telling us about environmentalism and politics in late modern societies.’

4. ESD outside of UK departments of philosophy

Many people who got in touch in connection with this survey identify themselves as working on ESD outside of UK departments of philosophy and history and philosophy of science. Academics from the Republic of Ireland, Iceland and many colleagues from Canada and the United States completed the survey. Initially, I had more responses from outside the UK than within it, despite using a UK-based email list.

There are also a number of academics working as it were nearby, and here the picture blurs considerably. People housed in

departments of government, politics, law, international relations, history, and social sciences, as well as some people in the sciences said their work touched on philosophical issues to do with sustainability. There are people with PhDs in philosophy teaching recognizable philosophy outside departments of philosophy, as well as others taking up what might be understood as a philosophical approach to ESD even though they themselves have a background in something else entirely. Some philosophers offer lectures in interdisciplinary courses on the environment. I don't know how valuable categorising all this might be, but certainly philosophers here could learn lessons concerning ESD from philosophers elsewhere, as well as those teaching philosophy with little or no connection to philosophy departments.

Here are some examples of philosophical approaches to ESD outside philosophy departments.

There is a new MA in Social Ethics and Public Advocacy housed in the School of Health and Social Sciences at the **University of Wales, Newport**. According to a contact there, the MA is 'geared towards those looking to deploy ideas from social and political philosophy in their campaigning work. There is an optional environmental ethics strand within the MA, in which moral/social justice-related arguments for sustainability feature as central themes. Environmental campaigners are one of its target audiences.'

At the **LSE**, a lecturer in political philosophy in the department of government says a new MSc course on the Philosophy and Politics of Environmental Change is about to be offered.

Exeter offers a course in Environmental Politics and Philosophy. Their website says that this 'online course explores modern environmentalism, a philosophy which has grown from a fringe concern to a powerful political movement. We will study the historical and philosophical foundations of different perspectives on the environment as well as looking at global issues, efforts to tackle these, the meaning of sustainability, and the current status of green political thought.'

5. Other findings

With just nine surveys completed by people identifying themselves as UK philosophers, it's important not to make too much of this, however

the following points did emerge from the results. Of the seven who responded to a question about trends in student numbers, five said numbers were staying the same, one thought numbers were increasing, and another believed numbers were decreasing. Six of the nine respondents said of the courses they teach which have a bearing on ESD, around 25% or less of the content directly concerns sustainable development. There is at least some ground for thinking that the next generation of philosophers will have people familiar with ESD in it: the nine respondents are or recently were supervising a total of fourteen PhD students ‘whose work concerns sustainability’.

No clear patterns emerged regarding the teachers themselves. Some engaged in research concerning ESD, and some didn’t. Some had many years of experience teaching around the subject, and some were relatively new to it. Some considered their area of expertise the environment and some didn’t.

6. Teaching issues: conceptions of sustainability

One of the aims of this project is to identify ‘teaching issues in ESD’. Perhaps the most striking feature of the response to requests for information about ESD in departments of philosophy is the philosophers’ reflex response, ‘Just what do you mean by “sustainability”?’ One wouldn’t imagine encountering a similar worry in a parallel survey on Education for Understanding French. ‘Just what do you mean by French?’ As might have been anticipated, though, the idea of sustainable development itself is the subject of philosophical scrutiny. There is a sense in which the main teaching issue raised just is the fact of philosophical interest in the idea of sustainable development and what effects this might have on ESD in philosophy.

The survey tried to get a backhanded grip on how philosophers understand sustainability by asking how they introduce the notion to students. Here are some replies:

‘I usually characterise it as a way of living sustainably with the environment, managing and conserving environments as opposed to a resource-driven approach.’

‘Activities and processes are sustainable that can be continued or sustained indefinitely, and thus satisfy the needs of every succeeding generation. Not everything sustainable is thereby desirable, but there is a strong contingent connection between sustainability and justice.’

‘[I] introduce this in terms of questions about human attitudes to the environment and the effects of our actions. It’s ultimately a question of how we live and live well – how to live in harmony with ourselves and all other living beings.’

Several philosophers mentioned the Brundtland Report:

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts: the concept of “needs”, in particular the essential needs of the world’s poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environments’ ability to meet present and future needs.

Others took issue with the very notion of ESD. You can spot it already in the response above: ‘not everything sustainable is thereby desirable’. The concept is ‘slippery’, one said. Many point out that ‘sustainable’ does not always mean environmentally friendly. The word ‘greenwashing’ came up a number of times—exclusively in replies from those working in the United States. ‘If “sustainability” meant what it should,’ one said, ‘it would follow Derrick Jensen’s definition: an activity is sustainable if it does not damage the capacity of the land base to support its members.’

There is the further thought that sustainability is something other than sustainable development. Perhaps the worry is that talk of meeting the developmental needs of the present sneaks something under the radar, something not sustainable at all in some other, better sense. Some environmentalists, anyway, say that we’ve had quite enough development. I did worry that some philosophers thought there was something sinister behind this survey. I said to one respondent that I was only asked to find out who’s doing what, rather than support the infiltration of ‘a sustainable development agenda’ in UK higher education. I’m not

sure he believed me.

Another philosopher pointed me to work in which he argues that the concept of sustainable development is ‘structurally unable to distinguish between on the one hand preparing to meet our obligations to the future, and on the other construing the future as putting us under obligations we are prepared to meet. As such the concept itself is radically anti-educational, encouraging forms of bad faith in policy and practice which are the negation of any social or individual learning.’

One philosopher expressed disquiet at the prospect of ESD as a kind of ‘social engineering’:

‘I’m not sure it’s our job to be engaging in education “for” anything. Why not education for world peace, while we’re at it? Or education for a healthy diet? However laudable, my concern is that this appears to conflict with what many of us believe are other, fundamental aims of a university education: the development of criticality and autonomy.’

7. Philosophy’s contribution to ESD

What distinctive contribution can philosophy make to ESD? Many respondents said something about the tools of philosophical enquiry: ‘Thinking through definitions; making distinctions between different approaches... raising awareness through teaching and scholarship.’ Philosophy, one said, can ‘distinguish and clarify notions of sustainability and supply and critique accounts thereof.’ Philosophers working on sustainability see themselves as getting on with the philosopher’s job of questioning assumptions, following arguments wherever they lead and getting clear on the real consequences of our beliefs.

There was another strand in the replies. Some said that philosophy has a special role to play in identifying connections between theory and action, between scientific facts and moral values. It has been said before that the humanities are needed if we are to come to an understanding of the facts of our changing world. If those in the sciences sometimes say that their job is to identify the facts, discover and present them objectively and leave it at that, perhaps others, including philosophers, are needed to interpret those facts. One said that phi-

losophy brings out ‘the deeply normative dimensions of any discussion of sustainability and shows—at the very least—that ethics is required alongside science in addressing and understanding the sustainability challenge.’ Another said that ‘philosophers have a unique contribution to make, not least to reinvigorate the notion of values-led science.’ One put it starkly: ‘ethical knowledge is at least as important as scientific knowledge.’

8. Philosophers and sustainability outside academe

There is the thought that philosophers should be involved in debates about sustainability in the wider world, and many respondents expressed some version of it. One said that philosophers, and in particular environmental ethicists, should be on government committees or advisory boards which had some bearing on the environment or energy. Another thought that philosophers should be better informed about the science before wading in.

One respondent had specific recommendations:

‘Sustainability can be explained to groups specialising in development studies such as the Development Studies Association, and to undergraduate groups in various universities. Membership of the International Development Ethics Association and participation in its activities is another route. Also some NGOs welcome talks and discussions on sustainable development.’

Some expressed regret at the level of support offered for such activities. ‘Sadly,’ one concluded, ‘universities are prone not to appreciate or foster such activities, guessing that research review panels will not be impressed by it.’ Another echoed the sentiment:

‘Environmental ethics has a low profile in the UK.... This is disgraceful! More teaching of the subject is needed. More recognition at various levels of the importance and value of practical philosophy. Things need to change in terms of broadening RAE and research funding which tends to be more supportive of pure philosophy.’

9. Recommendations for further work

This survey raises a number of questions, and profitable research and action might be undertaken in three different areas. First of all the provision of ESD outside of UK philosophy departments might be examined by considering these questions:

- Where and how are philosophical approaches to ESD being undertaken outside of philosophy departments? Might philosophers somehow support this work? Might those outside philosophy, in the sciences for example, help philosophers engage more effectively in ESD?
- Where and how are philosophers outside the UK engaging in ESD? What lessons might we learn from them? How might we share information, methods and approaches?

Second, when philosophers were asked about the resources they used in connection to ESD, nearly all left the section blank. Some mentioned a favourite book, and two used the space to request help in this connection. Philosophers working on ESD, particularly those new to it, would benefit from sharing information.

- A listing of resources—books, articles, websites, conferences, networks, mailing lists, associations, sample syllabi and other classroom materials—for those engaged in ESD might be assembled.
- A web-based method for sharing this information, perhaps a wiki or email list, might help too. Inviting teachers of ESD to share methods and approaches at a conference might be of value.

Third, this survey suggests that at least some philosophers whose work concerns environmental matters feel less than supported in their attempts to take part in discussions in the wider world. Philosophers do seem well-equipped to contribute to conversations about sustainability, and well-positioned to take part in debates about morally required action, and values generally, as well as our understanding of our place in the world. Finding new ways to support philosophers interested in this would no doubt be welcomed by them. Some said they would like to become more involved, if only they had some idea of how to do so.

- Determining where and how philosophers might engage

more fully in public discussion—and helping them to do so—might have a number of benefits.

- Voices speaking in unison are sometimes amplified, and a working group dedicated to bringing philosophical rigour to public debate might be valuable.

It's worth reflecting, finally, on the fact that at best we now know something about only half of ESD in UK philosophy departments. Even if we have a view of the ESD curriculum and philosophy's contribution to it, we won't really have a grip on the matter until we know more about the students who study it. What matters to them? Why do they take these courses? I wonder what they will do with the conception of things that gain by reflecting philosophically on the environment and sustainability. What principles, values and practices do they really walk away with, in the end?

Appendix—case studies

Sustainability in Philosophy Case Study I

1. What is your department and institution?

Philosophy, School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences, University of Edinburgh

2. What courses do you teach which have an ESD component? How many students per course?

Philosophy and the Environment, MA Honours level course (3rd and 4th year students) also offered to Taught MSc students. Approximately 35 undergraduate students and 2-3 MSc students each year.

3. What topics do you cover? What's your general approach?

We cover metaphysics (philosophies of nature), animal ethics, environmental aesthetics. We consider dualism, monism and pluralism via Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz and link these with contemporary developments, looking at anthropocentrism, biocentrism, values, deep ecology, Sprigge, Whitehead. We also consider what is meant by 'nature' drawing on Bradley and Mill. On animal ethics, we focus on Singer and Regan and on environmental aesthetics, the main focus is on Kant and the sublime. General approach tries to link thinking about

nature (metaphysics) and appreciation of nature (aesthetics) with ethical questions about how we should act in relation to nature.

4. What tasks do you set for the students in these courses? What works well?

We adopt a standard lecture-seminar approach. Students prepare a presentation for discussion during the seminar. They are examined by an end of semester written examination and are encouraged to submit a formative essay during the semester. Final year students can opt to submit a 5,000 word essay in lieu of the exam and as part of their dissertation requirement. MSc students submit a shorter essay.

5. What do the students find difficult in these courses?

Some students find the metaphysics hard. Others thrive on it.

6. What resources do you find valuable for these courses? Books? Articles? Websites? Conferences? Workshops? Professional bodies or groups?

We find the Light and Rolston anthology invaluable (Light, A. and Rolston, H. (eds) (2003) *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology* (Blackwell). On journals, *Environmental Values* and *Environmental Ethics* are the most useful, though I intend to make use of a number of articles from the *Trumpeter*.

And a selection of some others we list as either essential or further reading: Taylor, P. (1986) *Respect for Nature*, (Princeton UP); Jamieson, D. (2003) *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, (London: Blackwell); Naess, A. 'The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: a Summary, *Inquiry*, 16 (1973), 95-100; Naess, Arne 'Spinoza and Ecology', *Philosophia*, 7(1) (1977), 45-54; Katz, E., Light, A., Rothenberg, D., eds, *Beneath the Surface: Critical Essays in the Philosophy of Deep Ecology*, MIT, 2000; T.L.S. Sprigge, 'Are there Intrinsic Values in Nature?', in Brenda Almond & Donald Hill, eds. *Applied Philosophy: Moral and Metaphysics in Contemporary Debate*, pp. 37-44; A. Berleant, ed., *Environment and the Arts*, Ashgate, 2002; Jamieson, D. (ed) (2003) *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy* (Blackwell); O'Neill, J. 'The Varieties of Intrinsic Value', *The Monist* 75, 1992; Regan, T. (1984) *The Case for Animal Rights* (Routledge); Singer P. (1993) *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge UP); Merchant, C., *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (Harper and Row); DesJardins, J. (2000) *Environmental Ethics*, Wadsworth; Katz, E., Light, A., Rothenberg, D.

(ed) (2000) *Beneath the Surface: Critical Essays in the Philosophy of Deep Ecology* (MIT); Brennan, A. (1995) *The Ethics of the Environment* (Ashgate); Chappell, T.D. (ed) (1997) *The philosophy of the Environment* (Edinburgh); Carlson, A. (2000) *Aesthetics and the Environment* (Routledge).

7. Do you do anything outside the classroom that has a bearing on discussions or debates about sustainability in the wider world?

I co-ordinate the events programme on the environment at Edinburgh's Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities. These fall under two headings. First, the Embodied Values Project which is a wider inter-institutional grouping of academics and practitioners that arose initially from a series of workshops on Embodied Values in 2007-08 and which now encompasses work on biosemiotics, environmental art, animals and questions about the animal-human divide). We are presently editing a volume of papers from the workshops, due to come out with Springer at the end of next year. On the events side, the Institute is currently running a series of seminars and public lectures on 'Embodied Values: Bringing the Senses Back to Environment'. Second, a Humanities and Climate Change seminar which meets roughly once a month.

I try to keep abreast of environment events and sustainability initiatives around the University, maintaining contact with the Transitions team and attending some climate change lectures. I am a member of the CHCI (Consortium of Humanities Centres and Institutes) Affinity Group, 'Humanities for the Environment'. I am working on a book on philosophies of nature.

Sustainability in Philosophy Case Study 2

1. What is your department and institution?

Philosophy Group, Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, Manchester Metropolitan University, Cheshire Faculty.

2. What courses do you teach which have an ESD component? How many students per course?

Applied Ethics, a 24 week course of which 12 weeks are devoted to ESD content, more if you include four weeks on animal ethics. (30 Students); Political and Social Philosophy, a 24 week course, of which 6 weeks are devoted to ESD content. (This will commence in 2011-

2012—expected to have 30 students).

Also, the first year critical thinking unit uses ESD related material throughout in examples. For instance, for one of their assessments, the students are tasked to critically assess the arguments in Bjorn Ljomborg's work (those arguments don't fare well).

3. What topics do you cover? What's your general approach?

In Applied Ethics we cover the following: metaethical questions in environmental ethics, e.g. the intrinsic value debate; we examine Gaia theory, and the debate between its advocates and selfish gene theory advocates; we look at the nature of an ecosystem: e.g, how does one distinguish between an ecosystem and an organism; we then spend 6 weeks on the ethics of climate change.

In Political and Social Philosophy we will cover the following: students will be introduced to Green Political Thought; taught the distinction between environmentalism and ecologism; and explore the political issues emerging from anthropogenic global warming and ask whether traditional political philosophy has the resources to address these issues adequately.

4. What tasks do you set for the students in these courses? What works well?

Applied ethics is structured as a discussion forum. Readings are set each week and one student is tasked to introduce that week's topic for 10 minutes and raise questions for discussion.

Political and Social Philosophy at present has a more conventional lecture-seminar structure, though this is likely to change when the ESD material is incorporated next term.

In both units students must write two essays, give a presentation and sit an end of year exam.

5. What do the students find difficult in these courses?

Unfortunately a significant proportion of them find it difficult to accept the truth of anthropogenic global warming! As in all ethics teaching, students find metaethical discussions difficult and a little dry. In many respects, teaching ESD related topics can help mitigate this.

6. What resources do you find valuable for these courses? Books? Articles? Websites? Conferences? Workshops? Professional bodies or groups?

Barlow (ed.) *From Gaia to Selfish Genes*, Andrew Dobson's *Green Political Thought* (4th ed), Jamieson (ed.) *Blackwell Companion to*

Environmental Philosophy.

Much of the material on environmental philosophy and ethics is of patchy quality, but resources are emerging which are of better quality.

I would like to hear recommendations for useful websites, professional bodies and workshops.

7. Do you do anything outside the classroom that has a bearing on discussions or debates about sustainability in the wider world?

Not at present, but I am in discussions with colleagues in geography and outdoor studies in an attempt to devise a more radical approach, which would involve leaving the classroom and the university on field trips. I confess to still having little idea as to how this might work in an academically rigorous way. However, we'll continue to try.

Sustainability in Philosophy Case Study 3

1. What is your department and institution?

Department of Philosophy, Durham University

2. What courses do you teach which have an ESD component? How many students per course?

I teach—or teach on—several modules which touch upon issues in environmental ethics, namely: (1) Buddhist Philosophy (a Masters-level, seminar-based module, with about half a dozen students; it touches on the question of how one might be able to draw upon Buddhist thought to develop a tenable environmental ethic); (2) the Undergraduate Dissertation module (every year, a couple of final-year students choose to write on environmental philosophy); and (3) Applied Ethics (a final-year module, which attracts around 70 students each year; four lectures are devoted to environmental ethics). I'll focus on Applied Ethics in what follows.

None of these modules is billed as having anything to do with Education for Sustainable Development, however. I suspect that if they saw this phrase in the module description for, say, Applied Ethics, my students would worry that I'd use the lectures to preach to them about environmental issues.

3. What topics do you cover? What's your general approach?

I'm not the module leader for Applied Ethics—I'm just drafted in to

give the lectures on environmental ethics. So the general teaching format—lectures, tutorials, assessment by exam—is to a large extent out of my hands. In my lectures, I begin by trying to get the students to question the familiar 'moral status' approach to normative ethics (epitomised by the various attempts, as it were, to expand the moral circle, from writers like Singer and Goodpaster). I then move on to introduce some alternative approaches, namely, ethical holism (Leopold, Callicott, etc.) and environmental virtue ethics (Cafaro, my own work with David Cooper, etc.).

I should add that my aim, in teaching environmental ethics, is not to convince the students to lead greener lifestyles, but to inspire them to think about our moral relations with more-or-less natural environments. Personally, I think that there are good reasons to live one's life in a broadly green way, and I try to convey to my students what those reasons are. But, again, I'm very wary about sounding preachy.

4. What tasks do you set for the students in these courses? What works well?

Since I'm just a lecturer for Applied Ethics, I don't have much opportunity to set my students tasks. (I'd have more opportunity if I were a tutor.) That said, I try to keep the lectures fairly interactive, and I do ask the students to defend whatever views they voice.

5. What do the students find difficult in these courses?

A tricky question. Nothing in particular has come up in student evaluations, though I get the impression that quite a few students find it difficult to think about normative ethics in anything other than a moral status-focused, 'how far can we expand the moral circle' kind of way.

6. What resources do you find valuable for these courses? Books? Articles? Websites? Conferences? Workshops? Professional bodies or groups?

In my view, the best introductions to environmental ethics are (1) O'Neill, Holland and Light, *Environmental Values* (challenging for many students, but altogether an excellent introduction and a great piece of philosophy in its own right); (2) Jamieson's *Ethics and the Environment* (v accessible; engagingly written); (3) Rolston and Light's very useful *Environmental Ethics: an Anthology*.

As for journals, I (and my students) tend to rely on *Environmental Values* and to a lesser extent (simply because it's not online) *Environmental Ethics*. The ISEE bibliography, accessed via the

University of North Texas's website, is very useful, too.

7. Do you do anything outside the classroom that has a bearing on discussions or debates about sustainability in the wider world?

I'm a keen amateur naturalist, and I guess I'd call myself a nature lover, but I'm not much of an environmentalist. To be sure, I have supported various environmental causes in the past (I used to be a fairly active member of my local Friends of the Earth group, for instance). But in recent years, and for no good reason, I've become less and less engaged. Terrible, really!

Values and Aims of Higher Education:

The Case of Ernst Jünger, ‘Total Mobilisation’, and Academic Philosophy

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There is much discontent with British academia at the moment. The last thirty years have witnessed the funding abyss of Thatcher’s Britain and its mass closure of departments, and the encroaching managerialism, ‘strategic planning’, and omnipresent concern with outputs, metrics, and ‘performance’ of Blair’s government. Such phenomena are familiar and depressing enough and this paper will not dwell upon them; criticisms of ‘outputs’, ‘impact’, and metrological exercises like the Research Excellence Framework are familiar to British academics, and the subject of a variety of practical,

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political, and philosophical objections. The aim of this paper is not to add to the familiar arguments for or against such trends in higher education policies, but, rather, to offer what is hopefully an original and illuminating perspective upon them. I suggest that many trends in contemporary British higher education can be fruitfully understood using the political philosophy of the early 20th century German writer, philosopher, and cultural critic Ernst Jünger (1895-1998). If this claim is correct, it should offer new and fruitful criticisms of certain prevailing trends in higher education, and hopefully demonstrate that the disciplines of history and philosophy can draw upon their own intellectual resources to protect themselves against the deleterious trends which, many scholars agree, are jeopardising their professional and scholarly integrity. I begin with an account of Jünger's political philosophy, with special attention to his idea of 'total mobilisation', and, once this is in place, use it to model contemporary British higher education policies. This exercise is not intended to be either exhaustive or definitive, but should provide a novel perspective and, perhaps, an engaging one.

The changes in the recent history of British higher education are affected by many political, economic, and cultural reasons for these transformations of academia, too many to rehearse here.¹ Despite their complexity, however, they are arguably reflective of a broader trend which itself finds precedent within the history; more specifically, my claim is that the changes and trends just mentioned, and the centralising ideology they represent, were described very well by Ernst Jünger (1895-1998). I suggest that Jünger's idea of 'total mobilisation' can be used to describe and criticise the changes in British academic philosophy over the last thirty years—it may apply more widely, but my focus is on the discipline most familiar to me. I begin by briefly introducing Jünger and his political context and then describe 'total mobilisation', before applying it to contemporary British academic philosophy. Since this claim has political as well as philosophical dimensions, the tone is unapologetically critical, especially since a 'totally mobilised' higher education has deleterious effects upon undergraduate teaching and postgraduate training.

¹ For a recent historical perspective, see Clark, William, *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

Ernst Jünger almost outlived the 20th century. Born in 1895, he served in both world wars, earning military awards and popular acclaim, before settling into a long career as a writer, before his death in 1998 at the age of one hundred and three.² Despite his long life and career, my focus is on just two of his works, the long essay *Die Totale Mobilmachung* ('Total Mobilisation', 1931, TM) and the book *Der Arbeiter* (The Worker, 1932, W).³ It is in these works that Jünger here develops his eponymous ideas of 'total mobilisation' and its associated concept of 'the worker', both of which were reactions against the culture and politics of Weimar Germany. Like many of his contemporaries, Jünger was alarmed at what he and other veterans perceived as the impotence and inertia of the liberal democratic values of the new Weimar Republic. Despite such worries, however, Jünger suggested that the war was, as one writer put it, possibly 'the crucible of his generation' which, if properly understood, could draw 'a cultural [and] political victory from the ashes of military disaster'.⁴ For many commentators of the period, Germany's defeat in the first world was not simply a military conflict but a symptom of a deeper cultural instability, in which 'the exhaustion of the old values [was] being united with an unconscious longing for a new life' (TM 138). Jünger's philosophical project, then, was to reinterpret the war as a powerful agent of cultural change, and to help articulate and realise this potential. This is what led him to the idea of 'total mobilisation'.

The First World War was not called 'the Great War' simply on account of its geographical and military scope, nor its calamitous human cost. It was also an enormous industrial and technological triumph, in which whole nations maximised and coordinated their massive material and engineering resources: armies of men drafted, tanks rolling off production lines, unsleeping shipyards building battle-ships, women making shells and uniforms. The entirety of the natural,

² On Jünger's life, see Nevin, Thomas R., *Ernst Jünger and Germany: Into the Abyss, 1914-1945* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).

³ 'Total Mobilisation' appears as chapter six of Wolin (1993). Quotations from *Der Arbeiter* are taken from chapter four of Herf, Jeffrey, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). Sadly, *Der Arbeiter* has not yet been fully translated into English.

⁴ Herf, op. cit, 73, 76.

economic, and human resources of the combatant nations were ‘mobilised’ and all the energies and determination of an entire nation directed towards a single goal. Jünger praised this mobilisation but argued that it could only fully achieve its potential when it became ‘total’. ‘Total mobilisation’ would therefore see the complete natural and human resources of the state restructured and directed towards a singular set of goals defined by the state. Jünger perceived ‘mobilisation’ as an historical or ‘metaphysical’ destiny, one in which ‘the image of war as armed combat merges into the more extended image of a gigantic labour process [*Arbeitsprozesses*]’, an ‘unlimited marshalling of potential energies’ which promised to ‘transform’ whole nations into ‘volcanic forces’, resulting in ‘the dawn of the age of labour [*Arbeitszeitalter*]’ (TM 126).

Despite the vigorous prose, there is a clear political agenda within Jünger’s idea of ‘total mobilisation’. A ‘totally mobilised’ state is one in which the process of ‘marshalling potential energies’ is extended into and throughout the public sphere, into commerce, politics, art, education, and culture. A ‘totally mobilised’ state marks its ‘stamp’ onto each individual and every department of human life, resulting in ‘the increasing curtailment of “individual liberty”’ with the final aim of ‘deny[ing] the existence of anything that is not a function of the state’ (TM 127). Instances of total mobilisation would include the definition of education as the training of future workforces, of artworks and cultural heritage as national asserts, and of the environment in terms of natural resources ready and available for human manipulation.⁵ Total mobilisation requires that all activities and all individuals become subsumed to the national interest—hence its totalitarian overtones—and become ‘efficient’ components of a centralised engine of production. The ultimate aim is that ‘each individual life becomes, ever more unambiguously, the life of a worker’ (TM 128). The ‘worker’ that Jünger has in mind isn’t the burly labourer in grimy overalls, but an efficient functionary, a trained and mechanised component of a wider social machine. The process of ‘total mobilisation’ and the life of a ‘worker’ is, moreover, relentless and irresistible, since once one is totally mobilised, ‘the possibility of an alternative is not present

⁵ See Heidegger, Martin, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (London: Harper, 1977).

to [our] consciousness' (TM 134), and any movement away from it is accompanied by the sensation of inefficiency, inactivity, and the painful abandonment of one's role. Jünger wrote, in characteristically charged prose, of 'uniformly moulded masses' who 'comprise a great and fearful spectacle', each caught in the 'merciless grasp' of total mobilisation (TM 138).

The vision of 'total mobilisation' should surely strike us as a disturbing and totalitarian and it is not difficult to see why Jünger was popular amongst the emerging National Socialist elites of the mid-1930s. I would now like to consider 'total mobilisation' and relate it to contemporary academic philosophy, and to take three specific points from Jünger's account of 'total mobilisation' and 'the worker': there are 'production', 'specialisation', and 'centralisation'. These can be characterised together. In a 'totally mobilised' system, all energies and activities are geared toward a single end, and that is *production*—whether of tanks and rifles, saleable goods and commodities, or agricultural products. The large-scale systems needed to attain this production—round-the-clock factories, infrastructure, assembly lines—are staffed and operated by a *specialised* workforce. Everyone has some special role to play in the system of production, and this role determines their function and value, and of course limits their freedoms to change and develop. Finally, the construction and operation of this enormous system of production requires *centralisation*, the unitary coordination of these energies and activities. A successfully totally mobilised system consists of specialised units within a rigidly disciplined centralised system of production. This is, indeed, the vision that Jünger describes in his descriptions of 'our daily life, with its inexorability and merciless discipline, its smoking glowing districts, its commerce, its motors, airplanes, and burgeoning cities. With a pleasure-tinged horror, we sense that here, not a single atom is not in motion—that we are profoundly inscribed in this raging process' (TM 128).

Can Jünger's ideas of 'total mobilisation' and 'the worker' be used to model the deleterious trends which academics identify in contemporary British higher education—and, if so, can it therefore offer novel resources for criticising them? Consider the following points. Recent British governments have tended to assess academic philosophy, and other disciplines, according to a standard of production,

namely, ‘research output’, mainly in the form of publications. The familiar mantra is ‘publish or perish’ and this has generated a neurological mania which affects the structure and motivations of academics. Those who publish are more likely to be awarded jobs and research awards whilst those who are ‘research inactive’ do not and, often, disappear from the system—or, at the least, fail to advance professionally and financially within it. In some cases, failure to comply with the imperative to publish results in censure or, in severe cases, to the dissolution of entire departments. In 2009, for instance, a plan was presented to the Senate of the University of Liverpool to shut down their Philosophy Department, on the grounds of their poor RAE performance.⁶ This is, as one contributor to the ensuing PHILOS-L listserv debate observed, ‘part of a Europe-wide process of standardisation [and] bureaucratisation’ which is characteristic of ‘a mercantile mindset in which all that matters is short-term profit’, in which profit equals prestige.⁷ Another commentator added that continuous systematic evaluations like the RAE are modelled on management policies imported from private enterprises, in which ‘when a part of it ‘underperforms’ you simply cut it’.⁸ These trends are perfectly intelligible as symptoms of an imposed total mobilisation. The imperative is to engage in quantifiably-measurable ‘production’ in accordance with the directives of a centralised authority rather than the professional and scholarly standards of the affected discipline. Universities and national governments affected by the Bologna Declaration are organising academic philosophy according to dubious criteria of ‘productivity’ in a way which prioritises research and consummates the marriage of bibliometrics and the ‘publish or perish’ imperative. A recent initiative in this direction is the proposed European Reference Index for the Humanities (ERIH) which was criticised in a joint editorial by over fifty leading journals in the history of science, technology, and medicine (HSTM). The editors of these journals objected that the quantifying zeal of the ERIH would see research ‘being subjected to puta-

⁶ ‘Future of eight Liverpool departments in doubt’, *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 9th March 2009).

⁷ Chase, Michael, PHILOS-L post, <http://listserv.liv.ac.uk/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0903&L=philos-l&T=0&P=19317>.

⁸ Verelst, Karin, PHILOS-L post, <http://listserv.liv.ac.uk/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0903&L=PHILOS-L&P=R22836&I=-3>

tively precise accountancy by arbitrary and unaccountable agencies', which threaten to homogenise journals which are 'heterogeneous and distinct'.⁹ The editors of these journals asked that they be removed from ERIHs listings.

Collective resistance like this is reassuring, but the total mobilisation of academia may be harder to resist. For one thing, publish-or-perish ensures that financial reward and professional advancement are earned within an agonistic competitive arena, meaning that staff members who resist their 'mobilisation' linger on the lower rungs of the professional ladder. The interlinking of departmental funding with satisfactory production of accepted 'outputs' also introduces tangible financial imperatives, especially in these strained economic times. Other forms of resistance are also conceivable, however. Despite the emphasis placed by universities on the undergraduate 'student experience'—many universities now have a 'Pro-Vice Chancellor (Student Experience)'—there is little emphasis placed on teaching. Although academics should be both teachers and researchers, 'in practice the publish-or-perish syndrome has rendered teaching a peripheral activity', as is clearly evidenced in the derogatory phrase 'teaching load'.¹⁰ The RAE awards no points for good teaching, after all, which cannot (yet) be quantified in the way that publications can (although the end-of-term 'student satisfaction' questionnaires may be the beginning of this, and no doubt plans for the quantification of teaching are being drawn up.)

Jünger, of course, can make sense of this. Only that which can be quantified and measured—as 'work', 'output', or 'productivity'—is to be admitted as a value. Teaching and such traditional philosophical values as 'wisdom' cannot be quantified, and so are rejected: funding applications ask for the intended tangible results of new projects, such as workshops or a monograph, and not for obscure, airy things as 'greater understanding' or 'insight'. These are venerable scholarly values yet their resistance to easy quantification precludes them from consideration in an assessment regime which admits only tangible

⁹ 'Journals under threat: A joint response from history of science, technology and medicine editors', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society* (20 March 2009) vol. 63, no.1, pp.1-3.

¹⁰ Abra, Jock, *Should Psychology be a Science? Pros and Cons* (London: Greenwood, 1998), p.112.

outputs. Indeed, Jünger had emphasised that during total mobilisation what is ‘essential’ is the ‘quality of fighting’—that is, the vigour and industry of activity—rather than any intrinsic reasons or motivations for engaging in such activities (W 76). All that matters is ‘the growing conversion of life into energy’ (TM 126). In academic terms, this equates to a steady output of journal papers, book chapters, and learned monographs within top-rated journals. The ongoing efforts to rank and rate journals and to measure citation rates are indications of such efforts to measure ‘productivity’.

Another form of ‘outputs’ will of course be economic products. Philosophy is generally rather distant from economic profitability and so like most arts and humanities departments would suffer from any increasing emphasis on any emphasis on economic outputs. Sadly this is just what is being urged both by businesses and by the British government. A 2009 report by the Confederation of British Industry argued that British university education should focus on subjects such as science, technology, mathematics and languages—namely those with economic value—a claim regrettably echoed by the then-British education secretary David Lammy.¹¹ HEFCE’s recent report on the REF compounds the problem, emphasising the need to attract research funding from businesses, creating new business, better-informed policy-making, and ‘cultural enrichment’.¹² Most of this is obviously geared towards quantifiable economic productivity and statistical demonstration—and before that mention of ‘cultural enrichment’ inspires any optimism one should bear in mind its accompanying caveat that it should include ‘improved public engagement with science and research’. HEFCE clarifies that cultural enrichment amounts to increased public engagement with and attitudes towards science and technology, namely to propagandising on behalf of science and technology that borders on ideological technocracy. And if that

¹¹ Confederation of British Industry, ‘How Best to Strengthen the Links Between Businesses and Universities?’ (2009), <http://highereducation.cbi.org.uk/uploaded/20091020-cbi-he-summit-brochure.pdf>. See Peter Smith’s ‘Research Excellence Bullshit’, <http://logic-matters.blogspot.com>, for a spirited discussion.

¹² HEFCE, ‘Research Excellence Framework: Second Consultation on the Assessment and Funding of Research’ (2009a): http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2009/09_38/oi_38.pdf.

judgment seems too extreme, the report includes the explicit statement that the definition of 'impact' does not 'intend to include impact through intellectual influence on scientific knowledge and academia'.¹³

The emphasis upon relentless publication is allied to specialisation. Academic departments now place growing emphasis upon postgraduate recruitment. MA and PhD students pass through an increasingly harried training and research process in what the band Franz Ferdinand aptly described as the 'academic factory' in which they are loaded with 'key skills' and located within a niche of specialised learning for them to mine. The growing popularity of 'module streams' through undergraduate syllabi—from 'Ethics and Values' to 'Moral Theory' and then to third year 'Applied Ethics' for instance—is one manifestation of this. Such module streams may allow students with defined interests to move deeper into their areas of particular interest but it may also serve to discourage a broad and comprehensive exploration of philosophy. Many historians of philosophy complain that contemporary undergraduate philosophy courses fail to provide students with a sufficiently comprehensive grounding in the history and diversity of philosophy. However the spirit of 'total mobilisation' seeks to produce highly specialised postgraduate researchers—cognitive Swiss army knives, able to perform highly technical studies of narrow subjects and areas—rather than those 'eclectics' whose historical and disciplinary scope is much broader.¹⁴

A typical response to such appeals for eclecticism is the fact that the sheer number of working academics demands that one be specialised. The current rate of publication ensures that new journal papers and monographs appear at a constant rate on almost every topic—mental ontology, virtue ethics, Kantian aesthetics, philosophy of action, and more. Without a well-defined 'niche', one will be crowded out amongst the throng of others, especially at a time when, according to Randall Collins, 'several hundred thousand publications appear every year in the humanities and social sciences' such that 'it may well feel as if we are drowning in a sea of texts'.¹⁵ Jünger might praise the

¹³ HEFCE (2009a), 51c.

¹⁴ For a further discussion, see my 'Specialisation, Postgraduate Research, and Philosophical Eclecticism', *Discourse*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2008) pp. 239-245. For the historical complaint, see Cooper, David E., 'Philosophy and its Past', *Philosophical Writings*, vol. 3 (1996).

philosopher who publishes to avoid perishing, and who ‘endlessly brings forth magnificent and merciless spectacles’ (W, 77), but he might seem an alien figure to the rest of us. After all, some philosophers were prolific writers—Aristotle and Russell, say—whilst others—like Socrates and Wittgenstein—barely published a thing, a point developed by Donald Gillies’ critical essay *How Should Research Be Organised?*, which argues that the RAE, both in its previous and future forms, is costly and unlikely to increase the quality of research.¹⁶ Jünger—like the RAE, ERIH, and the politicians and administrators—judges the quality of research in quantifiable terms, whereby value equates to output, to mass and numbers. Moreover, as the historian of science Steven Shapin recently warned, specialisation can easily mutate into ‘hyperprofessionalisation’, the insular disciplinary myopia that praises abstruse submergence in technicalities. Too often, complains Shapin, ‘doing philosophy’ equates to ‘dexterity in manipulating the disciplinary literature’, rather than actually addressing the issues.¹⁷ It lacks, as he says, an ‘aboutness’ which contributes to the alleged ‘irrelevance’ or ‘disconnection’ of philosophy—a point ironically repeated by political critics of the arts and humanities who insist that academic research should be directed towards the sciences.

Jünger’s final theme was centralisation. He argued that total mobilisation must be directed by a centralised power because nothing less could survey and unify the disparate energies of the state. Without a central power which ‘invades’ spheres of activity and ‘demanded their role in the bloody engagement’, vast amounts of energy—industrial, intellectual, and so on—would remain ‘immobilised’ (TM 134). This might be true of national industrial and economic resources, even if environmentalists and anti-capitalists might object. However, it is arguably not true of academic philosophers, whose vocational commitment to their subjects should, hopefully, be enough to encourage them to research. Wittgenstein, after all, wrote just two philosophical books in his life, and only wrote the second after long meditation on the first.

¹⁵ Collins, Randall, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2000) p. xvii.

¹⁶ Gillies, Donald, *How Should Research Be Organised?* (London: University College Publications, 2008).

¹⁷ Shapin, Steven, ‘Hyperprofessionalism and the Crisis of Readership in the History of Science’, *Isis* vol. 96, no.2 (2005) pp.238-43.

Others churn out papers at a rapid rate. But, either way, introducing extraneous pressures on philosophers to publish will hardly encourage quality research; especially postgraduates, for whom the mention of ‘publications’ is inevitably accompanied by a fearful shudder). Either way, anyone ‘called’ to do philosophy should follow Rainer Maria Rilke’s advice in the first of his *Letters to a Young Poet*, that if ‘you are indeed called to be a writer. Then accept that fate ... without asking for the reward which might come from without’.¹⁸

Centralisation poses a further danger to academic philosophy. Whilst the RAE/REF and research in general is not controlled by the government it does contribute to a creeping control, albeit subtle, of academic research. Despite disclaimers, the RAE/REF does tend to favour certain ‘top’ journals over others, and this tends to promote certain kinds of philosophy over others; for instance, ‘core’ areas in metaphysics or epistemology, of the kind familiar to readers of *Analysis* or *Mind*, enjoy higher bibliometric status than, say, *Environmental Values* or the *Journal of Indian Philosophy*. This might have the effect of invisibly promoting certain areas of philosophy at the expense of others by introducing a powerful coercive constraint on the kinds and types of philosophy which will accrue RAE points. The result could be loss of intellectual diversity—perhaps environmental and Asian philosophy will continue to live in the shadows of metaphysics and philosophical logic, to the detriment of both the historical and intellectual richness of philosophical research and undergraduate syllabi. Moreover, large funding bodies like the AHRC have already begun to introduce multimillion pound ‘strategic programmes’—like ‘Beyond Text’, which enjoys £5.5 million funding and will run over five years, having commenced in 2007. Critics already have that such ‘research programmes’ merely reflect the AHRCs’ focus on ‘trendy’ but vacuous research projects at the expense of funding traditional research.¹⁹ One fears that this sort of centralised direction of academic research activities, in philosophy and beyond, will be amplified by the next RAE, the ‘Research Excellence Framework’ (REF)—especially when one reads HEFCEs’ ambition to ‘work to a more unified framework across all subjects’ by, for instance, achieving ‘consistency’ by

¹⁸ Rilke, Rainer Maria, *Letters to a Young Poet*, trans. Burnham, Joan M., (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2000) p.13.

reducing the number of subject panels.²⁰ Whether or not this indicates the academic homogenisation which it threatens is something that only time will tell; however, it does seem to indicate another movement towards the ‘centralisation’ that total mobilisation increasingly demands.

There is a final point raised by Jünger that should be addressed, which pertains to postgraduate teaching and research. Jünger once remarked that the ‘spirit of mobilisation can dominate an individual’s capacities, yet fail to penetrate his essence.’ By this he meant that one can become a productive component of a centralised system—a ‘worker’ participating in ‘total mobilisation’—without having a ‘deeper’ commitment to ‘readiness for mobilisation’ (TM 136, 129). This ‘inauthentic’ worker produces and participates in total mobilisation but has not experienced a psychological transformation—at the least, such a person will find themselves cooperating with policies and values which they neither agree with nor could tolerate indefinitely.

Such ‘inauthenticity’ is arguably an increasingly familiar experience for many academics, but especially for postgraduates and early career researchers who find their own ambitions and aspirations increasingly in tension with the externally imposed targets and objectives introduced by the policies and structures of British higher education. Although most postgraduates are keen to publish and research and engage in the full range of intellectual and professional activities which constitute academic life, they would arguably fulfil them better without the looming presence of ‘total mobilisation’. For Jünger, such objections to ‘total mobilisation’ simply indicate a weakness and passivity which automatically debar such persons from participation; however, his response is premised upon a set of martial virtues such as ‘determination’, ‘discipline’, and ‘stamina’ which are, even upon fairly liberal

¹⁹ For a sample of critics, see Leiter, Brian, ‘A Huge Cut in Funding for Philosophy in the UK?’, <http://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2008/02/a-huge-cut-in-p.html>; Blackburn, Simon, ‘A Takeaway Delivery’, <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=26&storycode=400428&c=1>; Crace, John, ‘Arts cuts ‘will be devastating’’, <http://education.guardian.co.uk/higher/research/story/0,,2257830,00.html>.

²⁰ HEFCE, ‘The REF and Accountability Burden: Discussion Paper’, http://www.hfce.ac.uk/research/ref/resources/acc_work_discuss.pdf (2009b) §§3, 36.

conceptions, hardly consonant with the professional virtues of academics. Certainly the virtues which one needs to endure and succeed in 'total mobilisation' are not conducive to the teaching and research activities of academia—in which the free and open development and exchange of ideas and the nurturing of the intellectual characters of students are surely the primary objectives.

Certainly the industriousness and determination which Jünger celebrates may be gratifying, such that one can indeed delight in the 'release of new forms of power' and the experience of 'unified and profound ... capacity' of total mobilisation 'to summon, from the outset, all possible forces for its cause' (TM 127, 134). However, the individuals who can create and thrive under such conditions and with such a psychology are unlikely to be attractive figures in an academic context. Jünger describes his 'worker' as 'steely, chiselled', marked by a 'hardness' borne of constant struggle and challenge—just as he was, during his experiences in the trenches of the First World War. Such a figure is, however, very far from the character of the philosopher described by the ancient Greeks or the scholar of the early modern period: they lack the temperance, patience, reflectiveness, and intellectual generosity which are preconditional for success in both academic teaching and research. The 'worker-philosopher' whom Jünger describes, who 'publishes or perishes' and is 'totally mobilised', is a remote figure from the equanimity of the Stoic sage, say, or the thoughtfully reflective early modern scholar. If philosophy is best understood, as Pierre Hadot puts it, as 'a way of life', then the sort of philosopher produced by the 'total mobilising' spirit of contemporary academic philosophy is surely a very unattractive one.²¹ And even if one does not subscribe to Hadot's vision of *la vie philosophique*, the 'totally mobilised' philosopher is surely still an unattractive figure—preoccupied with carving out and mining narrow specialised niches, motivated by 'outputs' and 'productivity', and dominated by a grossly instrumental conception of his own activities and that of his discipline.

The foregoing remarks have been generally critical in nature. I suggested that contemporary British higher education, at least in the specific case of academic philosophy, can be successfully modelled

²¹ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, trans. Chase, Michael (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

using Jünger's ideas of 'total mobilisation' and 'the worker'. Many recent trends in British academic philosophy do seem to reflect the 'totally mobilised' preoccupations with 'productivity' and 'specialisation' and the third theme of 'centralisation' is becoming increasingly visible on the horizon—although this depends upon future developments in higher education policy. Prime amongst my concerns is the point that a totally-mobilised academy will tend to produce scholars who fail to manifest the scholarly virtues which are most suited for academic life—certainly this is visible in the experiences of many current postgraduates and early career researchers. After all, when Jünger described 'states transform[ing] themselves into gigantic factories, producing armies on the assembly line' (TM 129), it is not too fanciful to imagine similar remarks being made about 'productive' philosophy departments, transforming themselves into 'academic factories' mass-producing research, 'outputs', and postgraduates on an academic conveyor belt, and in which the practice of philosophy becomes indistinguishable from the manufacture of motor engines. Of course there will always be a tension between vocational idealism and practical realism, but surely a better compromise than 'total mobilisation' can be found.

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