What should religious education aim to achieve?

: An investigation into the purpose of religious education in the public sphere.

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the question of what religious education should aim to achieve in the public sphere, and from that comes an interest in what is it that the teacher of religious education should aim to do. My enquiry is located, theoretically as well as conceptually, in the sphere of education. It is an educational study into religious education and situated in what can be termed a 'Continental construction' of educational research. I identify that since the inception of religious education in public schools in England, persistent assumptions have been made about both religion and education. I show how this has led, in my view, to conceptualisations of religious education which have been, and continue to be, incomplete. The central chapters of my thesis consider first religion and then education. This allows me to introduce my theoretical base, which is especially but not exclusively drawn from the work of Simone Weil and Hannah Arendt. I develop an argument suggesting that by also understanding religion existentially as faith, rather than as only belief or practice, will open new ways of considering the role of religious education in the public sphere. This is alongside an argument I develop with Arendt for education being conceptualised as bringing the child to action rather than to reason. This thesis argues for a broader understanding of religion, and therefore what it means to live a religious life, in religious education than has previously been considered. I bring this broader way of understanding what it means to live a religious life together with my argument for conceptualising education as bringing the child to action. This enables me to make a new proposal for what religious education should aim to achieve in the public sphere.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction.

'Those are the pearls that were his eyes
Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange'

Shakespeare. The Tempest, 1: 2.

1.1 Aims and research questions: what this thesis intends to achieve

The intention of this thesis is to make an original contribution to the development of new educational theory in religious education regarding its purpose, arguing a case for a new conceptualisation of what religious education should aim to achieve. In this chapter I introduce the scope of my investigation, place it within my professional context and explain the motivation for my enquiry. I describe what kind of an enquiry this is, and clarify my overarching research question and its origin, outlining three sub-questions driving the research.

The key question at the heart of my thesis is little changed from the question Cox (1983a) identified as 'what is religious education essentially trying to do at this point in history?' (p.115). Re-examining this question is a key part of my thesis and will enable me to bring something to the discussion, which I argue has not been sufficiently considered before. That there are many weaknesses remaining in religious education is clear from observations made in several national reports (see for example the All Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education 2013, Clarke & Woodhead 2015, Dinham & Shaw 2015 and the Report of the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life 2015) and well discussed in religious education literature (see for example Arweck & Jackson 2012; Conroy, Lundie, Davis, Baumfield, Barnes, Gallagher, Lowden, Bourque & Wenell 2013 and Baumfield, Cush, & Miller, 2014).

In my investigation I interrogate the concept of an educated person and develop an argument for what religious education should aim to achieve. There is therefore some resemblance between my approach and the one taken by Cox; however I take matters a step further when I discuss, in light of this, what is it that the teacher is required to do in order to achieve religious education's purpose. This is in order to respond to a further concern I show in the religious education literature regarding the persistent 'uncertainty among many teachers of RE about what they are trying to achieve in the subject' (Ofsted 2010, p.6) and further 'confusion about what they were trying to achieve in RE and how to translate this into effective planning, teaching and assessment' (Ofsted 2013, p.14). Cox's (1983a) approach was to begin by seeing whether it would be possible to 'arrive at a concept of a religiously educated person' (p. 11).

In order to discover what it is that religious education should aim to achieve, I identify three research sub questions which I investigate through the central chapters of the thesis. My first research sub-question is 'what counts as religion in religious education?' In this chapter I take up the need for a discussion about religion for those involved in religious education. However, rather than forming yet another definition of religion I discuss three different ways in which religion can be conceptualised, and do this through presenting three structurally different answers to the question 'what does it mean to be religious?' My second research question is in relation to education and I frame the question as 'what is it that education should do or aim to achieve?' I approach this question first through an investigation into what it is that makes education educative as contrasted to other kinds of things such as instruction, coercion or indoctrination for example. My third research sub-question is in two closely linked parts which enable me to bring together the findings of my investigation into questions 1 and 2. In my third question I ask first 'how do these understandings of religion and education help clarify what it is that religious education should aim to achieve?' and leading from that to investigate 'what should the teacher of religious education do?' that is in order for religious education to achieve what it aims to do.

1.2 Motivation for this thesis

This thesis has its beginning at least as far back as when I began to ask questions of philosophy itself during my London undergraduate philosophy degree. A small group

of us in the philosophy department at Bedford College (which subsequently relocated to Kings) requested lectures in existentialism and what we thought of as 'European Philosophy'. This marked a small rebellion in the midst of the heavily analytic Anglo-American climate of the traditional intercollegiate London philosophy BA degree of the late 1970s. A doctoral student in the department introduced us to the writings of Kierkegaard, Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Simone Weil. This news alerted me to the possibility that the study of matters of human existence and subjectivity was a legitimate area of intellectual activity; radically changing the course of my thinking from thence forward.

Questions in relation to matters of human existence emerged again when I undertook a PGCE in religious education in the early 1980's; this was followed immediately by an MA(ed), both courses undertaken at the London Institute of Education, in the religious education department and at that time led by Edwin Cox. Cox (1983a) had just published 'Problems and Possibilities for Religious Education' which was an investigation into the purpose of religious education. Significantly my PGCE also came just 6 years after the strongly phenomenological Birmingham Agreed Syllabus (1975) was published and 3 years after the Hampshire Agreed Syllabus of 1978. I say significantly, because both these syllabuses heralded a new way forward for religious education following a period of confessionalism. David Naylor, architect of the Hampshire Syllabus of 1978, was a guest at one of our weekly seminars and we were invited to compare the two syllabuses. Robert Jackson's work was establishing at Warwick and was celebrated in our course as an interesting challenge to the 'Phenomenological Approach'. My PGCE and MA gave me the opportunity to study the history of religious education in some detail, and to undertake courses in the philosophy of education. Paul Hirst and Richard Peters and others working at and connected to the London Institute of Education at the time, ensured my early teacher formation had a strongly philosophical perspective. The developing field of philosophy of education in England at that time was nevertheless much influenced by the analytic school. This analytic influence, because of its focus on reason and knowledge, was beginning to come to the attention of, and requiring a response from, those working in religious education.

I was aware of potential areas of conflict emerging between an analytic philosophy of education and the existential dimensions of religion. My undergraduate course had

already interested me in a wider range of philosophical questions than analytic philosophy of education was exploring at that time, however finding guidance on this while writing my masters dissertation was tricky. So it was that in the main, the piece drew on psychological responses to questions in relation to being human rather than philosophical ones. In terms of education I found my own way to Dewey's contribution to the philosophy of education. Nevertheless, this thesis left many questions still unanswered.

There is undoubtedly a link between the questions I was asking in my 1983 Masters dissertation and my PhD; that is a continuing concern to bring clarity to what it is that religious education should aim to achieve. During the last 30 years I have had the opportunity to work in different educative contexts as head of a number of RE departments as well as in the voluntary youth sector with The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and as national education advisor to the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). Returning to teaching in 1999, after a gap of seven years bringing up my children, I clearly recall reconsidering how I wanted to exist in the classroom as a teacher with the young people in front of me. What kind of a human being was I as a teacher? This brought my attention to the importance of the role of the teacher in general in the classroom, and whether there was something distinctive about the role of the religious education teacher. In addition to this I was surprised at the limited extent to which the horizon of those leading and influencing religious education had changed in the time I had been out of the classroom. Discussions regarding purpose and content of religious education I noticed were continuing in similar areas as before and interestingly the key discussants were much the same too. There was little new to help me think through what I was doing in the classroom.

Now working as County Inspector/Adviser for religious education in Hampshire, I have inherited a legacy of 40 years cutting edge work in religious education. Beginning at least with David Naylor's Hampshire Agreed Syllabus of 1978 continuing with the work of Alan Brine who succeeded David Naylor before going on to take up the role of Ofsted Lead for religious education. Right now I work closely with the vision of Clive Erricker in the form of the current Agreed Syllabus for religious education in Hampshire, Living Difference revised 2011. It is from this theoretical and practical position that I take up my enquiry and from which my thesis begins.

1.3 Preview of the steps taken in this thesis and explanation of the selection of informing scholarship

In the remaining sections of chapter 1 I proceed to identify how my thesis sets out to address the key research questions, discuss methodology and demonstrate the validity of the approach taken and give a rationale for my engagement with particular scholars. In chapter 2 I begin my enquiry by re-examining a range of historic literature available in the field. I give an overview of the main influences on, and the kinds of thinking that have been present within religious education from 1870 until the present, in order to identify what has led to the current situation. In so doing I expose several key hidden assumptions that have underlain much thinking in religious education since its inception in public education in the 1870's. In chapter 3 I undertake a critical discussion of each of three approaches to religious education: the interpretive, the critical realist and the conceptual enquiry approaches put forward by Jackson, Wright and Erricker respectively.

These three approaches have had significant influence on religious education through the last three decades and continue to exert considerable influence at the present time. Furthermore each of these approaches has a breadth of scholarship and academic critique associated with them. This level of scholarship as it has evolved has enabled each of the approaches to be influential in religious education practice in the classroom, to some different extents, over an extended period of time. Therefore in selecting the interpretive approach (see for example Jackson 1982, 1997, 2000, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2006, 2008, 2011a & 2012), the critical realist approach (see for example Wright 1993, 1996, 1997a, 1997b, 1998a, 1998b, 1999, 2000a, 2001a, 2003, 2004, 2007a, 2007b & 2013), and the conceptual enquiry approach (see for example Erricker 1987, 1997, 2000a, 2000b, 2001A, & 2010) I have not intended to leave other important writers in religious education out. Rather the opposite is the case. My intention is, through an examination of these three approaches, to also discuss other influential scholars in the field such as Grimmitt (1987a & 1987b) and Cooling (1993, 1994, 2000 & 2010) for example. In this part of my investigation, I reveal the ways in which the assumptions I note have, however, lain hidden in different ways in the work of many who have been and continue to be particularly influential in religious education at the present time.

Chapters 4 and 5 form the next key steps in the development of new theory, first in relation to religion and then in relation to education. I have designed my study in this way so as to be able to bring clarity and precision to my proposals for a new approach which is presented in chapter 6. This element of my research design marks this as a piece of work more situated in what Biesta (2011) has termed a 'Continental construction of educational research'[1] (p.183) and as distinct from an 'Anglo-American construction' (p.177). A 'Continental construction' is rooted in the idea that education is an autonomous discipline with 'its own form of theorising' (p.198). Emphasising such a distinction at this point in my introduction enables me to make clear that the moves made in chapter 5 are key and significant in terms of how I position my longer argument and therefore ultimately to my whole enquiry. This distinction also enables me in chapter 5, to emphasise the significance of an educational conceptualisation of education, and not a conceptualisation as philosophical or sociological. I take forward this conceptualisation of education (chapter 5) together with conceptualisations of what it means to be religious (chapter 4) into chapter 6. Here I frame a new proposal for what is to be achieved in religious education and what the teacher of religious education should aim to do also.

My proposal is for an existential approach to religious education. This is an approach which emphasises the significance of an existential conceptualisation of religion; rather than one where religion is only conceptualised as propositional belief and as practice. Further I argue it is imperative that religious education is educative and in order to be so I show why it matters how freedom and plurality are conceptualised in education. Freedom is understood in relation to action in plurality, rather than in relation to reason alone. I conclude that an existential religious education will be a place of appearance. Following from this an existential religious education will have particular and significant contribution to make not only to education as whole, but also to the possibility of the existence of freedom and the existence of the public sphere. This leads me to be able to articulate a position where I can say that the role of the teacher of

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[1] Biesta has delineated a 'Continental construction' of educational research as one 'based on the idea that education … (is) an autonomous discipline with its own form of theorising' (see for example Biesta (2011) p. 189). His point is that this makes a difference because 'while other disciplines can study educational processes and practices from their own angles, they do not have the devices to capture the reality of education as an *educational* reality' (p.190). This is significant in my thesis, because I am arguing for educational purpose for religious education. It enables me to clarify that I am locating this thesis not for example in the domains of philosophy of education or sociology of education or sociology of religion but as an educational study with regard to religious education.

religious education is to bring the child to action and does this through first bringing the child to attend, to intellectual humility and then to discernment.

Through chapters 2 and 3, which together form my extensive literature review, I reveal assumptions that have been made during the history of religious education regarding both religion and education. I show how these assumptions continue to lie underneath religious education theory and policy in the present time and therefore also continue to inform syllabus development. In order to address this I take up discussions in relation to religion and education respectively in chapters 4 and 5. In chapter 4 I present three conceptions of religion, as belief, as practice and as existential[2]. When discussing religion as existential I examine most significantly the work of Simone Weil. This is not only because of her explicit interest in both religion and education but also because there is a particular kind of relationship between her religious and educational observations and I take this into my enquiry in chapter 5. Most importantly I discuss her thesis regarding attention in relation to the way I conceptualise religion as existential in chapter 4, and later relate it to educational purpose in chapter 5. Further, I utilise my findings in her work extensively to formulate what it is that a teacher should do later in chapter 5, as well as in religious education in particular in chapter 6 with the intention of opening up new areas of discussion for religious education in the public sphere.

I read Weil's work as religious observations, not only as a philosophical analysis of religion. This makes an important difference to my longer argument when I proceed to draw links in chapter 6 between existential responses to the question 'what does it mean to live a religious life' and an idea of education's significance for the world. It is then, Weil's religious observations brought together with Arendt's scholarship regarding human care for the world and in this the significance of unique human beings coming into a world of others that enables me to give articulation to my existential approach to religious education. Indeed Weil puts this into words well when in responding to her own question about where religious feelings come from, she responds

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[2] In Chapter 4 I discuss three conceptions of religion, as propositional belief, as practice and as existential. Although the examples I give in this chapter are largely from those who could be considered as 'western' authors, I understand these three conceptions to be present in both western and non-western religious traditions. Indeed my proposals open up new lines of enquiry regarding these matters, especially in relation to religion as existential. This can be seen as already existent in scholarship in relation to religion located in the Indian tradition and can be found in the educational writings of Rabindranath Tagore (see for example 1961 p.85).

by saying that this is from 'the fact that there is a world' (quoted in McCulloch, 2014 p. 1) and the inescapable fact of finitude and death. For Weil the usefulness of religious concepts or feelings are tested by their usefulness in the world and the extent to which they are able to bring about a love for the world (see Weil 1964).

My reading of both Weil and Arendt[3] shows there are strong resonances between their respective works, in particular regarding their concern for human beings' existence in the world. Arendt's work is especially important for me because of her concern for how human beings come into the world and can take up their particular responsibility for it. This, taken together with Weil's observation about attention enables me to draw particular conclusions for the purpose of religious education and for what religious education teachers should do. Arendt and Weil's work is therefore strongly represented in my argument because of how they enable me to discuss human existence in the world, and articulate an embodied view of religious education which I term an existential approach.

I begin my work on education with a detailed analysis of Peters (see for example 1968). I do this, as I point out in chapter 5, because of the systematic way in which he addresses the question 'what is it that makes education educative?' In addition to this, as Martin (1981) explains, also because it was Peters who first captured 'our concept of the educated man' (p.97). My critique of Peters is not so much to disagree with him on the point that there should be a conception of an educated person at the heart of educative activity, but because of the particular way in which he conceptualises the educated person in relation to freedom and autonomy. Noting that this has had some negative consequences for religious education, I look to Arendt to bring a different conceptualisation of freedom which I show opens up new opportunities for education. Her work on freedom opens up a different way of conceptualising plurality in religious education and one which I show in my thesis, through my argument for a new way of conceptualising purpose for religious education, is likely to be highly significant.

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[3] Although developing the feminist implications of my work is not within the scope of this thesis, I acknowledge that my argument for an existential approach to religious education as a place of appearance opens up important lines of investigation from a feminist perspective. In particular it is possible to reflect that some of the present problems in RE rest in an epistemic culture located in male normative concepts of knowledge characterised by abstraction and distance. Whereas in contrast to this Weil and Arendt open up new, including feminist, possibilities to a much greater extent; for example regarding embodiment and the affective.

In addition to this and in light of the changing place of religion in public life as noted in recent reports and discussed in this thesis, as well as an increasing number of international conflicts resulting in the largest number of refugees and displaced people on the move since the ending of World War 2, Arendt's extensive work in relation to totalitarianism brings a particularly timely relevance to my work. This enables me to me to make observations at the very end of my thesis regarding possible consequences to the world of persisting with a wholly epistemic focus to the purpose of religious education.

1.4   Where this thesis is located intellectually

In designing this study it has been necessary to consider the best way to undertake an enquiry aimed at forming a reconceptualisation of educational purpose for religious education. That there is a range of ways to carry out educational research has been well documented (see for example Wellington 2015) and, in addition to this, research in education is often linked with other disciplines of 'philosophy, history, psychology and sociology' (Biesta 2011 p. 175). In light of this there are two broad points I want to make regarding where my thesis sits intellectually within the literature about religious education. The first is that my enquiry lies firmly in the sphere of education and is not a sociological or philosophical, psychological or historical piece about religion or religion in education. Rather this study is an educational study in the field of religious education. By emphasising the location of my study firmly in the sphere of education, theoretically as well as conceptually, I intend to make it clear that I start my enquiry from an interested position in relation to education, rather than anything else. The reason I do this is in order to gain some precision about what it is that religious education should do, and make it clear that I understand religious education to be a part of the bigger picture of education as a whole. The task before me in this thesis is therefore to undertake my enquiry in a way that is able to bring a response to persistent questions regarding both religion and education in religious education, as well as giving some pointers for further research.

The second point I want to make is that the position I am taking is normative. By this I mean that through my study I seek to discover what ought to be done in religious education in the sense of what is to be achieved. My approach takes in along its way

questions in relation to what it means to exist as human in the world. These are questions, I will argue, of educational concern. I have found it helpful therefore to consider my thesis to be located in a 'Continental construction' of educational research rather than an 'Anglo-American construction'. Although both constructions are normative in terms of discussing what ought to be the case, there are two critical distinctions to make in this respect; both of which are important to appreciate as I go on to introduce my study and demonstrate its validity. First, whereas the Anglo-American construction understands educational research to be some kind of multi-stranded 'interdisciplinary field' (Biesta 2011, p. 188) the Continental construction of educational research has particular reliance on educational theory as a discipline in itself. Secondly my approach does not mean that the theory I am developing here is intended to entirely replace what has gone before. Rather I am seeking to discern from the past what is valuable and thus able, with a new proposal, to form a reliable way of resolving existing issues.

1.5 What type of investigation is this?

Questions of educational purpose lie at the heart of this study and have influenced the research design. The key point I want to make is that discussion regarding purpose for religious education has until now been based upon assumptions that have not been fully interrogated. My approach is first to clarify and then interrogate assumptions in chapters 2 and 3, before putting theory in place of assumptions in chapters 4 and 5. Out of this I frame my argument for new educational theory regarding the purpose of religious education in chapter 6. I have chosen this approach to research because although a methodology based on qualitative or quantitative analysis of data intends to find reliable research evidence upon which to base a judgement about education, the view that this 'can tell teachers what they should do' (Biesta 2015, p. 80) itself is based upon 'the assumption that particular forms of research can provide clear and unambiguous knowledge about 'what works'. The issue here is that something never 'works' in the abstract sense, but is itself 'always in relation to a particular purpose or set of purposes' (Biesta 2015, p. 80). I have concluded therefore that research into religious educational purpose has to be undertaken in a different kind of way. My

conclusion is that until now, because of unclear assumptions, much work in the field of religious education research has been incomplete and too narrowly focussed.

In proceeding during my enquiry to identify what it is the teacher of religious education is to do, I am helped by Biesta's observations (see for example 2009 & 2015) of the consequence of the rise in the use of the language of learning in educative contexts, where children and young people are referred to as 'learners' rather than pupils or students. This has become prevalent in religious education too, where the intention of the classroom activity is widely understood in terms of 'learning' and the child or young person often referred to a 'learner' (see for example Jackson 2004, Hella, & Wright, and Erricker 2001a). One of the implications of this shift from education to learning has been to restrict conversations in religious education to what is to be learned and methods through which the 'what' is actually to be learned. The latter focusses attention on the teaching of skills and processes, and the focus on learning then sets up a false debate between knowledge and skills. What is at stake here for teachers is that an emphasis on the language of learning, both what and how, has served to ensure that teachers' attention has shifted and remained away from questions of purpose (see Biesta 2009 p. 39). I have found this an important factor to take into account when constructing my research. This is because the intention of my research is to help teachers become clear about what it is they should be aiming to achieve; that is to gain clarity regarding religious education's purpose or aim. Thus, it will be essential that I work with research processes that will make this clarity possible.

A further point about my investigation, is that my research design has built in to it openness to self-correction; hence allowing for modification during the process of writing. This aspect of my research has enabled me to take responsibility as a researcher for the outcomes, verifying and validating the approach through sound argumentation and building of precise educational theory, rather than relying on externally verified models of research. Hence my approach to designing this enquiry has been first to make sure there is adequate opportunity for discerning and then interrogating assumptions, which may have been preventing the identification of precise educative purpose for religious education. Further, difficulties with identification of such precise purpose may also have been impeding progress of coherent application of theory into practice and also development of religious education in the public sphere.

1.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, in the course of this thesis I explain how my investigation reveals there are options for understanding RE that have so far not been articulated and explored. I make some of these further options visible and show that current thinkers in the field of religious education have not exhausted all possible ways of thinking about religious education. Although my approach will include a consideration of what the teacher should do in order to achieve religious education's aims, it is not an approach that is going to tell teachers precisely what they should do from moment to moment in the classroom. Rather it aims to offer to teachers a way of understanding their professional responsibilities with children with regard to religious education. Through my study I find Cox's way of responding to his own question, as well as approaches taken by many of those who have come since and who have turned their attention to a similar question, to have been incomplete. This is because no one has yet clarified with sufficient precision matters in relation to religion as well as, and at least as importantly, in relation to the purposes of education. Instead I have discovered broad and under examined assumptions about religion and even more especially about education. Thus conclusions have been reached on the basis of these assumptions, the implications of which have until now been unrecognised and therefore impossible to resolve.

The intention of this thesis is thus to develop an argument for a reconceptualisation of religious education. I present this in chapter 6 and, working closely with Arendt and Weil, one which will have opened the way for a sea-change. Further there is an intention that this sea-change will render it possible to rescue what is valuable in order to richly transform the future of religious education and to have done this in two ways. One is to make it clear to teachers and others what it is that religious education should aim to achieve and the second is to have made it clear what it is that the teacher of religious education should do in order to achieve that. It is not the intention of this study to replace everything that has gone before, but rather in bringing more clarity and precision to the discussion to find a way to enhance previous thinking. My hope is that this may also serve to open up some previously unconsidered lines of research in religious education and that any significance there may be in my proposals can be further tested and taken forward.

Chapter 2:   An overview of religious education in England.

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the background and history of religious education in maintained schools in England, since the education acts of the late 19th century. I seek to discover the things religious education has been said to aim to achieve and identify assumptions that have underpinned this as well as clarify consequences of understanding religious education in a particular way. Up until the Second World War proposals for religious education in the main came from the churches and there was limited engagement with wider educational developments of the period. I identify and examine several approaches that emerged and became prevalent following the 1944 Education Act, specifically presenting and critiquing first confessional approaches to religious education and then in some detail the phenomenological approach to religious education. The exploration in this chapter enables me to identify several assumptions that have underlain theory as well as various approaches to religious education since the beginning. Furthermore I show these assumptions have continued to influence recent policy documents. Thus, these are assumptions which I assert have had significant and long standing implications for religious education and which persist until the present time.

2.2 Religious education in maintained schools in England 1870 - 1966: origins and intentions

Religious education in the public sphere in England took a new and significant turn as a consequence of 19th century educational reforms. The Education Act of 1870, known as the 'Forster Act', 'set out to fill the gaps in voluntary provision of schools' (Matthews 1968, p. 7) which, until that time, had by and large been provided by religious agencies. Prior to the 1870 Act the largest provider of schools was the Church of England's National Society established in 1811, which aimed to ensure a school in every parish; by 1851 there were 12,000 schools across England and Wales. Before this time although education in England had usually been associated with religion, by the late 18th century it was in general only available to the elite. 19th century educational reform must therefore be understood in the context of other social and economic

reforms taking place in the Victorian industrialised period. This is because these reforms were influential on the thinking of various Victorian Christian educationalists, for example Thomas Arnold. Arnold's assertion that 'school was a factory in which men are made' (Kinloch 1938, p. 129), articulated what was to become a prevailing and persistent association between character building, religion and educational achievement. The 1870 Act ensured the establishment of elementary education in England; attendance at school became both compulsory and free for all children, up to the age of 12, by the end of the 19th Century.

Religious education in the maintained education sector in England came about as a consequence of accommodations that successive governments made with different 'religious agencies' (Cox 1983a, p. 3). This was in order to fulfil the intention to ensure elementary education for all; an intention with multiple motivations. The political accommodation with the various 'religious agencies' (Cox 1983a, p. 3) facilitated the use of existing buildings, for example belonging to the Christian denominations, to be used by the authorities in order to provide enough school places for all children. A special relationship was established at the very beginning between the 'religious agencies' in England and the government's wider educational intentions. A dual system developed consisting of voluntary denominational schools, including Catholic and Jewish schools, and non-denominational board schools. The new schools were to be operated by school boards who 'would levy a rate' (Matthews 1968, p. 7) and provide for the building of new schools where there was need; especially in the rapidly expanding cities. Although the new, 'Board (that is non-denominational) Schools' that followed the 1870 Act 'generally included a religious element in their curriculum' (Cox 1983a, p.3), it is important to realise that at this point religious education was not compulsory in these schools. Concerns (see Matthews 1968, p. 7) that the Churches might seek to proselytise in these schools 'ensured the 1870 Act included the Cowper-Temple clause' (Louden 2002, p. 13) which prohibited the use of distinctive religious formularies in non-denominational rate-supported school. In turn influences on late 19th Century educational reforms included those involved within the Christian Socialist Movement, such as Charles Kingsley and Frederick Maurice, who felt there was compatibility with socialist ideas and Christianity. An intention therefore of including religion in schools, right at the very beginning, was commonly understood as enshrining in some way a social and reforming vision of what religion could do for

society as well as in terms of the public sphere. There was general agreement regarding an anticipated positive influence of religion in education, upon the individual and beyond.

Nevertheless, in the period leading up to the First World War, bitter theological controversy raged between Christian denominations about the nature of religious education (see Cox 1983a, p.3) or religious instruction (RI) as it was more commonly known at this time. At the same time there were other challenges to the power of the relationship that has been established between the government and the Churches regarding education. This came for example from emerging secular movements such as the Moral Instruction League (see Freathy 2008, p. 297). At this time new forms of moral education also began to be developed, but these were in reality 'rarely outside a Christian moral framework' (Freathy 2008, p. 297). Strong theological disagreements existed between churchmen in many respects. Although there was agreement that Christianity had had a critical contribution to make to the moral fabric of public life, there was also awareness that other freethinking intellectuals from the new secular movements would have been happy, even at this time, for there to have been no religion at all taught in schools. As Matthews (1968) notes, there was concern that the new board schools might fail to teach religion at all and because of this, compromises were struck. This can be exemplified by for example the London Board where in addition to the conscience clause, content was prescribed in such a way to ensure that simply 'the Bible shall be read and there shall be given such explanations and such instruction therefrom in the principles of morality and religion as are suited to the capacity of the children' (p.8).

To be sure religious education in maintained education, from the earliest Education Acts in the late 19th century up till 1944, was given a special position in the school curriculum because of the influence of the churches. Furthermore, and importantly, in order to satisfy the various factions, it was 'artificially protected' from agencies such as those involved in the new teacher training institutions who 'could have done most to help it' (Matthews 1968, p. 8). In addition to this, during the first quarter of the 20th century subsequent legislative opportunities added another layer of complexity. The various Education Acts designated a distinction between voluntary aided (VA) and voluntary controlled (VC) schools. In VA schools the partner body, in return for putting

more funding into the running of the school buildings, would have more control over the religious education the children received, leading to eventually all Catholic and Jewish state funded schools becoming VA schools and around half the Church of England schools adopting VA status. The first 60 years of compulsory elementary schooling in England made rapid progress in many respects, however religious education remained subject to a particular perception of the relationship between Church and home and school and the intentions of government.

By 1944 a range of social factors and educational concerns had led to the political determination on the part of government to transform maintained education. The architects of the 1944 Education Act, building on several reports published in the preceding years, ensured religious education became compulsory in all schools receiving public funds. This Act also came at a point where there was recognition of the need for a broad education, broader than the elementary schools were able to provide, for all young people. Successive reports such as the several Hadow Reports (see for example 1931), Spens (1938) and Norwood (1943) reports, which included respected educationalists of the day, advocated a development and restructuring of state education in such a way that included providing secondary schools for all and extending the school leaving age to 15; the 1921 Education Act having already raised the leaving age to 14. These reports also gave an opportunity for rethinking the settlement between the churches and government and, particularly relevant here, for reviewing provision for religious education. Religious Education in the 1944 Act was broken down into Religious Instruction (RI) and Collective Worship – both compulsory.

However, despite making religious education compulsory, the act 'never specifies what religion was to be taught' (Cox 1983a, p. 5). Instead, having legislated for religious education, 'parliament handed over the definition of it to the representatives of the Churches and the educational administrators' (Cox 1983a, p. 5). The process for a local authority adopting an 'agreed syllabus' for religious education in board schools was established and the wording of the Act extended the provision which allowed a parent to withdraw their child from religious education in voluntary and board schools alike. It is worth noting at this point that by and large educationalists were not engaged with defining religious education, but more concerned with determining its continued

presence in maintained schools. These various reports affirmed the presence of an assumed link between good character and religious instruction. This was even to the extent of asserting 'that no boy or girl can be counted as properly educated unless he or she has been made aware of the fact of the existence of a religious interpretation of life' (Spens Report 1938, p. 208 as quoted in the Norwood Report 1943, p. 85). Thus the link between religious education and the education of character can be seen as being in the heart of the political vision behind the inclusion of religious education in the 1944 Act.

Nevertheless, in terms of why the provision for religious education was strengthened in the 1944 Act, several additional factors also need to be taken into account. These include the development of an ecumenical movement which ensured that denominational rivalries had subsided considerably. This meant that there were instead reasons to work together to advance a shared vision for religious teaching in schools, and the foundations to make that possible in the terms of the 1944 Education Act were now in place. However the established Church remained the most influential partner. In addition to this there were also more practical reasons. The need to build schools fit for the purpose and able to meet the intention to provide secondary education for all meant that the stake the established Church had in existing buildings enabled it 'to bargain for the presence of religious teaching in schools' (Cox 1983a, p. 7). Far higher standards were prescribed in the 1944 Act for school buildings themselves, 'the State offered to take over any ecclesiastical schools whose owners were prepared to relinquish them rather than face the expense of modernisation (Cox 1983a, p. 7). So it was then that for many reasons two elements were woven into the 1944 Education Bill under the sub (shoulder) title of 'religious education'. The first was religious observance now understood as collective worship and the second was religious instruction, in other words what was to go on in the classroom. The wording of the act did not specify what religion was to be taught, but it was assumed that Christianity was intended and probably Protestant Christianity in particular (see Cox 1983a, p.5).

2.3 The confessional approach to religious education and 1960's challenges.

As well as laying down requirements for the existence of religious education in a unique way over any other school subject, the 1944 Act set out the vehicle for establishing religious education in the form of the 'Agreed Syllabus'. The 1944 Act

required every Local Authority to adopt an agreed syllabus by an 'Agreed Syllabus Conference' (ASC) which the Local Authority must convene comprising of four interest groups with equal status. Group A representing 'other denominations than The Church of England', Group B representing The Church of England, Group C representing the Local Authority elected representatives and Group D to include teacher representatives. These particular criteria made sure everything was in place for an approach to religious education that would ensure it was not like any other aspect of school life. Furthermore the 1944 Act made it clear that religious education was intended to contribute to the life of the whole school in a particular and distinct kind of way. However the politicians who had been involved in the construction of the 1944 Act, such as Rab Butler and Winston Churchill as well as social reformers such as Archbishop William Temple, having established religious education into the statute of The 1944 Education Act left determination over what should be taught to the Local Authorities and other 'experts' of the ASC's. The position of the Church of England and other Christian denominations therefore made sure that any Local Authority agreed syllabus developed between 1944 and the 1960's remained largely schemes of Christian study (Cox 1983a, p.6)

Cooling defines this focus on Christian study and evangelistic intention as being a 'confessional' approach (Cooling 2000, p. 154) to religious education. Cox (see 1983a, pp. 30-31) gives examples from several agreed syllabuses of this time to demonstrate this point. The Cambridgeshire Syllabus of 1949 (Cambridge 1949) aimed to '*lead children to an experience of God, His Church, and His Word, an experience based upon worship, fellowship and service.*' and the Lincolnshire Syllabus of 1964 makes it clear that '*(t)he syllabus is deliberately designed as an evangelistic influence ... the aim is to lead pupils to a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ.*'. However, although in the 1966 The West Riding of Yorkshire Syllabus there are signs of an interest in educational matters emerging, assertions such as '*(p)ersonal needs are religious needs which are only satisfied by the growing discovery that at the heart of the universe there is a God who cares*' nevertheless reveal a strong confessional approach to the curriculum. Cole notes that a 'principle pioneered by the West Riding (was) to have given education precedence over theology' (Cole 1976, p. 127). However although this syllabus was influenced by educational pioneers significant at the time and sought to

take these matters seriously, it remained predominantly orientated to the view that children should better understand Christianity.

It is important to note that these confessional agreed syllabuses had been developed under the influence of the constituent members of the ASCs, revealing something of the influences at work in these ASCs. However, from the late 1950's onwards confessional approaches to religious education were challenged and came under scrutiny as the religious and social composition of England underwent rapid transformation. I group these challenges into three broad areas, firstly cognitive or psychological challenges, secondly philosophical and thirdly theological challenges.

Cognitive or psychological challenges can be seen for example in the work of Yeaxley for the Institute of Christian Education as well as from Harold Loukes (see Cox 1983a, p. 13). Although working separately, both Yeaxley and Loukes showed that children were remembering very little of what they had been taught and furthermore often misunderstood what they did remember. Loukes' work also identified that teenagers were disenchanted with 'a bible based religious education that assumed the truth of Christianity' (Jackson 2004a, p.24). In addition to this Goldman (1964 and 1965) and Hyde (1965) drew for example on the developmental insights of Piaget. Piaget's ideas had been inspiring wider curriculum reform in England during the 1960's, and Goldman raised questions for religious education about children's cognitive capabilities at different ages. Discussions ensued regarding the appropriateness of certain religious material at particular ages. In terms of curriculum development, although not challenging the confessional approaches as directly as some other research of the period, it did influence the planning of schemes of work in some syllabuses. In particular Goldman's influence led to agreed syllabus recommending for example that small children are taught more concrete aspects of religious teachings such as the New Testament parables, whilst leaving other elements such as the Gospel accounts of Jesus' miracles until later. Goldman's ideas, which had influence for more than a decade, were themselves subsequently contested (e.g. Slee 1986, and Cooling 2000, p.156) as Piaget's work in education was more carefully reviewed.

A second group of criticisms came from the newly emerging area of philosophy of education. Paul Hirst (see for example 1965, p.5) was amongst those who challenged

assumptions made about the role of religion in individuals' lives as well as in society and the public sphere in terms of moral formation. His view was that if religious education were to have any place in maintained education, it could only be to impart facts about religion that are demonstrable and agreed. Building on writings of the 19th and early 20th century from secularists and humanists (Cox 1983a, p.21), these arguments had a stronger voice in the 1960s as the analytic movement within philosophy at large had an increasingly powerful influence in philosophy departments of English universities during this time. In addition to this, analytic philosophy was also informing the newly emerging field of philosophy of education in England. The work of those such as Hirst, who questioned the link between moral development and religion, was supported by research from other disciplines such as psychology and led to the emergence of a broad consensus regarding the need for change.

A third critique came from new movements in theology (see for example Robinson 1963) at this time. These new movements challenged old assumptions and consequently raised new questions regarding approaches to religious education. Christianity, across denominations, was facing up and responding to new questions for example about the nature of God and faith (see for example Tillich 1962) leading to theological discussions within The Church itself about how the Christian faith could be passed on in a faith specific context. These developments allowed more careful thinking to take place about how religious education inside a faith context could or indeed should be defined as distinct from religious education the wider public educational context (see for example the work of Groome 1980). Furthermore, implications of conceptualising the two differently began to be discussed as further social transformations of the 1970s came about.

These cognitive or psychological, philosophical and theological challenges to the confessional approach to religious education came to the fore in the context of the rapid transformation of the religious and cultural composition of England in light of migrations to Britain from the New Commonwealth. At this time, and taking theoretical criticisms together with the changing context, a broad agreement began to emerge among leading thinkers in religious education that the post second world war consensus defining religious education in maintained schools only in Christian terms could stand unquestioned no longer. Furthermore the role of religion in an individual's life as well

as in the public sphere was changing significantly. What was actually to count as religion in religious education in the public sphere, formerly assumed to be synonymous with Christianity had to be reconsidered; however the way forward was not clear.

Religious education was justified for inclusion in the curriculum of schools in the first half of the 20th century alongside reading, writing and arithmetic, initially because of assumptions around what religion could do for people. With religion being equated in general with Christianity, it was assumed that knowing Christian principles would form better individuals who would bring about a better nation. Therefore one of the things religious education was to do was to ensure children and young people knew about Christian principles. This idea was perpetuated in the 1944 Act, leading to religious education being defined as 'a blueprint for the spiritual and moral rejuvenation of society' (Wright 2000b) and ensured religious education continued to be understood as having a unique position in the life of the school, leading to assumptions that one of the things religious education in maintained schools would do was to positively mould children and young people for life in society.

2.4 The phenomenological approach to religious education in the 1970s

One particularly influential response to the psychological, philosophical, theological and social challenges made to the confessional approach to religious education came from the phenomenological approach to the study of religion. A particularly significant move came when the Schools Council Secondary Project appointed Ninian Smart to its directorship in 1969. The Schools' Council Working Paper 36 *'Religious Education in Secondary Schools' (W.P. 36)* was published in 1971 to be followed in 1977 by *'A Groundplan for the Study of Religion'*. Both drew heavily on arguments Smart had developed regarding the relationship between the phenomenological study of religion and non-denominational religious education. Smart had established a department of Religious Studies at Lancaster University in 1967 and can be considered to have been one of the most influential figures in the development of the application of the phenomenological approach to the study of religion to religious education. Nevertheless the assumption persisted that religion was essentially good for people. The line of argument followed from here arguing that what was needed was a new approach to the study of religion in religious education, one capable of overcoming

challenges in relation to assumptions about religion which led to linking religious education with character development and Christian confessionalism (see Barnes 2000).

Smart's proposal was that problems faced by religious education would be resolved if 'the different dimensions of religion' (Barnes 2000, p. 321) were taught and he asserted that 'religious education should transcend the informative' (Barnes 2000, p. 321). The Chichester Project, which began in 1977, although distinct from Smart's Lancaster work, broadly shared a commitment to applying a phenomenological method to the teaching of world religions (see Grimmitt 2000a, p. 28), and also applied the method to the teaching of Christianity. The idea was that this would resolve criticisms about the confessional teaching of Christianity. Christianity was to be seen on a level playing field alongside all other world religions. The phenomenological approach to the study of religion was a method which began to be advocated by certain scholars of religion from the beginning of the 20th Century (see Cox 2006, p. 26.). It was arguably linked to 'late nineteenth-century attempts to describe and categorise religious phenomena, free from church interference and uncoloured by confessional assumptions' (see for example Chantepie de la Saussaye 1887 quoted in Barnes 2000, p. 321 and Flood 1999). Chantepie de la Saussaye is sometimes considered the founder of this approach to the study of religion (see Allen 2005, p. 191) which has several branches and should not be considered to be a single theory. Scholarly approaches, although not all having the same emphasis in terms of category of interest, have tended to share certain characteristics which include being 'highly normative, applying their standards to make disciplinary value judgments' (Allen 2005, p. 188). In addition to this phenomenologists of religion try to respond to questions 'involving the interpretation of religious meaning' (Allen 2005, p. 188). Although phenomenologists of religion differ from philosophers of religion, who also ask normative questions, they share an interest in questions of human experience of religion such as 'what are the meaning and significance of such experienced phenomena?' (Allen 2005, p. 188).

The phenomenological approach to the study of religion had taken a new turn in the 1960's in Britain when the new discipline of religious studies was forming; emerging into academic life as distinct from theology in universities in England. The British School (see Cox 2006) was informed by work in the Netherlands and was also

influenced from other original work in Africa from the 1950's undertaken for example by Geoffrey Parrinder (see Cox 2006, p. 6) and others. Parrinder took up a post at Kings College in London in 1958 and ultimately was promoted to a professorship at Kings in Comparative Religion. However there was a significant moment when the area of academic study which had formerly been called 'comparative religion' came to be more commonly known as 'religious studies'. In England this can be understood as marking the time when the phenomenological approach to the study of religion took over as the most influential approach to the study of religion apart from theology. Cox (2006) also identifies a North American strand of development during the 20th century, although he concludes that the phenomenological approach to the study of religions, as figuring in current religious studies departments, may have a greater homogeneity than would possibly have been possible in the past (see p.6).

The phenomenological approach to the study of religion itself, sought to enable a scientific exploration of religion (see Whaling 1999, p. 231) by stepping outside a theological-insider reflection on religion. This was whilst still holding onto the possibility of a transcendent reality and assumed that there is a discrete area of human experience, human expression and 'phenomena', which could be called religious. Fitzgerald (2000) in his chapter on Smart's Phenomenology of Religion notes that this way of conceptualising religion seeks to give religious phenomena a privileged position in the range of all other human activity. Fitzgerald also identifies what he considers to be a continuum of approaches to the study of religion. He observes how they seem to range between two poles, one being more theological and the other more sociological. The point I want to make here is that each extreme has potential difficulties. At one end there are approaches, broadly viewed as reductionist, that resemble liberal Christian ecumenical theology looking for similarities between religious traditions whilst also seeking to acknowledge the transcendent realities of each. At the other end, there are social and anthropological understandings of religion which do not particularly engage with conceptualisations of transcendence. Fitzgerald (2000) suggests that Smart's intention was to locate his version of the phenomenological approach to the study of religion some way between the two. Smart hoped to argue both against accusations of essentialism and reductionism which some theological approaches may have led to, as well as against challenges of relativism, that cultural approaches to the study of religion entail. By beginning to employ a phenomenological approach in his study of religion,

Smart was also signalling that he was stepping away from earlier comparative formulations of the study of religion and aiming towards becoming a kind of philosophy of religion (see Smart 1973, p.3). He saw hope of resolving theological and confessional challenges to religion, and by inserting this method of the study of religion into religious education to the formation of an approach which could also respond to accusations of confessionalism and character formation in religious education. In fact the phenomenological approach as he configured things, was to bring a new way of approaching links asserted between religious education and moral development.

To bring greater appreciation of the impact the phenomenological approach as proposed by Smart had on religious education into my discussion, I clarify the extent to which Smart was looking to philosophical phenomenology in developing his phenomenological approach to the study of religion. I make this point because of the potential for misunderstanding in religious education where insufficient distinction is made between the phrases 'phenomenology of religion' and 'phenomena of religion'. Smart (1999) in 'Dimensions of the Sacred' makes it quite clear that in his view phenomenologists of religion do not usually use the term 'phenomenology' in the philosophical sense as developed by Husserl (p.1) but instead understand phenomenology to be more of an 'attitude of informed empathy' (p.4). In other words phenomenologists of religion tend to take on the method of phenomenology, but do not seek to respond to the same questions that philosophical phenomenologists have tended to concern themselves with. Recalling that Husserl's initial interest in phenomena grew out of his reflections first on the relationship between the subject and the object, Hermberg (2006) points out that Husserl's main concern was with the 'evidentiary relationship between the subject and the object' (p. 8); that is how objects 'related to the subject in experience' (p. 8). My point is that losing sight of the original concerns which engaged Husserl, and which had grown out of his interest in the phenomenology of religion, may have contributed to what has now become a focus on phenomena of religion in religious education.

2.5 Critique of the phenomenological approach to religious education

In this section I consider two areas of concern in relation to the phenomenological approach to religious education and discussed since its emergence until the present time (see Cox 1983a, p.25; Jackson 1997 and 2004a, p. 24; Barnes 2000 & 2001 and

Erricker 2010, p. 45). The first is from a theological perspective and second philosophical. Examination of these concerns enables me to raise questions in relation to the preferential epistemological and social status of religious knowledge that has been implied by this approach and show that this has had a powerful impact on the way religious knowledge has been prioritised in many approaches to religious education. My intention in continuing to engage in the debate, regarding the phenomenological approach to religious education, is to reveal that certain assumptions have remained underexposed. Following this, in chapter 3, I go on to show how these assumptions have continued to cause problems for current approaches to religious education.

The first area of concern I discuss here arises from the theological positioning of the phenomenological approach to the study of religion. At the time when this approach to the study of religion was forming, late 19th Century liberal protestant theology was looking also to religious experience as a means of countering continuing rationalistic challenges to traditional theistic beliefs. New theological approaches were growing at this time. Liberal protestant theology was not only motivated by the same interests and concerns as the phenomenological study of religion, but also seems to have shared similar assumptions about religion, for example that there were 'common features' (Flood 1999, p. 98) or essences shared by all religions. Indeed it seems possible that phenomenologists of religion at the time were inspired by the same liberal protestant and ecumenical motivations. In addition to this, both liberal protestant theologians and phenomenologists of religion held that religious knowledge is a privileged kind of knowledge, separate from other rationally accessed knowledge (see Flood 1999, p. 115). This led to the conclusion that not only would an impartial study of religious phenomena be possible no matter which religion is being studied, but also that the student of religious phenomena may be able to access something of the special essential vision of the religious adherent. This particular point was also taken up by 20th century anthropologists such as Geertz (see for example 1960, 1973), and became evident in Jackson's work in the 1980s and beyond. My point here is that the hope which the phenomenological approach to the study of religions seemed to offer, in terms of an objective approach to the study of religion and one suitable for religious education in the public sphere, cannot be relied upon. This is because the shared motivations of both liberal protestant theology and those working with a phenomenological approach to the study of religion give grounds from which to challenge the objectivity of the

phenomenological approach. Thus significant theological questions, regarding the objectivity of the phenomenological approach to the study of religion and the approach as applied to religious education, remain.

Nevertheless there was a strong attraction to this approach from those in religious education. This was because the phenomenological approach to the study of religion seemed to establish, in a scientific manner through reasoned arguments, religious experience as a significant area of human life. This appeal to reason apparently offered a defence, particularly against philosophical challenges to religious education. Chater and Erricker (2013) go even further to suggest that it was precisely because the phenomenological approach to religious education became such a powerful influence in classroom practice that the criticisms were poorly attended to. They also note that in addition to this, religious education had been in the hands of those who 'continue to give sympathetic representation to religion and religions' (p. 87). The attraction for a proposal which held a special significance and status for religious experience was strong; problems although identified in academic literature of the day, were largely overlooked in practice. It is important to realise that until this point in the history of religious education, it was in the main those who were outside religion who had most difficulty with religious education (e.g. White 2004). Indeed until this point it was only those outside religion and religious education who questioned any such privileging of religious knowledge.

Since challenges to religious education had come from those proposing alternatives, particularly in the area of moral or character development, defence of religious education had by and large focused on what in fact amounted to a defence of religion itself. The phenomenological approach to the study of religion seemed to offer a new defence of religion that could appeal to those who were until then critical of it. The influence of Smart's work, seen for example in the Schools' Council Working paper 36 (1971), also ensured a particular articulation of religion was adopted into national documents of the decade. By the mid 1970's it was exemplified in the Birmingham Syllabus of 1975, and influencing many other agreed syllabuses. Cox (1983a) was one person involved in teacher education at the time who recognised problems raised by the phenomenological approach, arguing that '(d)isagreement about the status and credibility of religion renders it impossible to achieve the necessary consensus as long

as we confine the subject to the study of religion or religions. … the justification of religious education may have to be found outside religion all together' (Cox 1983a, p.133).

The second area of concern I explore here is broadly philosophical and arises from the fact that the phenomenological approach to the study of religion stepped away from Husserl's initial interests. The point I want to make is that this matters and that it mattered especially when the phenomenological approach to the study of religion was aligned with an approach to religious education. Smart (1999) noted that when Husserl became interested in religion, he sought to try 'to bring out what religious acts means to the actors' (Smart 1999, p.2) and that furthermore his intention was to 'delineate the various manifestations of religions in complex ways' (Smart 1999, p.2). Nevertheless, Smart's move to look to the phenomena of religion through phenomenological approach to its study had the consequence of ensuring he began to look at a rather different set of questions than had engaged Husserl. Smart's orientation moved from the subject to the object of religion and because of this, although initially looking positive as an approach to religious education, something important was lost. This approach, because of its focus on the phenomena as object, became less able to be open to the one experiencing the phenomena; that is the subject. Schools' Council Working Paper 36 (1971) notes that '(i)f religion cannot be properly understood apart from subjectivity, then any satisfactory concept of objective study must somehow include that subjectivity (p. 22). However the authors of this paper instead of going to Husserl's questions, claim that '(s)uch objectivity is actually possible because of the characteristic human capacity for self-transcendence' (p. 22) which is 'the basis for all objective scholarship' (p. 22). The issue of subjectivity is dealt with in such a way so as to ensure the questions Smart interrogates at the core of the phenomenological approach to religious education are very different from the questions Husserl was seeking to respond to in developing his phenomenological methods.

My point is that this has led to attention resting on the matters of religious education rather than on the child, who is the subject of religious education. Smart's approach to religious education utilised a method of studying religion but left assumptions regarding its suitability for religious education underexposed. Husserl's questions were in a large part in relation to transcendence, to a sense of otherness, and he was

following a stream of philosophical concern raised first by Descartes in the modern period and again for example by Kant during the opening of the enlightenment. Husserl's particular conceptual and philosophical understandings of these questions were also in response and relation to the inner experience and the intentionality of experience. Turning Husserl's concept of for example 'bracketing' into a scientific tool, as Smart seems to do, for the objective study of religion has led to the emphasis coming to be on the phenomena itself and not with the subject, in which Husserl was at least equally interested.

Not engaging in the questions of interest to Husserl served to narrow the range of possibilities for the phenomenological approach to religious education. This is because, rather than enabling Smart to find shared elements in human existence as he had hoped, the focus came principally to be on the external observable phenomena of religions. Despite his best efforts, this focus on the shared externals of religion made Smart's work vulnerable both to the challenge of essentialism, that is of reducing all religious phenomena to common denominators, and in equal measure to the challenge of relativism where all claims about the nature of reality are considered entirely equal in relation to each other.

In his later work Smart (see for example 1999), recognising some of the problems which earlier formulations of phenomenological approaches had regarding accusations of essentialism, looked to resolve these problems by reference to a 'dialectical phenomenology'. Dialectical phenomenology, he tells us, 'has to do with the relationship between various aspects of religions and world views' (p.7). However, my point is that a simple appreciation or recognition of the complexities in relationships between religious manifestations is an insufficient response to accusations of essentialism. This is because Smart continues to assume that religion is in some way a distinctive category of phenomena that can be separated from other, for example cultural, aspects of life. In brief, the assumptions lead Smart, rather than looking deep into phenomenology itself in formulating his approach to religious education, only to draw the terminology into the phenomenological approach to religious education, and which unfortunately has been open to considerable misinterpretation. The questions from which Husserl had begun his exploration were by and large entirely forgotten and 'there has been little continued discussion of him' (Flood 1999, p. 16).

35

The theological and philosophical concerns discussed here make it clear that the phenomenological approach, as adapted to be an approach to religious education, was not after all as objective or scientific an approach as hoped; rather it had an inescapable Christian theological bias (see Barnes 2000, p. 325). From this questions arise regarding the possibility that the phenomenological approach to religious education, as Smart developed it, maps not objective categories or 'dimensions' (Smart 1971, p.6) of religious expression, but categories resembling categories of the Christian religious tradition. Although these 'dimensions' may work for Christianity, they are not assured to be capable of recognising the plurality of ways it means to live a religious life or indeed what it means to be religious at all in other traditions. If successful, this challenge would not necessarily undermine the phenomenological approach as a means of studying religion, but it would render it untenable as a method for embarking on a non-confessional religious education in schools (see Barnes 2000). Furthermore, influenced by liberal Christian theology of the period, phenomenological approaches to the study of religion looked to religious experience as the source of religious knowledge therefore avoiding questions of ultimate truth of religious propositions. The heart of the problem is that recourse to a theological pre-eminence of the authority of religious experience taken together with allocating a privileged status to this kind of knowledge, avoids subjecting religion to the same rational analysis as other forms of knowledge. Further problems with this approach have, as a consequence, been recognised later for example it failing to respond adequately to epistemological problems constructivism raises for religious belief itself (see Cooling 2010).

2.5 Responding to critiques of the confessional and phenomenological approaches to religious education and the impact of the 1988 Education Reform Act.

In the wake of criticisms of the phenomenological approach to religious education a number of alternative approaches emerged in the 1980's and 1990's. I consider three of these briefly in this section, before analysing three other influential proposals in detail in Chapter 3. New approaches emerged when the curriculum came under renewed scrutiny whilst new legislation regarding the English school curriculum was laid down in the 1988 Education Reform Act. Britain until 1988 had no defined national curriculum for its schools and one of the reforms intended by this Act was to initiate closer control of the curriculum at a national level (see Cox 1989, p. 23). However religious education was not drawn into the national curriculum for all children, but set

outside the 'requirement to conform to nationally prescribed attainment targets, programmes of study and assessment arrangements' (quoted in Cox 1989, p.24). Nevertheless, that religious education was officially considered to have similar status to other school subjects was made 'explicit in DES Circular 3/89' (Cox 1989, p. 24). Religious education in all maintained schools should continue to be taught according to an agreed syllabus as set down in the 1944 Education Act and the rules for drawing up such syllabus were reinforced in the new act with some notable modifications. Such modifications acknowledged the changing social context within which religious education was being taught. One of these was the inclusion of representatives of non-Christian religions into the SACREs. Another modification was that agreed syllabuses were to now 'reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, whilst taking into account the teaching and practices of the other principle traditions represented in Great Britain' (Education Reform Act 1988, Section 8, 3. quoted in Cox 1989, p.27).

The first alternative approach considered here, and referred to as the experiential approach, has been described as 'being based upon the phenomenological approach' (Hammond and Hay 1990, p.198). However, the experiential approach attempted to give a different weight to the phenomena studied by putting more emphasis on the accounts of experiences. This approach was not without critics (see for example Thatcher 1991). A problem for the experiential approach, which persisted from the phenomenological approach, lay around the likelihood of it also privileging religious experience as a special way of knowing. This was because its roots lay in the same protestant liberal theology of the late 19th Century as the phenomenological approach to the study of religion. A further and different problem, recognised earlier in this chapter and inherent in both phenomenological and experiential approaches to religious education, emerged from the link between the phenomenology of religion and liberal Christian theology. This problem is in relation to the proposal that there is some kind of an essence common to all religion (see Barnes 2001, p.453) and that this 'essential' element can be approached through a kind of experience that all human beings have access to.

The experiential approach also claimed that religious experience as expressed in language has a special kind of status or authority, not only internally but also over

propositions about other areas of experience. Proponents of the experiential approach to religious education asserting it had the capacity to enable children to access some kind of important non-conceptual knowledge. However, this leads to the accusation that religious education defined experientially seeks to escape conceptual criticality. Barnes engages with this discussion by proposing that it is questionable whether religious experience can have meaning apart from the conceptual framework of language (Barnes 2000, p.454). However there is another concern which suggests this approach will establish a problematic dualism between religious experience and religious language. Citing Wittgenstein, Barnes (2000) asserts that '(n)o direct experience of the Sacred or of anything else enjoys any privileged epistemic status over discursive reason and conceptual thought'(p.326); his point being that without a conceptual framework there could indeed be no articulated religious experience (see p.326). Such disagreements regarding phenomenological as well as experiential approaches to religious education are consequently in general understood in relation to epistemology and ontology (Jackson 2004a, p.85); serving to reposition discussion about approaches to religious education into the area of epistemology and ontology and a focus on knowledge.

A second approach to religious education during the 1980's and still prevalent today, attempts to make a connection between religious education and 'spirituality'. This has attracted particular support from those working in the faith and faith school context (see for example Nye 2009 & Court 2013). This approach begins from recognising a confessional approach is no longer tenable even in faith contexts, asserting instead that 'all human beings are spiritual people' (Nye 2009, p. vii), and emerged at the same time as research into religious experience in a secular context (see for example Robinson 1977, Hardy 1978 and Hay 1982) came to the fore. In addition to this, the approach bears some resemblance to aspects of work undertaken by another group of scholars who are generally regarded as a sub-group among phenomenologists of religion. Notable examples being Otto (1959) and Eliade (1959), both of whom emphasised the phenomena of religious experience. Some distinction between researchers into religious experience of the 1980s and phenomenologists of religion interested in religious experience may be useful, if not absolutely binding. Whereas research into religious experience in the 1970's and 1980s was based on collections of individual people's accounts of their own experience of the transcendent without a

particular philosophical position on the validity or otherwise of that experience; those working in the phenomenology of religion were more often advocating a particular philosophical approach to the study of religion.

Since the 1988 Education Reform Act, schools have been required to promote the spiritual development of children and young people. In the early days this was often seen as a preserve of religious education since a spiritual approach to religious education was understood by some as less contentious than confessional approaches in particular. Subsequent work seeking to explore the relationship between 'spirituality' and religious education in maintained non-denominational schools has been considerable (see for example Hannam, 1992; Wright, 1997; Erricker, Erricker, Ota, Sullivan, and Fletcher, 1997). As Priestly (1997) notes spiritual was placed in the Preamble to the 1944 Education Act because 'it is a wider concept than the religious' (p.29). Priestly also acknowledges that 'much of the thought behind the concept in the 1944 Education Act actually came out of a 1928 conference' (p.24) indicating a long realisation of some of the issues surrounding religion in education. Recent Ofsted frameworks for school inspections in England have ensured a renewed interest in this area since the promotion of children's spiritual development has been reemphasised in latest Ofsted handbooks (Ofsted 2012 and 2015). Although in the present time spiritual development of children and young people is explicitly understood as *not* being the preserve of religious education but an element of the whole school curriculum, most recent iterations of this (see Ofsted 2015) have nonetheless identified a close relationship between spiritual development and religion. Spiritual is defined by Ofsted and hence having a great influence on schools in terms of children's 'ability to be reflective about their own beliefs, religious or otherwise, that inform their perspective on life and their interest in and respect for different people's faiths, feelings and values' (Ofsted 2015, p. 36). The potential for increasing confusion regarding the relationship of religion to the wellbeing of children and the societies within which they live therefore remains.

The third approach to religious education I consider in this chapter focussed on how children learn. Following Goldman in the 1960s this approach looked to psychology and sought to bring insight from research on learning to the various developing approaches to religious education. This has influenced most other approaches to

religious education following since this time, leading to most contemporary approaches to religious education being regarded as broadly 'constructivist' (Grimmitt 2000). Such approaches are often characterised by starting from the position of valuing each child's current understanding; the purpose of teaching understood as enabling the students to learn through 'building on or reconstructing' (Stern 2006, p.68) that learning. Grimmitt (1987a) identified two different kinds of learning going on in religious education and hoped so doing would help to find a common basis and draw together different approaches to religious education. Firstly in suggesting that religious education needed to include 'learning about' religious practice, Grimmitt was responding to those coming from the analytic and phenomenological positions. Secondly in arguing that there is another important aspect of religious education where children are enabled to 'learn from' religion, he was responding to proponents of experiential or spiritual approaches to the subject. From this point it is possible to trace the emergence of the language of 'learning' (see Chater and Erricker 2013) in religious education.

From this point, the concept of 'learner' and 'learning' began to be widely used in the religious education literature. The learner's learning is to be 'facilitated' by the 'teacher' and teaching in religious education in the past 30 years has become increasingly and sometimes only associated with or equated to 'learning'. Approaches which have been influenced by this kind of thinking have tended to be referred to as 'postmodern' models (Jackson 2004a, p. 9) of religious education, as distinct from instructional ones. This language appears in the non-statutory framework for religious education of 2004 where two purposes of religious education are identified as 'learning about religion' and 'learning from religion'. The same language of learning and the same two purposes for religious education persist into the Religious Education Council's (2013b) Curriculum Framework for Religious Education where again the subject of religious education is referred to as 'the learner'. Other more recent reports designed to influence national religious education policy continue with a focus on the language of learning in relation to religious education in particular and where the child is referred to as 'the learner' (see Dinham & Shaw 2015, p.1) revealing underlying with assumptions.

2.7 Identifying assumptions and observing their impact.

Grimmitt (see for example 1987a and 1987b) had already recognised 'an amalgam' of assumptions underlying religious education. In this section I identify and highlight two particular areas of assumption present for religious education since the late 19th century making some comments regarding their impact here and which I take forward to consider in a detailed and contextual way in the chapter 3. The first is in relation to religion and second in relation to education. With regard to religion, there is an assumption that religion is something positive, identifiable and discreet and essentially good for children to encounter. The various challenges to confessional approaches to religious education in the 1960's revealed that a confessional encounter with religion in schools did not bring about the desired consequences and that this was not a sufficient basis upon which to formulate an approach to religious education in a plural context. However the phenomenological approach to religious education and those which have followed it, also sought to give a privileged position to religion and religious knowledge. My point is that the same assumptions about religion have lain underneath all approaches. Furthermore, especially since the idea of dimensions of religion (see Smart 1968) became influential in religious education and because these dimensions are strongly related to Christianity, there has also been a privileging of particular views about religion which are in fact related largely to Christianity. This in turn has led to a view that what it means to be religious is to believe or to know certain things in certain kinds of ways and to behave in certain ways principally because of those beliefs.

Such a consideration of religion through the lens of Christianity Barnes (2000) suggests has led religious education in fact to be formed too frequently around a kind of neo-confessionalism. Barnes' work enables me to observe a further point, and this is that the central questions for religious education have come to be thought of as ontological and epistemological (Barnes 2000 & 2001). This in turn has ensured that under identified assumptions about religion in religious education have led to emphasis being placed on what counts as knowledge in religious education (ontology) as well as how this knowledge is to be acquired (epistemology). Following on from this, such assumptions lead to the view that curriculum development will focus on mechanisms for enabling children to 'know and understand' particular aspects of religion (see Religious Education Council, 2013). My point is that not only has this led to an overemphasis on learning in religious education, but also to an objectification of

religious knowledge. Objectified matters of religion and knowledge risk being separated from considering what it actually means to live a religious life.

The second broad area of assumption I consider here, is regarding what is understood to be educative about religious education. Theory about religious education has had limited engagement with educational theory, since the central focus has been on religion in discussions about religious education. This has been further complicated by positive assumptions made regarding religion and together these things have led to a focus on ideas about learning. Further, assumptions regarding religion have sometimes led to 'learning' understood as synonymous with education. This can be observed in some contemporary discussions in the literature (see for example Weisse 2003 and Gearon 2013) but is also observable in documents published recently intended to influence policy. For example the Religious Education Council's (2013a) review of religious education tends to use the word 'education' to refer to the structures of maintained system where for example it notes that 'large-scale changes in education made by the Coalition government' have created challenges for religious education (p.7). The Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life (2015) report uses the word in a number of ways including to refer to systems but also to a more general activity in schools with the repeated phrase 'education about religion and belief' (p. 35) noting that there was a 'widespread need for religion and belief literacy' (p.29). This could lead the reader to equate literacy with education, especially when taken together with the emphasis on religious literacy in the work of Dinham and Shaw (2015). However, none of the recent policy documents problematize the concept of education. This taken together with the fact that the child as the subject of religious education has also being objectified, referred to 'the learner' (see for example Chater and Erricker 2013 and Holt 2014), it is clear that assumptions continue to be made around what it is that religious education is aiming to achieve educatively.

It has already been noted that religious education before the 1960s took little account of the educational movements that were emerging in the country during through the first half of the 20th century. The 1970's were, as well as a time of religious transformation in English cities, also a time where discussion about education was significantly taking place in the public sphere. James Callaghan's Ruskin Speech in 1976 came at a point when those interested in religious education were also considering many new

possibilities. The speech put education itself high on public agenda and opened a renewed consideration of what counted as 'good education' in the public sphere. Callaghan in this speech spoke of education 'for all' not only in terms of personal and intellectual growth, but also in terms of preparation for work and opened the way for others to look at the contribution of education to public life. This period of development culminated in The Education Reform Act of 1988 and the introduction of The National Curriculum (Kay, Frances and Watson, 2003 p. 113; Wright 1999, p.6). However, because there had been no examination of education itself in relation to religious education, the 1988 Education Reform act, instead of opening up new possibilities for rethinking these matters culminated instead with laying down content for religious education. Teaching about Christianity and other world faiths was made a legal requirement, stating that religious education agreed syllabuses 'must reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, whilst taking account of the principle religions represented in Great Britain' (Clause 8/3). Religious education remained in the unique position of being outside the national curriculum, but still a statutory part of the whole school curriculum; its special status reaffirmed but its distinctiveness educatively continues largely unexamined. This is a point I note recent reports and policy recommendations have done nothing to challenge.

2.8 Conclusion

An examination of religious education in the maintained sector in England since its inception following the late 19th century education acts, has enabled me to identify two particular areas of assumption that have underlain religious education. That religion had a role in the public sphere was taken for granted in the late 19th century. This was assumed by both conservative elements in the established Church who sought to maintain the existing political and economic order, as well as by emerging reforming elements at the time which spanned across denominations; as exemplified by the work of the Christian Socialists. A reason for the inclusion of religious education in the 1944 Education Act was based on assumptions about what religion can do both for individuals and for whole societies. However, as English society has begun to manifest increasing religious plurality, expectations of religious education have changed surprisingly little. Assumptions about religion have pertained. Confessional approaches were superseded in the 1960's and 1970's by approaches influenced by the phenomenological approach to the study of religion and this had huge impact on what

has followed in religious education. A critical point I have sought to argue in this chapter, especially through examination of theological and philosophical concerns about phenomenological approaches, is that religious education since this time has focussed on a particular way of conceptualising religion as belief and practice. My point is that this has led to discussions about religious education being based upon under exposed assumptions about religion. Furthermore I have shown that religious education theory in the period discussed in this chapter, right up until the present time, has not given much attention to education theory. Assumptions have been made and opportunities for reflecting on what is educative about religious education therefore missed.

My critique of the hugely influential phenomenological approach to the study of religion, and in particular the influence of Ninian Smart, has enabled me to expose a theological bias present in religious education. Furthermore my philosophical critique has revealed a loss of focus on the educational subject (that is the child) in religious education. Assumptions about the centrality and privileged position of religious knowledge and religious experience as a means of knowing, as well as aligned defences and justifications of religion and its place in schools have further exacerbated this. My view is that the resultant focus on knowledge in religious education has led to attention being given to ontological and epistemological questions rather than questions about education. The curriculum has been dominated by things to be known and understood, and proposals for mechanisms to enable such knowing and understanding have taken centre stage. Learning has been conflated with education and the educational subject objectified; referred to in abstract terms as 'the learner'.

In the chapter that follows, I proceed by giving further examination to two areas of assumption that have emerged in this chapter, first in relation to religion and secondly in relation to education. I present in-depth case studies of three approaches to religious education influential today and which developed in response to critiques of both confessional and phenomenological approaches to religious education. Through first presenting and then offering a critique of the approaches and their theoretical positions, my intention is to clarify pressing questions for religious education and which are addressed through the rest of my thesis.

Chapter 3: Contemporary developments in the religious education curriculum

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a critical discussion of three approaches to religious education that emerged in England, during the latter part of the 20th century. Each continues to have an influence on religious education in England today, as well as internationally. This chapter takes forward the findings of chapter 2. Assumptions underlying religious education were identified, the first regarding religion and secondly education. Whereas chapter 2 gave an overview of approaches to religious education since the earliest education acts of the late 19th century and identified assumptions prevalent through the period, chapter 3 takes another look at these assumptions through examining the work of three specific thinkers in detail. The examination of each of the three approaches follows a similar pattern. Each begins with a presentation of the approach through an investigation of their theological, philosophical and educational positions, as well as a consideration of how each has emerged into practice in the classroom. The critical discussion which follows, through reference to the wider literature, identifies particular and distinctive problems in each case. The findings of the discussion enable me to clarify two pressing questions facing religious education which I address in chapters 4 and 5. The first of the three contemporary positions examined is the interpretive approach as developed by Robert Jackson and colleagues at The University of Warwick University. The second is the critical realist approach as developed by Andrew Wright formerly at Kings College, London and thirdly the conceptual enquiry approach developed by Clive Erricker most recently until 2009, County Inspector/Adviser for religious education in Hampshire.

Chapter 3.2: The interpretive approach

3.2.1 Introduction

In this section I present the interpretive approach to religious education as developed by Robert Jackson and his associates at the Warwick Religious Education Research Unit (WRERU) and sometimes referred to as a 'socio-cultural' approach (Gearon 2013, p. 126). I consider some practical developments in respect of the interpretive approach to religious education before proceeding to identify and critically discussing three areas of difficulty this approach faces. I identify that these difficulties are as a consequence of the fact that the work began with what were initially anthropological studies of religion. I argue that this has led to some particular assumptions being made about religion and raises questions therefore regarding the extent to which this approach is able to represent the range of ways in which it is possible to live a religious life.

3.2.2 What is the interpretive approach to religious education?

The interpretive approach to religious education developed to a large extent in response to criticisms of the phenomenological approach to the study of religion (see Jackson 1997, p. 8), which influenced RE from 1960's but with increasing pace after the publishing of Schools Council Working Paper 36 (see Jackson 1997 p.10 ff). The phenomenological approach to religious education had already led to world religions being studied increasingly in religious education in maintained schools (Jackson 1982, p.53). One consequence of this was for Christianity also to be looked at afresh and 'as a world religion in its own right' (Jackson 1982, p. vii). Problems in the phenomenological approach to religious education became apparent to Jackson as he observed the lived experience of newly settled families in Coventry and Birmingham during the 1970's. These families were arriving from East Africa following expulsions from Uganda and Kenya, alongside migration to the area already taking place from India, Pakistan and other areas of the New Commonwealth. Jackson identified that the phenomenological study of religion itself, as developing at the time at for example Lancaster University, had significant problems which would limit its application to religious education. Jackson saw these problems as theological, philosophical as well as educational (see Jackson 1997, p.14-24). For example as well as there being a Christian theological starting point from which many phenomenologists of the period with a 'liberal agenda' began their work, as previously discussed in chapter 2, the

phenomenological framework imposed upon non-Christian religious traditions was one drawn from Christianity itself.

In addition to this, Jackson argued that philosophically the particular constructivist interpretation of knowledge in the phenomenological study of religion was subjective in a way that took no account of truth. Jackson (1997) saw further difficulties in assumptions implied by the 'notion of 'épochè, of distancing or putting into parenthesis one's presupposition, as a methodological tool' (p. 21). Identifying an educational concern, in terms of whether children are actually able to undertake such distancing, Jackson notes the phenomenologists of religion don't explore much how they could achieve épochè either and that may be 'they could not go much beyond the intention to achieve it' (p. 21). Nevertheless fascinated by the new ways of living and believing he saw around him in the locality of the university, the ethnographic studies which Jackson and his colleagues undertook at this time (see Jackson and Nesbitt 1993) led to an appreciation of the need for religious education to look at religion not just as a 'phenomenon' but as a lived experience. This is as one where the inner plurality within a faith was also taken seriously. Such awareness, led Jackson to look for an approach that would enable religious education to take full account of social and cultural differences which existed for people within a particular faith tradition. Although the interpretive approach does not 'claim to be a total method' (Jackson 2006, p.400), it is strongly influenced by the social sciences in particular social anthropology. It can be 'supplemented fruitfully by other methods and approaches' (Jackson 2006, p.400) nevertheless the interpretive approach is understood by Jackson to be both an approach and a method for religious education which would allow for a more accurate representation of religion, an open exploration (see for example Jackson 2008, p. 23) and enable children and young people to respond to and interpret these representations.

The interpretive approach to religious education 'aims to help children and young people find their own positions within the key debates about religious plurality' (Jackson 1997, 2004 and 2005). Theoretically it drew, at least at the beginning, from branches of social anthropology and especially from the work of anthropologists and ethnographers such as Geertz (1973) and other scholars such as Said (1978). A particular view emerged regarding the content of religious education in light of ethnographic research undertaken at the University of Warwick from the 1970's

onwards (Jackson 2000, p.131). The early ethnographic work (Jackson and Nesbitt 1992 and 1993) was, and continues to be, highly significant to the development of this approach. This is because these ethnographies led Jackson to identify early on in his work problems existing for religious education in relation to the representation of religion in the classroom, especially in relation to how inner as well as outer plurality of religious traditions could be taken seriously. As a consequence of this, a clear understanding about the representation of religion was established and which subsequently became a distinctive element of Jackson's interpretive approach. Two other significant theoretical and practical issues arose and influenced this approach forming together 'three related strands of work' (Jackson 2000, p. 130). These were first with regard to clarifying a precise relationship between the field research and secondly 'issues of method in relation to theory and practice' (Jackson 2000, p. 130) of religious education. However initial classroom studies of this new approach raised further questions regarding the representation of the inner plurality of religions.

In order to address concerns regarding the representation of religion in the classroom, three further issues were recognised. These were in relation first to how materials in the class room would be interpreted, secondly how they would be reflected upon and thirdly recognition of the inseparability of reflection and understanding. The issues were summed up as (i) representation, (ii) interpretation (iii) reflexivity linked with (iv) edification. Together these came to be understood as elements underpinning all theoretical work, developed initially during an ESRC funded study (Jackson 1997, 2004a), and continue in the present time to define this approach to religious education. Jackson states that the interpretive approach belongs to the tradition of hermeneutical learning (see for example Ipgrave, Jackson & O'Grady 2009, p. 166). The hermeneutical nature of the interpretive approach was developed through engagement with the work of Geertz, who himself was influenced by the work of Paul Ricoeur (see Geertz 1973, p. 19). Jackson discusses how the interpretive approach utilises aspects of Ricoeur's hermeneutics; especially the concepts of participation and distanciation (see Jackson 1997, p. 129 and Ricoeur 1973 in Jackson 2011, p. 192). Jackson wanted to ensure he had responded not only to the critique of the phenomenological approach to the study of religion in the way religions would be represented in the classroom, but also that the anticipated ways in which children and young people would engage with the material presented would be congruent in terms of both aims and practice.

3.2.3 Representation, interpretation, reflexivity and edification.

The first key principle of the interpretive approach 'Representation', signals an appreciation of there being many significant issues in relation to representing religion in the classroom. Jackson draws on Said (1978) and Smith (1991) to 'deconstruct(s) Western, post-Enlightenment models of representing 'world religions' as schematic belief systems, whose essence can be expressed through a series of propositional or doctrinal statements' (Jackson 2000, p.133 and 2004b p.3). However Jackson also insists the approach is not relativistic with regard to truth, acknowledging varying and often competing truth claims (Jackson 1997, pp. 122-126, Jackson 2000, p.133 and 2004b p.5). The model Jackson proposes overall (see 2004b p. 5), encourages religions to be represented in ways in the classroom which acknowledges their complexity, internal diversity and different relationships with culture.

With regard to the key principle of 'Interpretation', Jackson rejected the assumption of the phenomenological approach to religious education which suggested that the 'skills of empathy were unproblematic' (Jackson 2000, p. 133). Jackson (2004b) recognises that this work has some features in common with Jacques Waardenburg's new style phenomenology, but most closely relates his work to contemporary interpretive anthropology (see p. 5). Jackson developed an approach which 'requires an oscillating movement between the learner's and the insider's concepts and experiences' (p. 5). This approach Jackson says embodies hermeneutical understandings in the way it applies this concept of representation to the relationships between individuals. This approach neither 'privileges the individual nor the religion, but is concerned with the hermeneutical relationship between the two' (Jackson 2011a, p. 192) where Jackson cites Geertz' development of Ricoeur's hermeneutics. There is a need for a high level of teacher sensitivity to the relationships within the classroom as well as the relationships to the people being represented in the classroom materials. Furthermore, going back to the work of Geertz (1973 and 1983) and Rorty (1980), the interpretation principle aims to enable the child or young person in the classroom to interpret the particular representation of a religious tradition presented to them. Jackson (1997) suggests 'the method looks for areas of overlap to be used as a basis for discussing similarity and difference' (p. 111), so enabling children to interpret the material presented to them. Here Jackson connects the interpretive approach with Ricoeur's hermeneutics mentioned above. Books for children were produced, with the intention

of drawing on the ethnographers experiences to facilitate classroom embedding of this principle into the classroom, although in actual fact there has been little systematic embedding of this work into classroom practice.

The third principle of 'Reflexivity' (Jackson 1997, p.111) is 'concerned with helping pupils reflect on their studies of ways of life that are different in some respects from their own' (Jackson 1997, p.112). Students should be able to consider the relationship between their own experience and that of those who they have been studying. There are three aspects of this principle Jackson (2004b) says he would want to encourage, the first of which is 'the learner re-assessing her or his understanding of her or his *own* way of life (edification) (p.6). Second that they make 'a constructive critique of the material studied at a distance' (p.6) and third that they are 'developing a running critique of the interpretive process by reviewing methods of study' (p.6). It was anticipated that a level of self-understanding would emerge from this, and in this sense 'Reflexivity' also relates to another concept at work in this approach, that of 'Edification' (e.g. Jackson 2011a, p. 5). Edification, Jackson notes, is close to the way some ethnographers reported their investigations had 'promoted some reassessment of their understanding of their own way of life, or some insight into the human condition in general' (Jackson 1997, p.112). This Jackson (see for example 2004a) has written about at length and describes it as being close to what he means by 'learning from religion' (p. 95).

Edification relates to being able to interpret another's world view, which Jackson (2007a) suggests is a 'basic aim of religious education' (p. 130). However it is more than this for it also relates to a transformation and means 'to be taken out of oneself' (p.130). Jackson likens edification to 'learning from religion' as discussed by Grimmitt; however it is distinctive in three important ways. First Jackson emphasises the importance of the use of ethnographic studies being brought to children and emphasises that he has not been considering religion in 'abstraction or "religions" as straightforwardly definable belief systems' (p. 132). Secondly Jackson insists the interpretive approach aims to give attention to internal diversity and finally he notes a distinction in educational goals. Whereas Jackson suggests Grimmitt's approach assumes 'all learners … should become fully autonomous individuals, making their own choices and decisions', Jackson says that the interpretive approach sees 'schooling as but one key influence on socialisation' (p. 132). Nevertheless, 'pupils may be

changed through taking part in the interpretive process' (p. 133) recognising the 'personal nature of edification' (p.134). This means that the teacher of religious education working with this approach has a particular role in providing opportunities for reflection on the material being studied.

3.2.4 Practical developments

Jackson (1997) discusses various 'experiments' in putting 'the interpretive approach into operation' (p. 112) including the development of a series of text books for school aged children and young people planned as part of the Warwick RE Project (see p. 105). There was a direct connection between the development of the interpretive approach and the desire to formulate materials for classroom use from the ethnographic studies undertaken. This process led to the development of further theory; for example to reconsider the character of religions and especially to recognise 'religions' and 'cultures' as dynamic and changing' (p. 109). Therefore rather than making use of the categories or dimensions of religion that had characterised the phenomenological approach to religious education, the researchers in Warwick sought to 'make use of categories … within the traditions which were suggested by (the) source material' (p. 109) and tried to avoid making generalisations. An example of these materials was 'The Buddha's Birthday' (Barratt 1994) which aimed to teach primary-school pupils through a study of the family and religious traditions of a Buddhist child in Britain. More recently the REDCo project 'addressed the question of how study of religions and values in schools could contribute to either dialogue or tension in Europe' (Weisse 2011, p.111). The REDCo project was undertaken 2006 – 2009, and 'key concepts of the interpretive approach were used in field research in both methods and data analysis as well as in pedagogy' (Weisse 2011, p.117). The work of the REDCo Project has been extended into various action research studies in different combinations. Furthermore the key process concepts of the interpretive approach are now beginning to influence European Policy (Weisse 2011, p.121) with the overall 'goal' of the work being 'to contribute to intercultural understanding, the respect for otherness and coexistence with the help of interreligious dialogue in the public schools of Europe' (Weisse 2011, p. 122). This work has until now been focused in Europe, whilst being aware 'of the fact that the new discussion on religion in education has world-wide dimensions' (Weisse 2011, p. 123).

3.2.5 Critical discussion

I develop my critique of the interpretive approach through a consideration of three broad and interconnected areas of concern. The first area I discuss here is in relation to the way the relationship between religion and culture is presented, the second in relation to philosophical concerns and the third educational concerns. Although intending to give recognition to the 'dangers of generalizing about cultural or religious 'wholes' (Jackson 1997, p. 49), I assert there is insufficient clarity between religion and culture in this approach largely because of the emphasis on ethnography. The second area of concern is broadly philosophical where despite aiming to take a 'critical stance towards Western, post-Enlightenment models of representing 'world religions' as homogeneous belief systems' (Jackson 2011, p.191), it seems to me that Jackson does not spell out clearly enough what he means by certain terminology and that this leads to an insufficient response to the challenge of relativism. The third area of concern is broadly educational and these three concerns taken together lead me to infer that assumptions are being made in this approach regarding religion as well as education.

Some confusion about precise distinction between what is meant in the interpretive approach by religion and culture respectively is, I assert, possible because of the extent to which Jackson draws upon interpretive anthropology. It is apparent both in Jackson's original configuration of the interpretive approach and continues to be the case in more recent writings as for example where the interpretive approach is being used as a research tool (see Jackson 2011). An example of this can be seen also in the work of Wolfram Weisse, a collaborator with Jackson on the interpretive approach as a research tool in the REDCo Project. Citing Council of Europe recommendations from 2008 (Council of Europe 2008), Weisse (2011) suggests that there is 'great importance and relevance of learning about religions as part of intercultural education and of interreligious dialogue' (Weisse 2011, p.122). However, the lack of clear distinction between the two reveals how assumptions are being made about their precise relationship. From this arises a related question with regard to how children are to distinguish between what is religion and religious expression, and what is culture and cultural expression. There is potential for misunderstandings where distinctions are not made clear between matters of religious expression and matters of cultural expression. Perhaps equally as concerning is the limited discussion in the body of Jackson's work and that of his collaborators' as to how these distinctions, were they to be identified,

actually could be represented and explored in the classroom. Erricker (see Chater and Erricker 2013 and especially chapter 5) concludes that this approach rather than being religious education is really offering an anthropological exploration of religion in the classroom, which 'pedagogically is totally insufficient and confused' (p. 76).

The relationship between culture and religion as in the interpretive approach has been critiqued by others working in the field of religious education, including Wright (2008) who expresses concerns about the ways in which religions are to be represented to children in the classroom. Jackson responds by saying that although he thinks it is possible 'to give general descriptions of religions … but that such descriptions should not be regarded as final or uncontested' (Jackson 2008, p. 14). Jackson and Wright have disagreed about the relationship between culture and religion in religious education, however Jackson (2008) defends his approach as being able to make distinctions between religious education and cultural education, giving several examples from Russia, Northern Ireland and Japan where this would be particularly important (see p. 18). Furthermore, he identifies situations where 'an avowedly non-confessional programme can, in reality, be politically loaded' (p. 18). Jackson's view is that the attention he gives to issues of power, which can be perceived as coming from Asad's criticisms of Geertz, 'in the interpretive approach is intended to provide checks and balances against such loaded representations, not imply that traditions are 'arbitrary constructions' devoid of descriptive content' (p. 18). The point Jackson is trying to make is that there are not clear boundaries between culture and religion, but that his approach is robust enough to ensure no power or other undue influence is possible in the way religions are represented in the classroom.

There are however further concerns which arise from an insufficient clarity between culture and religion which can be revealed by taking an example from Geertz's (1973) 'Interpretive Theory of Religion' itself. As a starting point for the interpretive approach to religious education, Geertz's work seemed at first to offer a means of moving away from criticisms faced by the phenomenological approach to the study of religion in religious education, and in particular the close association the phenomenological approach had with Christianity. Geertz's starting point had instead been with Indic and tribal religions (Asad 1983, p. 238) and not Christianity. In particular, Geertz's seminal chapter 'Religion as a cultural system' (1973, Ch. 4) is appealing since it looked for a

deeper account of religion than, up to that point, had been afforded by anthropologists or sociologists which Geertz says were 'stagnant' (Geertz 1973, p.87). Although Jackson (1997 and 2004) considers Asad's (1983) critique of Geertz in relation to conceptions of power and history, other problems raised by Geertz's work in the relationship between religion and culture have not been addressed by Jackson. To illustrate my point I take the particular example of the way Geertz approaches the matter of symbol in religion. Geertz's anthropological work opens up a discussion around the interpretation of the place of symbol in religion but only from a cultural point of view; my question is whether this is sufficient an account of symbol for those living a religious life. Tillich (1964) however brings something else to the discussion regarding symbol from a theological point of view. Tillich's approach to the study of symbol in religion ensures that religion is positioned rather differently in relation to culture, and thus illustrates my point well. Tillich is concerned that there is a 'fateful separation of religion and culture' (p. 29) but that this separation comes largely from differences in approaches to philosophy of religion.

In Tillich's work symbols are not regarded as being 'a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life' (Geertz 1973, p. 89). Indeed Tillich (1964) says that when symbols are regarded in this way they 'become signs pointing to a meaning which is defined' (p.56) he regards symbols in such a way as to say they are able to 'stand for a reality in the power of which they participate' (p.56). So whereas Geertz's understanding of symbols in religion seems indistinguishable from a cultural understanding, Tillich asserts a more existential role. Symbols for men and women living a religious life, according to Tillich (2000), have a different and perhaps more profound role in each person's day by day existence than can be perceived through ethnography alone. He asserts 'the means by which the relation of man to the ground of his being must be expressed in symbols taken from the structure of being, the polarity of participation and individualization determines the special character of this relation as it determines the special character of the courage to be' (p.156). Tillich's proposals aim to bring a particular appreciation of how symbols offer humanity this sense of 'courage to be'. Tillich seeks to do this by explaining how symbols are an attempt to communicate a reality in 'which the ontological side of courage is taken into faith (including hope), while the ethical side of courage is taken into love or the principle of

ethics' (p. 8). The existential nature of symbols, as Tillich explains, penetrates deep below the surface of daily life into faith and faith he says is 'the state of being ultimately concerned' (Tillich 2001, p.1). Therefore my critique of an anthropological approach to understanding religious symbols in religious education is that it is not able to express fully what they actually do for those to whom they matter. Further I assert that this distinction is highly significant and enables me to illuminate the distinction between an anthropological interpretation of the role of symbols in religion, which is more or less indistinguishable from a cultural one, and a religious understanding. The point I want to make here is that it seems likely that Jackson's appeal to anthropology is not able to bring a sufficient religious understanding of religion into religious education.

To be sure, this enables me to shed light on a further problem for the interpretive approach that arises when examining culture, ethnicity and national identity through the lens of contemporary anthropology. The problem is the possibility that distinctions as well as similarities are blurred. And a possible consequence of this is that the distinctive aspects, particularly in relation to the public sphere, are not taken seriously enough. Jackson (1997) has discussed the changing nature of religion understood as part and parcel of a multicultural society p.83ff). Although Jackson notes that 'religious educators need to be critical of their assumptions regarding the nature of 'cultures' and to develop new methods of representation' (p.91). Jackson emphasises both the personal and social experience of religion in the cultural context. From this I want to question whether the attempt to bring the experience of 'the other' close to the students, whilst acknowledging that it is never possible to actually experience the experience of 'the other', was actually successful. Geertz' interpretive method offered an alternative to the problematic 'eidetic vision' of phenomenology, developing a similar but different conceptualisation of 'experience near'. However I suggest that unfortunately this approach in fact can only serve to emphasise cultural and social interpretations of religion and religious expression, meaning that issues of plurality are wholly in relation to cultural plurality. Further and although questions of both inner and outer religious plurality are recognized, informed by extensive ethnographic research (Jackson 2003, p.3), the interpretive approach rather than broadening an understanding of religion as is intended (Jackson 1997, p. 58), in fact serves to reaffirm confusion between culture and

religion. Thus it is possible to conclude it fails to acknowledge the difference religion means existentially, that is day to day for those who live a religious life.

A further area of concern is demonstrated by for example Jackson's use of phrases such as 'post enlightenment' (Jackson 2007, p. 401) and 'postmodern' (Jackson 2004a, p. 11). Jackson (2003) indicates that by these kinds of phrases he means very broadly the kind of thinking that has followed the European Enlightenment (see p. 7). Jackson goes on to say however that the 'assumptions, ideas and values that characterised the European Enlightenment have led to a plurality in contemporary thought that is often pictured as a move from modernity to late modernity to 'High Modernity' (citing Giddens 1990) or from modernity to 'post-modernity' (citing e.g. Lyotard 1984)'. Through Jackson's body of work however, distinctions made between these terms remain underdeveloped, leading to possible generalisations and underexposed philosophical assumptions about for example the meaning of and conditions for knowledge. It could be argued instead for example that the Enlightenment, since it had no clear beginning and ending, is rather a stream of thought or way of thinking about knowledge and humanity which is still prevalent now. Jackson's point, that there is some significant time in the past when plurality became viewed in a different way, is thus a weak one.

A question that may help make distinctions between the terms would be to ask whether the influence of new ways of thinking, which emerged in and around the 17th century, are having a different kind of impact now compared to another moment in history. The assumption made by Jackson is however that the Enlightenment has had a negative impact, particularly on religion and religious knowing, and that the 'post-enlightenment' or 'postmodern' period being lived at the moment is somehow the worse for that impact. Jackson makes it quite clear that his work is 'critical of Western, post-Enlightenment models of representing "world religions" ' (Jackson 2007, p. 410). However apart from placing in a vague chronological order, the a lack of distinction between the 'modern' and the 'Enlightenment' periods brings the possibility of an uncritical conflation between for example the dualism and doubt of Descartes' thought and notions of autonomy for example from Kant. Lack of detailed engagement with what the terminology means precisely has led to his understanding of the Enlightenment also not engaging with the political transformations that took place

during this period. Instead the lack of attention to certain philosophical assumptions, taken together with an anthropological and cultural focus of Jackson's position, ensures his approach to religious education remains centred on observable aspects of religion rather   than existential. This means the discussion remains, just as it does for the phenomenological approach, at the level of knowledge; both in terms of what there is to know and ways of knowing. This leads me to my discussion of the third area of concern which in relation to the educative possibilities of the interpretive approach.

The interpretive approach has faced charges both of reductionism and relativism (Jackson 2007, p.6) in its approach to both inner and outer religious plurality. Jackson (1997) meets the challenge of reductionism by saying that those working on the interpretive approach ' do not deny the existence of religious 'wholes'' … but that they do 'take the view that such wholes are constructions and that one insider's view of the nature and scope of the religion will be different from another's' (p. 126). Linked with this, when meeting the charge of relativism Jackson (1997) does not deny that there are implications for maintaining that 'some aspects of knowledge are socially constructed' (p.126), however he insists that it does not follow 'that the notion of 'ultimate truth' has no meaning' (p.126). Elsewhere he insists that the interpretive approach takes an epistemological position which is neither anti-realist (Jackson 2008, p.22) nor naïve realist when dealing with religious plurality; preferring instead a position somewhere in between (Jackson 2007). He frequently refers to the 'epistemological openness' of the approach (e.g. Jackson 1997, p. 126, 2004c p.8, 2006 p.402 and 2012a, p.3), however the meaning of this is never precisely explored. Instead he mentions that it is reasonable for different people working with the interpretive approach to have different epistemological positions. The implications of the lack of critical engagement with his own position in this respect are not fully considered, although Jackson tells us that the intention has been to 'find a *pragmatic* way of dealing with epistemological difference that is inclusive of conservative as well as liberal religious views' (Jackson 1997, p.126). Jacksons' use of the word 'pragmatic' here is in a general and not precise philosophical sense; the pragmatist philosophical tradition is not referenced at all. The possible consequence of unexplored assumptions implicit in the lack of a developed position in relation to epistemological matters is important as he moves into discussing constructivism in relation to religious education. This is highly significant in relation to ontological concerns, since without such clarity it is hard to see how coherence can be

found between his position on religion and what it is that religious education should aim to achieve.

Jackson (2000) acknowledges that what he calls the main pedagogical principles of the interpretive approach are associated with theory from 'an eclectic range of sources' (p131), including the humanities, social sciences and especially hermeneutics. By hermeneutics Jackson means to include into the practise of his approach 'methodology from the social sciences influenced by hermeneutics' (p.131). The intention is therefore to 'encourage pupils to engage in a hermeneutical activity similar to that of the religious believer in order to gain further insights into their way of life' (Grimmitt 2000a, p. 39). However the main point I want to make is that it remains hard for this approach to religious education to settle a position in relation to what is particularly educative about religious education. This is in large part because the interpretive approach does not exactly spell out the purposes of education in the public sphere.

Because the interpretive approach does not spell out the role of education in the public sphere, assumptions are made about the role of religious plurality in religious education. Aligned with this I want to note three areas of difficulty that are associated with the particular way the interpretive approach considers religious plurality. The first relates to the way the interpretive approach seeks to resolve ontological and epistemological concerns. Taking the desired epistemological openness of this approach together with an inconclusive engagement with the political implications of the Enlightenment, means that discussion regarding the significance of religious plurality in the public sphere is barely begun. Secondly further questions are raised by other elements of the interpretive approach; in particular discussions of reflexivity and interpretation. It is not well explained how the capacity to interpret text is distinctive in religious education, that is what for example would be its distinguishing features compared to an English literature lesson or one undertaking historical textual analysis. The precise existential significance of different interpretations of a religious text for those living a religious life seems possible to be missed. And finally Jackson assumes that one of the key aims of religious education is concerned with helping pupils to reflect on their studies of ways of life that are different in some respects from their own, but in light of the insufficient distinction between religion and culture questions

remain over whether the overlaps between cultural learning and religious education can so easily be made.

To be sure Jackson does make the point that each act of reflection is personal to each student, and that teachers therefore have a responsibility in each moment to be alert to that as well as providing structured opportunities for reflection. Jackson also suggests that as well as the need for reflection there should also be a place for constructive criticism. The interpretive approach Jackson (2011) claims '… builds upon a positive attitude towards diversity, recognising the encounter of people with different beliefs and cultural practices as enriching in principle, and seeing individual identity as potentially developing through meeting the 'other' ' (p. 6). Furthermore, '(r)eflexivity also involves the learner (or researcher) being able to engage critically with material studied. The management of such critical work is a sensitive pedagogical issue, especially in pluralistic classrooms' (p. 6). Jackson looks back to the ethnographic studies he and his colleagues had earlier undertaken in order to convert some of this earlier data into curriculum material, trying all the while to use the information of 'insiders' to the religion in order to represent the tradition authentically to 'outsiders'. However, if the interpretive approach becomes only a way of approaching objective knowledge of the religious aspect of culture, it may be an approach that has neither the capacity to engage with the inner as well as outer plurality of religion nor to acknowledge the uniqueness of each individual as he intends.

3.2.6 Conclusion

Through my analysis of these three broad areas of concern I note that the interpretive approach, in taking the route it does to move away from both confessional and phenomenological approaches to religious education, may actually be closer to being a kind of cultural education. This is to a large extent because Jackson's work is underpinned predominantly by theory and practice emerging from 20th century anthropologists; drawing especially upon social and ethnographic theory. The lack of clear distinction between religion and culture means that assumptions are made about religion and issues of religious plurality are resolved through recourse to an open approach to epistemology. Further the close connection to anthropology has allowed assumptions that 'reflexivity' and 'edification' are not only possible but also good

things in education, to remain underexposed. This is because questions about the role of education in the public sphere are not asked or fully addressed.   Indeed as Erricker (2013) notes we 'need to be clear then that this approach to religious education is not about the representation of religion, per se. It is about encouraging participation towards to common good in pluralist environments and societies' (p. 78). However on observing that cultures change over time, Jackson notes that '(h)uman beings *actively* make and remake ways of life' (Jackson 1997, p.81). The point Jackson is wanting to make is that the fluidity of the ways in which human beings remake their ways of life in his view serves to emphasise the importance of reflexivity and especially edification not only in people's lives in general but also as an aim for religious education (see Jackson 2004b, p. 7).

The strength of the interpretive approach is its intention to ensure that young people are given an authentic experience of a particular religious tradition because of its intention to allow for the acknowledgment of inner plurality within particular traditions. The approach seeks to enable young people to interpret religion, in part in the manner of an anthropologist, and to make understandings which are their own, which are meaningful and in some way life enhancing, building on theory around the concept of 'edification'. A significant problem for Jackson however, is his insistent claim to be 'epistemologically open' (Jackson 2012a, p.3). He avoids engaging with problems of 'truth' preferring the distancing moves of the anthropologist. However, the model which emerges is neither instructional nor constructivist operating in an unidentified educative place theoretically. Since curriculum materials were limited in scope and founded on underexplored educative assumptions, although widely applied to civic situations in both the UK and Europe, there remain questions about whether this work is educational rather than instructional. The political context within which Jackson sets his approach is a broadly liberal, democratic and multi-cultural and having significant influence on civic social policy in Europe, but the lack of critical engagement with what is really intended in terms of post-enlightenment, means the distinction between the political vision of the enlightenment and conceptualisation of humanism is missed. Finally, the focus on an anthropological approach to religious education leaves this approach with unresolved theological and philosophical questions about precisely how the interpretive approach is distinctive from cultural education; can it be termed religious education at all?

3.3 The critical realist approach

3.3.1 Introduction

In this section I present a second approach to religious education that has come to be known as 'critical religious education' or the 'critical realist approach'. This is as developed by Andrew Wright and his associates, in particular Philip Barnes, whilst at Kings College, London. I then also look at some practical applications before proceeding to identify and discuss three critical challenges the approach faces. I argue that these challenges come as a consequence of assumptions about religion that have led to an emphasis on epistemological problems, in relation to religious plurality, as being the most significant issue facing religious education. This approach, seeks resolution to these perceived epistemological problems through developing theory for religious education based on the social philosophical theory of critical realism. The critical realist approach to religious education does not make close reference to theory in relation to education but to learning theory. As a consequence, I argue this approach is not able to be sufficiently educative.

3.3.2 What is the critical realist approach to religious education?

The critical realist approach to religious education developed as a body of theory over the past 25 years. Wright's proposal begins with the view that at its heart, religious education should be capable of 'empowering children to learn to be responsible and wise as they encounter the vitally important, although extremely dangerous, horizon of religion' (2000a, p.186). In order to do this Wright (2007) suggests that religious education 'should enable students to engage with questions of ultimate truth, and attend to the task of living truthful lives in an informed and critical and literate manner' (p.3). His assertion of the centrality of truth within religions per se, enables Wright to develop an argument for truth as the central concern of religious education itself. This is significant as it points to the philosophical position of this approach. Insisting 'there is a real world existing largely independently of our knowledge of it' (p18) this view forms the basis upon which the proposal is built. Recognising that a distinctive problem for religious education is how to uphold the integrity of many different claims to the absolute correctness of truth, Wright identifies particular philosophical theory through which to develop his approach to religious education. The theory he aligns his work to

is 'critical realism' (see for example Wright 1996, 2004 and 2007). This is in order to find a way to resolve problems emerging in relation to competing religious 'truths', the impossibility of all truths being 'true' and also, as he insists, the untenable possibility of anti-realism (Wright 2004a, p.45). His further point is that while noting that religious education must overcome the problem of how to represent and engage students in an authentic encounter with the views of 'the other' who may hold quite different things to be true, his intention is to develop theory which can at one in the same time respect competing claims. In Religion Education and Post-modernity, Wright (see 2004a) sets out to develop his theoretical argument for critical realism and extracts the concept of 'critical' to formulate what he terms a 'Critical Religious Education'.

This proposal for critical religious education grew out of Wright's work on the 'The Spiritual Education Project' based at Kings College London and operating between 1996 and 2000 (Wright 2000a, p.170). The essence of the Kings project had been outlined earlier by Wright (1993) in 'Religious Education in the Secondary School: Prospects for Religious Literacy'. This work is best understood as part of a stream of theory which developed as religious education responded to the challenge which the charge of confessionalism brought in the 1960's, rather than a response to the phenomenological approach. 'The Spiritual Education Project' had three aims: first to analyse and evaluate the nature of contemporary spiritual education in England and Wales, second to develop an alternative critical rationale and thirdly to present proposals for a new critical pedagogy (Wright 2000a, p.170). Wright (2000a) explains his attempt to construct a 'critical theory for religious education has been developing in two directions. The first is in relationship with the hermeneutical tradition running from Schleiermacher through Dilthey, Husserl and Gadamer to Habermas. The second is through the Spiritual Education Project itself' (p.173). Wright asserts that from the The Spiritual Education Project's report it was possible to identify five pedagogical principles. 1. Critical religious education seeks to do justice to the horizons of religion. 2. Critical religious education must do justice to the horizon of the pupil. 3. Critical religious education seeks to equip pupils to recognise and respond appropriately to power structures inherent in religious and educational discourse. 4. Critical religious education seeks to enable a critical dialogue between the horizon of the child and the horizon of religion. 5. Critical religious education seeks to develop in pupils a religious

literacy rooted in attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness and responsibility (see Wright 2000a, pp.177-180).

A further strand of thinking informing the development of the critical religious education approach, is in relation to questions emerging from the 'extent to which 'modern' religious education reflects and has been shaped by Enlightenment commitments and post-Enlightenment Romantic reinterpretations of religion that locate its essence in the private sphere of immediate experience' (Barnes and Wright 2006, p.65). This is not only regarding the moves religious education made away from 1960's confessionalism, but also significantly to questions emerging from complexities surrounding the concept of truth and truth claims. This has come to the fore especially given the increasing religious plurality in Britain during the second half of the 20th Century. Wright's initial exposition of what he means by the terms 'modernism' and the 'enlightenment' can be found in his earlier writing where he sometimes conflates 'modernism' with the 'enlightenment' (see for example Wright 1997a, p. 10). Asserting that, 'Descartes' trust in the power of reason became the cornerstone' (Wright 2000b, p.12) of the enlightenment, Wright goes on to say that this emphasis on reason brought with it an 'emancipation' from primitive medieval religious superstition. However, his view is that this led to an 'optimistic humanism later linked up with nineteenth century evolutionary theory to create the modern myth of the inevitable intellectual moral and spiritual progress of humanity' (Wright 2000b, p.12).

Wright concludes that the chief legacy of the enlightenment was a set of assumptions and principles which have become the 'mind-set' of modernity (see Wright 2000b, p.16). He lists these as including, individual autonomy, reason as a foundation of knowledge and understanding, a distinction between objective knowledge and subjective belief, priority of science and technology over religion, liberal values of freedom and tolerance and democratic politics (see Wright 2000b, p.17). In this book 'Spirituality and Education', Wright (2005) continues this line of thinking by presenting what he calls four 'major' philosophic traditions that have 'been instrumental in shaping contemporary spirituality' (p. 16). These he suggests are Materialism, Romanticism, Post-modernism and Critical Realism. Romanticism, Wright sees as a 19th Century response to the materialism of the Enlightenment period,

and coming for example from the work of theologians such as Schleiermacher. This he argues, led to a shift towards emphasizing significance of individual religious experience as a source of religious knowledge (see Barnes and Wright, 2006). Wright's (2007a) point is that this in turn later had a strong influence in developing what he calls 'experiential' (p.88) and uncritical approaches to religious education of the 1980's in for example the work of David Hay (see pp.92-93).

Wright suggests that the problems which have come to the present moment from the enlightenment, have led to a distinction being made between reason and experience. Religious education in responding to this has reacted by entering into a period of neo-confessionalism influenced by liberal protestant theology, heavily influenced by a romantic attitude to religion and a romantic hermeneutic. In addition to this a particular 'reading of Wittgenstein has been evoked in support of a postmodern hermeneutic which affirms relativity and denies the possibility of attaining objective truth' (Wright 1997b, p.204). In order to bring greater criticality to religious education as well as avoid the romantic hermeneutical thread running from Schleiermacher to Husserl (Wright 1997b, p. 205), Wright looks to Gadamer because '(w)here romantic hermeneutics has been concerned with the explication of existential meaning, Gadamer's focus is on questions of ontology, realism and truth' (Wright 1998a, p. 60). It is in part through an engagement with the hermeneutical tradition, which he understands to be 'a set of presuppositions regarding the nature of the process of understanding' (Wright 2006 p. 176 and Wright 2007 p.181), that Wright opens a discussion regarding the relationship between the nature of truth, truth claims and truthful living. His intention is to develop theory on how religious education, when moving beyond confessionalism, can retain the integrity of religious truth claims; an integrity which he regards as having been lost in approaches to religious education influenced by 19th Century romanticism. In this category of approaches Wright included the phenomenological approach (see Erricker and Erricker 2000b p. 44).

Wright's key concern to avoid either a return to confessionalism or a resort to relativism leads him to propose theory for religious education, which while facing up to the paradox of working in situations where truth is much contested, can also ensure it is possible to keep central the 'pursuit of truth and cultivation of truthfulness' (Wright 2007, p 103). In addition to this Wright (2008) seeks to resolve questions which he

considers to have emerged from the Enlightenment's emphasis on individualism noting that the 'dislocation of fact from value is largely a product of the Enlightenment' (Wright 2013, p. 296). Since, as he also notes, conceptualizations of truth manifest themselves into some ones' life, questions of truthful living cannot be separated from questions of ultimate truth. His argument proceeds by saying that as religion is interested in the pursuit of ultimate truth therefore religious education should be 'orientated towards the pursuit of truth and truthful living with relation to the ultimate order of things' (Wright 2013, p. 296).

The critical religious education approach, in contrast to experiential approaches to religious education emerging in the 1980's as well as phenomenological or anthropological approaches, can be understood as being 'critical' in at least two ways. The first, in seeking to resolve problems associated with competing 'truth claims', is in relation to ontology, semantics and epistemology (Wright 2007, p.177), and seeks to utilise a critical realist epistemology. Critical realism according to Wright (2007) 'enables us to avoid the traps of either reducing reality to merely the sum of atomistic facts, or to embracing a thoroughgoing scepticism about our ability to know anything of the actual order-of-things' (p.177). Furthermore 'critical realism makes it possible to discern meaning, purpose and intention by asking crucial questions about truth' (p.177). A second way in which the critical religious education approach can be understood as critical is through particular engagement with the critical hermeneutics of Gadamer and Habermas. Gadamer's concern with realistic truth, and his 'insistence that interpretation requires dialogue between the horizon of the text and the interpreter' (Wright 1998a, p.61), enables him to bring together findings of the Spiritual Education Project and hermeneutical theory. However Wright has some difficulty still with Gadamer's hermeneutic as he argues it does not sufficiently take into account the possibility of the 'horizon of the text being false' (Wright 1998a, p. 64). For this reason Wright looks to Habermas' interpretation of Marxist critical theory as a development of Gadamer's thinking, which Wright understands to draw into itself understandings of the communal and social context of language and a commitment to the notion of 'contingent rationality' (Wright 1998a, p. 66). Such an engagement with the social and political context of religious education is something Wright and more recently his close collaborators have opened a discussion, especially in relation to what they see as

the impact of Enlightenment liberalism (see for example Barnes 2010, p.26), on religious education.

Wright asserts that a problem for religious education, following the demise of a confessional approach to the subject, is that religious education has taken the principles of the liberal education tradition too much to heart. He develops his thinking, concerning the political implications of this for religious education, through an exploration of liberalism over a long period (see Wright 2000, 2001b, 2007 and 2010). A consequence of the influence of liberalism Wright maintains, has resulted in religious education having uncritically passed on 'the liberal values of freedom and tolerance' (Wright 1998a, p. 65) and that this has given a tacit message to children that 'it does not matter what you believe' (Wright 2007, p.81). Problems liberalism presents for religious believers have been explored elsewhere (see for example Wolf 1968, pp12-15). Wright (2004) in revisiting the questions looks for a resolution (see p.191) to such difficulties through drawing a distinction between comprehensive and political liberalism (see Wright 2007, p. 31 and Wright 2010, p. 134). Setting this distinction within a context where, '(l)iberalism, at its most basic, embraces the virtues of generosity, tolerance, benevolence, broadmindedness and a certain laissez-faire permissiveness' (Wright 2004a, p.31), he further advances the point that the 'notion of liberalism as a virtuous disposition has a long relationship with education' (Wright 2004a, p.31). Political Liberalism he says 'is concerned to provide a pragmatic solution to the challenge of ordering a plural society in which there is no consensus about the ultimate nature of reality of the meaning of life, and as such functions 'independently of any wider comprehensive religious or philosophical doctrine'' (Wright 2004a, p. 32 and citing Rawls 1993, p. 223). Comprehensive Liberalism, Wright sees as constituting 'a total world view that offers an all-encompassing account of the place of humanity in the world' (Wright 2004a, p.33) and will lead to an ideological position within education where '(a)utonomy would be presented as the highest good, and alternative religious and non-religious visions … relegated to the private sphere of optional belief …' (Wright 2010, p. 135). A school based upon the principles of political liberalism, which Wright advocates, such as those of Locke (e.g. Wright 2007, p.43ff, & 2010, p.135) or John Rawls (Wright 2009, p 45) on the other hand, would 'embrace the principles of freedom and tolerance as a non-absolute interim

ethic designed to enable all faith traditions, … to engage in conversations designed to pursue truth and cultivate truthful living' (Wright 2010, p. 136).

Wright's political and contextual understanding of religion and religious education is consequently linked to an examination of the situation of religion in what he terms 'post enlightenment societies' (see for example Wright 2000, p. 41). He proposes that the enlightenment challenge to religion led, at least in Protestantism, to a 'reinterpretation of religion in terms of inner subjectivity and commitment.' (Wright 2006, p. 67) and according to Wright this forced an unnatural division between the natural and moral universes. Wright's formation of the critical religious education approach is an attempt to make sense of these two universes in the context of religious education. Wright's (2003) means to a resolution of this divide is to bring to centre stage an idea for the 'cultivation of wisdom' (p. 285). He takes this from the classical notion of *paideia* and which he understands to mean 'a complex cognitive stance that includes apprehension and appreciation as well as critical refection and an orientation to practice based on life experience' (Hodgeson 1999, p.7 quoted in Wright 2003, p. 285). Ultimately Wright is looking for a new approach to religious education that can weave back together the divisions between reason and experience he sees as being opened up at the enlightenment, and place this within a contextual understanding of education in a liberal democracy.

3.3.3 Practical developments

Wright's proposals for a critical religious education were intended (see Wright 2000) to be developed into classroom practice. Nevertheless, there has been limited attention given so far to what the critical religious education approach would actually look like in the classroom (see Teece, 2004), supporting Wrights early contention that 'spiritual education has yet to make the fundamental educational move from education-as-advocacy to education-as-critical-understanding' (see Wright 1997). Aware that the transfer of theory into classroom practice is as least as complex as the development of theory itself, Wright none the less asserts that the '*pedagogy of teaching* needs to be proceeded by a focus on the *pedagogy of learning'* (Wright 2007a, p. 237). Wright (2007a) has begun to develop work based upon the Variation Theory of Learning and phenomenography (p. 237). Variation Theory of Learning is an approach to pedagogy that developed within the phenomenographic research tradition (see Hella and Wright

2009, p. 59). Further, it is suggested that variation theory addresses key principles of learning that are 'more fundamental than understanding contested interpretations of an object of learning' (Hella and Wright 2009, p. 59). In addition to this there is the assertion that 'learning cannot be reduced to mere self-expression; on the contrary, there is always an 'object of learning' because learning is always learning of something' (Hella and Wright 2009, p. 59). The variation theory of learning Wright suggests is particularly suited to the critical religious education approach because it assumes that 'learning is an on-going dialogue between the horizon of meaning of the students and of the aspect of religion being taught' (Hella and Wright 2009, p. 60). In addition to this Wright's point is that the linking of the two theoretical positions will enable 'religious educators to recognise the essential unity of learning about and learning from religion' (Hella and Wright 2009, p. 60) and resolve the problems presented for engagement with the plurality of religions through a critical religious education in a liberal context (see Hella and Wright 2009, p. 62).

3.3.4 Critical discussion

In taking forward my critique of the critical religious education approach I consider three interconnected areas of concern, theological, philosophical and educational. The first area of concern arises from the way in which religion is defined. I discuss two closely linked points here; the first is in relation to whether Wright can avoid the accusation of confessionalism as he hopes, the second a response to his critique and resolution of the issues pluralism raises for religious education. Ultimately this leads me to question whether Wright's account of religion is itself sufficient. Critical religious education emerged to a large part in direct response to the collapse of Christian confessionalism and to what Barnes has called confessionalism in another form, namely 'the pluralist doctrine that all religions are valid public expressions of private encounters with the divine' (Barnes 2009, p. 9). The theological problem which the key proponents of critical religious education identify in this kind of pluralism, is that such a view itself is informed by liberal protestant doctrine of the possibility of a universal encounter with the transcendent. Wright's difficulty with this possibility is that since it grants all religions equal validity, it fails to acknowledge seriously enough their different claims to truth. Wright wants to maintain a realist view of truth, albeit a critical realist view, while at the same time wanting to avoid the accusation of confessionalism. My assertion is that in this respect he fails, and rather than avoiding

confessionalism, because of his insistence that religion is constructed as a matter of true versus false claims about knowledge he cannot step aside from a 'compliance with the affirmation of the inherent universal value of religion' (Wright 1997, p.212). This is itself, I would assert, a form of religious confessionalism. Furthermore, despite hoping that his move away from romantic hermeneutics will enable him to bring a greater criticality to the study of religion, it seems to me that this either/or notion of 'ultimate truth' is far more aligned with models of truth seen in traditional forms of Judeao Christian theology, and hence neo-confessionalist, than he gives credence to. My point is that this limits his perspective and capacity to interpret elements of religious significance in other ways of human existence.

Wright's critique of pluralism arises in part from his criticism of the romantic hermeneutic as discussed by John Hick. Teece (see for example 2005) suggests that Wright's criticisms of Hick are unfounded for two reasons. The first is that Hick is not a theological romantic and secondly that it would be mistaken to think that romanticism underpins pluralism in general. It is this second point I wish to pursue here in order to demonstrate that Wright's rejection of pluralism is unfounded. Further, through this, I want to expose what seems to me to be his incomplete vision of what defines religion. Wright places himself into an either/or situation, as I have shown above, not only in relation to truth but also in relation to his insistence that the growth of religious pluralism has 'placed the issue of religious truth in an ambiguous position' (Wright 2007 p. 79). Further he suggests that this has led to traditional assumptions about religion being increasingly questioned. Wright, in discussing the two attainment targets found in many Agreed Syllabuses through the Non -Statutory Framework for RE, suggests that 'learning about' religion although has some engagement with 'ultimate truth' is insufficient. However, the 'learning from' element in his view exemplifies disengagement with the pursuit of truth 'as an end in itself, and a path to personal and social well-being' (Wright 2007, p.71). Thus pluralism for Wright as advanced by Hick will not do. Instead Wright opens a discussion of the slave boy dialogue in Plato's Meno, a method of questioning and recollection he leads his readers to believe he would embed into religious education. This he does to emphasise further his view that a 'concern for ultimate truth, an acceptance of the intimate connection between knowledge and virtue, and an acknowledgement that the pursuit of truth and the practice of truthfulness require strenuous effort guided by appropriate education'

(Wright 2007, p. 72). In other words both learning from religion (the pursuit of truth within religion) and reflecting on and learning from religion should be understood equally in relation to ultimate truth and truth claims.

Wright's approach here, although termed critical religious education, seems to imply a view of religion which has an uncritical acceptance of the essential goodness of religion. In my view this leads to a poorly reflected and far too optimistic attitude to and confidence in the capacity of religion alone to guide human beings to ways of 'truthful living'. Nevertheless, and responding to the challenges presented as he sees it by both modernism and post modernism, Wright (2004) is seeking a path by which he wants to be able to move beyond 'the tyranny of objective knowledge 'and 'the tyranny of subjective opinion' (p.36), arguing that critical realism 'enhanced by a non-dogmatic post-modern commitment to alterity' can tread round 'the quasi-totalitarian claims of post-modern anti-realism' (p.65). Significant to his argument is the centrality of the exploration of truth, and herein lays my key criticism of his position. This is that although an engagement with truth is arguably an important element of religious education, I am not at all clear he is convincing in his insistence that the exploration of ultimate truth is the only significant element of religion itself. Therefore my point is that Wright's interpretation of religion is not a sufficient account of religion. Wright's suggestion that collective intentionality comes before the intentionality of the individual adherents, sets his position clearly, and forms the basis of what could be considered his theological positioning of critical religious education.

Moreover there seems to be a weak link between the way truth is conceptualised and the idea of truthfulness, and also with and the idea of 'truthful living' as currently formulated. The key problem here I would see lying in the limited account of religion itself. By contrast in Hick's thesis, which Wright critiques, personal transformation is at the heart of religion (see for example Hick 1989, 1999). This, taken with Teece's assertion that Hick does offer us a way forward when considering pluralism albeit in a 'soft' way (see Teece 2005, p. 37), Teece (2005) suggests would enable students to study religion 'critically and develop their understanding of what it means to be human in a religiously ambiguous world' (p. 37) and thus merits further examination. Wright makes the point that 'a subjectively committed and objectively rational search for religious truth rests on the cultivation of academic freedom in the classroom …' (p.86)

and further that the students should 'develop appropriate levels of religious literacy through which they can explore issues of ultimate truth and truthfulness in a critical and potential life changing manner' (p. 260). So although Wright (2007) claims that a study of religion must transcend the merely informative, his theological assumptions about the relationship between religion and truth as well as his philosophical assumptions about truth give limited indication of an education proposal for a religious education. However it is to a critique of his philosophical position that I turn next.

Several philosophical dimensions can be identified in Wright's (2007a) strategy for resolving the problems plurality brings for religious education. The philosophical areas he sees involved are related to progression towards understanding the ultimate nature of reality (ontology), the way language is used to express this ultimate reality (semantics), the process of understanding different truth claims (hermeneutics) and the ability to judge between conflicting truth claims (epistemology) (see p. 12). Despite identifying these significant philosophical areas Wright does not bring an entirely philosophical account of religious truth, but returns instead to Christian theological assumptions about the nature of authority and salvation (see Wright 2007a, Part III). This creates problems for Wright when later he wants to develop these ideas in relation to religious education, since he has a limited philosophical position to draw from. Furthermore, it is questionable whether Wright discusses critically enough his decision to rely upon critical realism to resolve questions raised by the plurality of religion. In addition to this, Wright's incomplete theological exposition of the nature of religion adds another problematic layer of assumption to his interpretation of the philosophical questions rising through the enlightenment. The kinds of questions his work raises can be understood as being in terms of the relationship between reason and experience on the one hand and to truth and plurality on the other. Wright (2000), building on the Spiritual Education project as discussed above, asserts that an effective spiritual education will combine a 'hermeneutic of nurture with a hermeneutic of criticism' (p. 176) and further that critical religious education has a commitment to enabling children 'achieve the appropriate levels of spiritual and religious literacy' (p. 186). Furthermore, Wright's claim that '(C)ritical realism questions Descartes dualistic distinction between the material and mental as separate substances' (Wright 2007b, p. 341). In my view this distinction is insufficient to be able to explain what he wants his approach to be able to do with children, since the emphasis in critical realism remains on the observed rather

than the observer. This seems to me to retain the dualism of Plato and Descartes rather than weaving the alternative perspective he is looking for.

There is no doubt that Wright has given his proposal, regarding critical realism's resolution of the matters of plurality in relation to religious truth, extended consideration. He states that he does not want to allow the 'conflict between idealism and nominalism to set the parameters of the debate' (Wright 2007a, p. 153) instead asserting that critical realism can answer questions of whether religion reveals realist expressions of reality or is comprised of social constructs; furthermore he identifies the need to 'penetrate beyond the experiential to identify the forces and structures that make reality what it is' (Bhaskar, quoted in Wright 2007a, p. 154). Nevertheless, another concern is that no alternative to critical realism is examined, for example he does not consider James' more challenging explorations of idealism and how the 'pragmatic method' enables him to question the very assumptions made about the 'rationality of the hypothesis of the absolute' (Woell 2012, p. 128). Even if the issues presented by religious plurality were best resolved through finding a fitting epistemological theory, there should be a more careful examination of alternatives to both absolutist and relativist assumptions about the absolute order. Such an exploration would have strengthened Wright's position and possibly opened alternative avenues for bridging between his philosophical and theological assumptions.

I move now to offer critiques of Wright's educative proposals in relation to the critical religion education approach. My main point is that Wright's focus on truth as being at the heart of religion and his resolution of religious plurality through recourse to a social philosophical theory has had an impact on the capacity of critical religious education to translate into educational practice. In addition to this, and even though the larger part of my critical analysis of Wright's approach to religious education lies in the way he attempts to resolve problems related to religious plurality, I have another and perhaps greater concern in terms of his practical proposal for religious education in the classroom. Here my concern lies in the fact that there is insufficient examination of questions regarding the purpose of education within a plural democracy. Although Wright does look at the relationship between liberalism and religion in society when it comes to considering education, his first move is to look back to the Judaeo, Platonic and Christian traditions rather than to contemporary educational theory. He draws

instead on theological understandings of education in order to bring critique to the post-confessional liberal religious education which has developed in England since the 1960's. His argument for this is that religious education in the liberal tradition has turned its back on that which classical religious education traditions in faith contexts value most – exploration of questions of matters of ultimate truth and measuring success by standards of self-realisation rather than some other external standard (see for example Wright 2007). Wright accepts the two objectives for religious education that emerged from Grimmitt's work (see Hella and Wright 2009, p.54) and the related educational tasks. However, the notion of 'educational tasks' and the assumptions underlying this idea is not fully examined bringing yet further problems into the discussion and, for example, leading to the view that education can be equated with the child's completion of particular tasks, possibly allowing it to fall back into the very trap of advancing individualism that Wright seeks to counter. The fact that there is a lack of coherence between Wright's theory about religion and the variation theory of learning, as I have already mentioned, establishes a critical fault line in his work in relation to educational purpose. Further there is no exploration of how religious education can handle either external or inner plurality of religion in an educative context, independently from a Christian one.

In moving to the close of this section, to be sure the phenomenological movement of the 1960's led in some areas to a narrow transmission of factual material about religion. As Grimmitt (2000a) put this there was 'a narrow descriptive and content-centred approach to teaching RE' (p.28). One response to this was an identification of a more affective dimension of religious education. At the same time there was a growing awareness that religion had the capacity to respond to the existential questions of human living and that this would be hugely relevant to the living of young people, this led to a divide between the knowledge transmission element of religious education and the personal or affective dimension. Edwin Cox identified useful distinctions for religious education in his work (1971, 1983a and 1983b) and opened the way for others, including Wright not to follow the phenomenological route. The Critical Realist approach to religious education should therefore be understood instead to be a response to critiques of the confessional approaches to religious education. This approach recognises Cox's concern that there was a different way of understanding religion for the religious believer compared the non-believer (see Cox 1983b) and further that this

raises questions regarding what kind of understanding should be cultivated in the classroom. It is from here that Wright's religious and philosophical positioning has its origin. In addition, Wright identifies another problem in England, that of a separation between the tradition of the university system and that of the school, appealing for an 'academic rejuvenation of religious education' (Wright 2003, p 282). Nevertheless although he discusses how University education is generally aligned to a higher level of study than schooling, which is associated more with enabling a young person to fit into society, Wright does not address Cox's concern ' that religious education has perhaps more than any other subject to show that it is a worthwhile educational activity' (Cox 1971, p.3). The lack of development of educational theory, as opposed to the linking of the critical realist approach to religious education with a theory of learning, as well as limited practical exemplification of how this is actually going to exist in the classroom . This is sufficient to lead me to have serious concerns about the educative possibilities of his work. The recourse to the variation theory of learning highlights the limits to the 'educational worthwhileness' (Cox 1971, p.3) of religious education so configured.

3.3.5 Conclusion

Wright's approach to religious education is underpinned by a view that a religion is essentially a collection of propositional statements (truth claims) which refer to some kind of actual reality (truth). However these truth claims also impact on the way an adherent lives and in this way contribute to what he calls 'truthful living'. His work was in part a response to the religious education of the 1970's where there was a difficult tension between older confessional approaches to RE and newer phenomenological approaches. Wright seeks to maintain an authentic exploration of truth, truthfulness and truthful-living. However his approach, in looking to critical realism in order to resolve epistemological and ontological complexities related to the plurality of religious belief, in fact raises other questions. This particular attempt at a philosophical resolution to the problem he sees of competing truth claims, without sufficient engagement with educational theory, I argue leads an incomplete exposition of what religious education should aim to achieve. The broad aim of his approach is that religious education should engage young people with religious truth claims in a way that can contribute to their own exploration of truthful living. Nevertheless, since the educational dimension of the critical realist approach to religious education is weakly formulated, there is a limited basis for the development of proposals regarding

what is actually to take place in public educational contexts. Theory, especially in relation to religion, remains separate from educative practice.

A strength in this approach is that some political considerations have been examined. For example Wright makes distinctions between comprehensive and political liberalism. Nevertheless, in relation to religious education there remain serious questions about the capacity of liberalism as configured by Wright to deal with the question of plurality at all. The conception of freedom in relation to his approach to religious education has been rooted in an epistemological or ontological understanding rather than one in relation to education in the public sphere, and so has limitations. I argue that the limited exploration of the educative implications of different conceptualisations of liberalism within a plural democracy has weakened his proposal. This is because the lack of critical engagement with the practical shortcomings of his approach in relation to education means the educative consequences of the critical realist approach remain underexplored. His reliance on critical realism as an epistemological theory capable of resolving the problems raised by religious plurality brings with it a particular view of knowledge and knowing, which places that which is to be known at the centre of the locus of concern. Taken together this has led to an over emphasis on content, on the externals of religion in his proposal. Discussion of the relationship between the child and her teacher is absent and the accusation of neo confessionalism has not been answered. This is despite extensive hermeneutical explorations, and is as a consequence of both the under exploration of educational theory as well as overreliance on the philosophical theory of critical realism. I remain concerned regarding the extent to which his proposals for religious education can actually be educative.

Chapter 3.4: The conceptual enquiry approach

3.4.1 Introduction

In this section, I present a third approach to religious education that has come to be known as the conceptual enquiry approach, and as developed principally by Clive Erricker County Inspector/Adviser for religious education in Hampshire until 2009. I then give an account of how this has worked out in practice before moving to a critical discussion of the religious, philosophical and educative aspects of this approach. I raise concerns with regard to whether assumptions regarding religion and education ensure there are some unforeseen limitations of this approach, especially as developed into the Hampshire Agreed Syllabus in 2004 and revised in 2009. In particular, whether the approach has the capacity to respond to the challenge of relativism and whether this in turn may raise questions about its educative possibilities.

3.4.2 What is the Conceptual enquiry approach to religious education?

Erricker's explorations in religious education began with the earliest publications linked to The Chichester Project. This sought a process for teaching Christianity in the English secondary school, one capable of placing the teaching of Christianity firmly 'within the context of a world religions approach' (Brown 2000, p. 68). It was a research project with wide practical and theoretical support and its' aims evolved initially from a paper written in 1976 by Edward Hulmes and Ninian Smart   (see Brown 2000, p. 53). Hulmes along with Cox and Smart had already been instrumental in discussing the need for a new kind of religious education in the public sphere, following the 'discrediting of confessionalism' (Barnes and Kay 2000, p.5). As part of the Chichester Project, Erricker was interested to develop an approach to the teaching of Christianity where children and young people could realise and respond to the diversity within Christianity, both theologically as well as anthropologically. Observing that children were aware that not all Christians' 'faith is acted out in the world' (Erricker 1987, p.30) in the same way, he wanted religious education to be able to acknowledge both the internal theological diversity of particular religious traditions as well as the differences which are present in the way religious people live. Later, during his time as County Inspector/Adviser, Erricker had an opportunity to develop an agreed

syllabus for Hampshire as in Living Difference (2004) and later Living Difference revised 2011 (2011) that aimed to develop the capacity to be aware of diversity in the way envisaged in his earliest work. The approach to religious education, that came to be known as the conceptual enquiry approach and embedded into Living Difference and Living Difference revised 2011, should be understood to be drawing on the entire body of Erricker's work developed since the 1980's, including the findings of the Children and World Views Project (Erricker, Erricker, Ota and Sullivan, 1997).

The report of the Children and World Views Project published in 1997 (see Erricker, Erricker, Ota, Sullivan, and Fletcher, 1997) was initially prompted and continued to be influenced by several observations, including that religious education had become too content led and that it paid insufficient attention to the capabilities and experiences of children and young people. Key observations made by the report raised concerns that fell into three broad areas and which Erricker has taken up in the conceptual enquiry approach. First there was concern in response to the phenomenological approach to religious education which was felt to pay 'insufficient attention to the experiences of the learner as part of the model of enquiry' (Erricker, C. and Erricker J. 2000a p. 188). Secondly concerns arising from developments in educational thinking and policy at the time and in particular a desire to show 'what children are capable of by drawing on their own experience and seeking to make sense of it' (Erricker 2010, p. 72). Thirdly, and in relation to the second, Erricker sought to advance a particular view of the teacher child relationship considered necessary for 'good curriculum learning' (Erricker and Erricker 2005, p.189). Erricker was at pains to learn from other subject areas, for example history (Erricker 2010, p. 99 quoting Stern 2006, p.8), in order to clarify the domain of subject knowledge as well as enabling a focus on pedagogy over specific knowledge.

The 'pedagogical process' (Erricker 2010, p. 94) of the conceptual enquiry approach, as exemplified in the Hampshire Agreed Syllabus for religious education (2004 and 2011), also intends to be 'an approach to effective learning in religious education' (Erricker 2010, p. 71). In outlining what he means by 'effective learning' Erricker (2010) suggests that 'we must pay careful attention to the learning processes and its progression and particular techniques for learning (p.94). The idea of concepts having a significant place in structuring the content of religious education was not original to

Erricker. Cooling (1994) had also advocated such an approach to religious education, where the unpacking of the meaning of the Christian concept for Christians was the starting point of the process. However there was a difference as to why they looked to the unpacking of the meaning of concepts; whereas Erricker was motivated by an interest to engage with children's learning, Cooling's (1994) motivation was to 'develop a strategy which wins the confidence of both' (p. 14) educationalists and faith communities. Nevertheless, a further agreement between Cooling and Erricker was that teaching through concepts was a good idea since 'most subjects are comprised of concepts' (p.6). Both Erricker and Cooling were taking into account a Westhill report which found that 'concepts are the main focal point of any educational programme, concepts helps us to make sense of what we observe and encounter in particular religions' (Rudge 1991, p.23). However Erricker saw himself at variance with both Cooling and Wright (Erricker 2010, p. 61) in their focus on epistemological questions regarding truth, and their intention to place theological perspectives more centrally. Erricker wanted to place the life of the child at the centre of concern for religious education and the conceptual approach he developed, through an enquiry into concepts, sought to articulate this intention in a practical way.

The concepts which are to be the focus for student's enquiry, were initially classified into three broad *types*: Type A concepts, used by religious and non-religious people alike (e.g. love, community, celebration, belonging), Type B concepts used by religious people across several different traditions (e.g. god, worship, prayer, karma) and Type C concepts distinct to particular religions (e.g. Umma, Sanga, The Body of Christ). The notion of a typology of concepts was modified into a looser idea of 'groups of concepts' in the 2011 revision of Living Difference. In addition to clarifying methodology Erricker (2010) attempts to deal with what he sees as two important aspects which have emerged for him from his own analysis of the history of religious education: narrative and hermeneutics (see p. 71). By narrative he means an approach that gives attention to young people's personal narrative and by hermeneutics he is referring as he puts it to 'how the connection between the learner and the subject material can best be established' (p. 71). His approach to narrative leads him to what he sees as a radical reassessment of traditional ideas in education, including those of knowledge and learning. Erricker's intention is to 'articulate a clear response' (p.20) to questions regarding the purpose of religious education where there is emphasis on the

'narrative of the child' rather than the 'grand narratives' (see Erricker and Erricker 2000b). In particular a perspective that is 'concerned with human narratives rather than doxic truths or the teaching of 'world religions' (Erricker and Erricker 2000b p. 131).

In developing his account of 'narrative' Erricker draws from among others Lyotard (Erricker and Erricker, 2000a, p. 108 and 2000b, pp. 66-69) and identifies his theoretical position as being part of a particular post-modern understanding of knowledge. By specifically introducing the dilemmas and criticisms of postmodernity he means the 'critics of the project of modernity itself with its over-arching grand narrative' (Erricker 2010, p. 5). From this he concludes that a constructivist position regarding knowledge acquisition is needed, which he says 'is not dissimilar to Grimmitt's constructivist method in approach' (Erricker 2010 p.65, from Grimmitt, M. 1987b). Erricker (see 2010) sees the model advanced in Living Difference as having a 'conceptual nature' in its progression and by this he means that the conceptual investigations in the classroom provide the framework for the construction of knowledge and understanding. Erricker alerts us to contemporary tensions in RE which have arisen from the legacy of the unique relation religious education has to the Christian Churches since the formation of a national education system. Quoting Grimmitt, Erricker reminds his readers that 'religious educators are essentially 'secular' educators concerned with the educational value of studying religion and religions' (Grimmitt 1987b, p. 258 quoted in Erricker 2010, p. 63). Erricker seeks to make a contrast between his work and the dilemmas faced by other religious educators who are entangled in the problematic of the religious material itself because of their focus on the subject matter of religious education. Erricker on the other hand sees his purpose in a different way in terms of framing a clear pedagogy which can rectify inadequacies in other theories of religious education. However, despite interest in knowledge acquisition remaining in the methodology, he proposes the view that knowledge is best acquired through an enquiry into concepts. It is clear that this is intended to be an approach that is focused on the child and can therefore be 'wholly relevant to the development of young people as its foremost aim' (Erricker 2010, p. xii).

A further intended outcome of the Children and Worldviews Project (1997) was the development of a line of argument for 'putting the spiritual education of the learner, from a 'heretical' point of view, at the centre of what we seek to achieve' (Erricker

2000b, p. 11). The heresy to which Erricker is referring, is an opposition to the idea that, 'values can only be derived from religious truth claims in particular, or from epistemologies in general' (Erricker 2000b, p.58). This kind of religious education, he asserts 'is pedagogically restrictive and damaging' (Erricker 2000b, p.58). Erricker (2000b) goes on to say that it is necessary to go beyond a view of religious education that supports a particular kind of values education or one which focuses on truth claims or epistemology in terms of religious knowledge at all. Instead he suggests it is necessary to 'go beyond religious education and embrace relativism to establish an appropriate form of spiritual education that in turn embraces, rather than instructs, young people and the plurality of cultural experiences and values' (p. 58). This will therefore be in opposition to an approach to religious education which focuses on the acquisition or even exploration of a realist representation of knowledge. Erricker looks to a very different understanding both of knowing and knowledge, shifting the locus of attention from the matter to be known to the child. He therefore intends to centre the key concern of religious education away from ontological or epistemological matters to the unfolding of meaning in the life of the child.

In explaining what he means by this Erricker (2000b) in chapter 4 of *Restructuring Religious, Spiritual and Moral Education* quotes Vygotsky on the unfolding movement of thought 'which is what we are now invited to attend to as our educational task, we cannot speak of a final product, that is, point at which 'knowledge' is established. Rather we must speak of an utterance (a 'performative action') that makes us aware of the point or site of understanding – the location – in the process" (Vygotsky 1987, p.250, quoted in Erricker 2000b, p 71). Erricker's (2000b) aim in the conceptual enquiry approach to religious education is to move the discussion towards an interest in the subject who has faith (see page p. 76) arguing that such an 'understanding suffices as the basis of spiritual and moral education because it is the basis of community' (p. 77). This view of the educational place of religious education is reaffirmed in recent writing (for example Chater and Erricker, 2013) since the development of 'Living Difference' in 2004.

More recently and in clarifying what religious education can offer young people, without which the curriculum would be impoverished, Erricker (2010) makes it clear

that in his view 'religious education is derived from religious studies' (p. 95). The emergence of the phenomenological approach 'from a reductionism of the writings of Ninian Smart' (p. 95) enabled the idea that 'students should empathise with religions' bracketing out their own perceptions and value systems which Erricker recognises as originally being promoted in the phenomenological writings of Edmund Husserl. Nevertheless, Erricker observes that all too often the purpose of religious education has been positioned extrinsic to the child, leading to problems for religious educators who have found themselves having to defend the supposed positive contributions of religion and its values. This has taken the focus of religious education away from critical engagement with an enquiry into key the themes or concepts intrinsic to its understanding. Erricker's (2010) approach to religious education is that it should have 'both intrinsic and extrinsic educational aims, for example understanding of religious perspectives and behaviour and the development of student's capacities and skills' (pp.76-77). This is in order to give the subject direction in terms of what he calls a 'discipline'. Devising a methodology which will ensure the discipline has 'relevance to children's experience and narratives' (p.95), will ensure that the discipline of religious education will also contribute to extrinsic (by which he means for example educational) aims (see p.96). It is at this point that Erricker looks to current developments in educational policy and practice in other curriculum areas and looks to bring religious education to some extent into line.

A significant move, in the agreed syllabus development of Living Difference (2004) at this time, was to in part emulate the National Framework for religious education by having a clear target for attainment. However instead of the 'learning from' and 'learning about' targets which came from Grimmitt's work of the 1980's and discussed earlier in this thesis, Erricker proposed a single attainment target. This attainment target was intended to weave together both intrinsic and extrinsic elements of religious education whilst at the same time keeping the focus on the child and not the knowledge. The target looks at children and young peoples' progress in religious education in terms of their being able 'to interpret religion in relation to human experience' (Living Difference, 2004) and this remained the same following the revision of the Hampshire agreed syllabus known as Living Difference revised (2011). Erricker reiterates the constructivist theory underpinning the practical work placing this clearly in contrast to instructional models; Erricker (2010) proceeds to identify three

'specific criteria' (p. 80) which he suggests underpin constructivism. The first of these is 'enquiry' and this 'involves students actually carrying out an enquiry supported by their teacher' (p. 80). The second of these is 'Conceptuality' which he says 'involves focussing the enquiry on one key concept throughout the enquiry process' (p. 80) and thirdly 'Integrity' which 'involves ensuring that the key aspects of the pedagogy are intimately and explicitly related to each other' (p. 80).

3.4.3 Practical developments

In designing an Agreed Syllabus for religious education, Erricker (2010) saw that the 'development of pedagogical purpose was imperative' (p. 81). However in order to reach as many teachers as possible, it could not be based upon one philosophical or epistemological position. Understanding pedagogy to mean 'the relationship between theory and practice' (p.77), he considered that pedagogic principles have to be inclusive, to refine teachers' understanding of the subject and not be merely instructional. The Hampshire agreed syllabuses of 2004 and 2011 both contain a clear statement of the purpose of religious education including: To support students in developing their own coherent pattern of values and principles. To support their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. To encourage them to interpret and respond to a variety of concepts, beliefs and practices within religions and their own and others' cultural and life experiences. To develop the capacities to interpret, evaluate and respond to differing values and beliefs … through extending their thinking and analytical skills and their creative, imaginative and emotional development.
To foster mutual understanding between students of differing religious and cultural backgrounds.

In addition to this the single attainment target mentioned above is supported in this approach by a method of enquiring into concepts. Erricker considers a methodology to be 'a procedural instrument. As such it is to be identified as a pedagogic strategy dependent upon and consistent with pedagogic principle and procedure already established' (p.82). The method must be followed systematically (p.82) and the figure here represents the enquiry methodological process with two possible starting points.

A methodology for enquiry into concepts
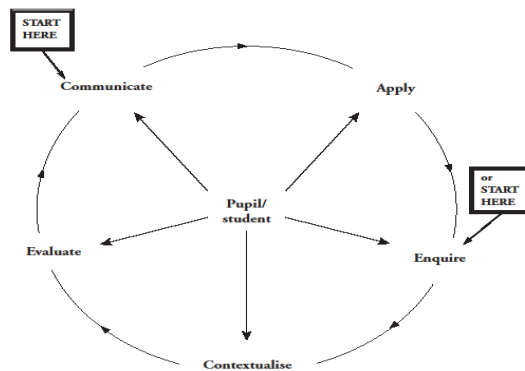
At the 'communicate' step students are introduced the concept and invited to make a response to it from their own experience. At the 'apply' step students apply these different responses to situations in their own lives, society and the wider world. These first two steps Erricker understands as relating to Grimmitt's idea of Preparatory Pedagogical Constructivism (Grimmitt 2000, p.47 quoted in Erricker 2010 p. 83). Supposing the concept for the enquiry was the concept of 'sacred', at the 'enquire' step the teacher will introduce meanings and understandings of the concept from for example the Jewish tradition. This corresponds to Grimmitt's second stage of 'Direct Pedagogical Constructivism' (Erricker 2010 p. 83). Erricker discusses how the movement between the 'apply' and 'enquire' steps enable students to be confronted with the item of religious content directly. The next two steps of 'contextualise' and 'evaluate' correspond to Grimmitt's third constructivist stage which he calls 'Supplementary Pedagogical Constructivism' (Grimmitt 2000a, p.47-48 quoted in Erricker 2010, p. 85). Here the Jewish understanding of the concept of sacred is 'contextualised' within a specific example or case study, perhaps the Torah. This will be the kind of exploration that would reveal issues and implications 'with regard to what makes the Torah Sacred and in what ways its sacredness might seem to be diminished or adaptable' (Erricker 2010, p. 85). The evaluate step is itself in two part where students are enabled to make a critical evaluation of the concept both from within the context as for example by responding to a question such as 'Why is the concept of sacred important for Jews?' as well as outside the context by responding to

the question 'To what extent is the concept of sacred important today?'. Erricker sees all steps of this enquiry model as constructivist, including the step at which the religious information is introduced. The enquiry in the Living Difference methodology as Erricker (2010) explains it, is 'firmly rooted in its developmental function for students. This remains the case whether the concept in focus is of type A … B … or C …' (p 86).

3.4.4 Critical Discussion

In this section I look at three particular areas of concern raised by Erricker's work. The first is in relation to his approach to religion, which invites a religious as well as philosophical critique, and the second closely aligned to this is his approach to how religion is to be brought into educative contexts. The third area is his approach to classroom practice or pedagogy, which Erricker has indicated he would like to treat separately from his way of conceptualising religion. In order to understand how Erricker is conceptualising religion in the conceptual enquiry approach to religious education it is necessary to look outside both manifestations of it in the agreed syllabuses Living Difference or Living Difference revised 2011. In a paper 'Children's spirituality and postmodern faith' Erricker (2007) seeks to make a distinction between religion 'understood as doctrinal formula, with its concern for knowledge, political ends and power, and faith as a possibility within an environment of uncertainty' (p.51). He further points out (see p. 52) that the terms religion and faith are usually thought as relational in some way, but he wants to 'create a rupture' (p. 52) between the two concepts. This is because he proposes the two concepts are quite different, with religion linked far more with ideas of knowledge and reality, concepts which he understands as being far away from that of faith. Faith by comparison, and drawing on insights of Derrida and Kierkegaard should be located in the 'every day' (p. 58) and more closely linked with spirituality. In an earlier paper Erricker (2001a) outlines religions as 'institutionalized structures that conserve and maintain tradition, act as political bodies that necessarily are concerned with matters beyond the faith of individuals relating to the way in which they make sense of the meaning and purpose of their lives for themselves' (p. 34) again wanting to see faith and spirituality as not necessarily having any link with this. This way of approaching religion and distinguishing between faith spirituality and religion he regards as being 'postmodern'; arguing for a postmodern spiritual education where the 'educator used narration (the exchange of experiences) as

a vehicle towards faith, based upon the development of young people's convictions' (Erricker 2007, p. 59).

Wright (2001a), in giving a critique of Erricker's conception of a 'postmodern spiritual pedagogy' (p.120), argues 'that it is incoherent on its own terms and, as a result, both internally unstable and vulnerable to external attack' (p. 120). This is for example because although Erricker recognises there are problems with knowledge, however instead of looking to theoretical resolutions of this reaches to a 'postmodern fire' (p. 120), which Wright suggests means he misses opportunities for developing his theory more coherently. What is likely to follow therefore from Erricker's analysis of religion, is an element of risk in the way religion is to be represented in the classroom. This is perhaps further complicated since Erricker's position (see for example Erricker 2010, p.9) is that the means of studying religion in educational contexts including in religious education should be derived from and directly linked to religious studies. The risk I take from this comes from his suggesting that religion, which he has linked with knowledge and reality, is the kind of thing that has to be studied in a particular kind of way. The risk is that once again religion is positioned as content driven and the content becoming once more objectified. Erricker does look to Kierkegaard for an explanation of faith in relation to religion and knowledge, but does not follow this through in any detail into his model of religious education. Theology or theological enquiry is understood as only one possible way to study religion, rather being able to reveal anything of particular value. It appears then that not only are there underexposed assumptions regarding religion in Erricker's view of religion in religious education, but also possibly in addition to this as Cooling (2002) asserts Erricker's 'discussion of the status of human narratives reveals a marked ambivalence … to institutional religion and its attendant orthodoxies' (p. 108).

Other methods Erricker (2010) suggests could be available to religious education would include anthropology, sociology, history; philosophy and psychology (see p. 44). Erricker's intention in settling on such a broad approach to the study of religion is that it will enable a framing of the edges of the discipline of religious education. However since Erricker does not give acknowledgement to the different theoretical positions of these disciplines, and that the theoretical perspectives they have could in fact be in conflict, in my view serves only to add to the complexity and lack of clarity of what is

meant by religion in religious education in the conceptual enquiry approach as originally configured. The motivation for trying to agree the boundary of the discipline Erricker says is in order to be able to fit in with other subject areas in the 'common' school (p. 17). However what seems likely to occur with this approach to religious education is that the boundary between religious education and other areas of study will be further confused. This is because in seeking the boundary through engaging with differing means of studying religion, since they themselves may have different theoretical positioning , for example in relation to the boundaries between religion and culture in fact leaves religious education open to confusion with other activities in schools such as history, psychology, sociology or personal and health education.

Erricker (2010) was however concerned by what he considers as the scientifically 'orientated secularism of mass western education' (p.16) citing the findings of the Runnymede Trust Report (for example see Berkley and Vij, 2008). This report which examined religious education in faith schools, recommends key ways in which faith schools can contribute positively to the English education system. Erricker notes that to implement these findings would require a radical reorientation of the 'vision of faith schools' (Erricker 2010, p. 19) because they too often display an 'insular and absolutist approach to faith' (Erricker 2010, p. 19). Linking all this to his previous research into spiritual development he notes 'spirituality is not commonly a part of the educational lexicon of teachers in state schools' (Erricker 2010, p.20). His view is that neither religious education in faith schools nor in the non-denominational state school has an adequate sense of 'its contribution to the primacy of overall educational goals based on the development of young people'. In addition to this Erricker's (2010) view is that religious education can make a difference   'in relation to what a 'religiously literate' student will be able to achieve – (to) how that quality would make a difference to them as a person' (p.67). However, Erricker is also clear that to do this meaningfully would require 'a new vision for state education … and a clear understanding of the role of religious education within that' (p. 20). So although Erricker's intention is to identify that new vision for religious education in education within in the public sphere, or the 'common school' as he determines is needed, it is not clear to me how his argument regarding religion or education reveal precisely how his approach will achieve what he hopes.

In making my second broad critique, that is in relation to philosophical issues of Erricker's approach to religious education, I begin by pointing out that a consequence of him insisting religion is concerned with knowledge and reality necessitates him having an ontological as well as epistemological position in relation to religion. That Erricker's (2000a) position is relative he makes clear when he says that '(t)he first principle that underpins a narrative pedagogy' (p.194), 'is that all 'knowledge' is relative' (194). Looking to Lyotard, Erricker (see 2000b) emphasises that value judgements are made on the basis of custom, and are in this sense a construction. At this point Erricker links closely with the work that Grimmitt (1987, p. 109ff) had already undertaken in relation to constructivist thinking in religious education. From this point, Erricker moves to assert that the primary educational aim of religious education is to 'attend to the construction of self in community' (Erricker and Erricker 2000b, p. 131).

In proceeding to develop his relativist position on the relationship between religion and education, Erricker (2000b) suggests that the educational purpose of religious education is not only the child's construction of knowledge, but also of themselves in relation to their own community. Knowledge constructed in the classroom will be on the understanding that it is 'fluid, contingent and constructed by the narration of stories' (p. 109). Erricker sees religious education understood in this way as an ethical project in terms of the formation of the self, but he insists that this is a self that is also 'fluid and contingent' (p.113). Theologically, philosophically and now educationally the key questions I have for Erricker are in relation to constructivism, that is to say how this is understood in particular in relation to religion in religious education as well as in relation to the educative purpose of religious education in relation to the child. This is because although the construction of the individual is with the purpose of developing community, because it is taking place in school it is therefore happening separately in some kind of communal isolation. One problem is that Erricker does not give a clear account of the relationship he envisages between the individuals who are together constructing their identities. Furthermore there is no political discussion in his work about the role of education in the public sphere, instead Erricker moves at this point to explaining developmental models of self; such as those of Piaget and Kohlberg (see Erricker and Erricker 2000b). My point is that since these are in the main psychological perspectives on the concept of the self or the child in relation to the other, there is an

absence of an argument in relation to education. That is to say there is an absence regarding what it is that education in general should do or aim to achieve in the public sphere, therefore there is no particular positioning or explanation of what it is that religious education in particular should aim to achieve in regard to the public sphere.

My final critique is to consider whether in the context of the classroom, Erricker's proposal for conceptual enquiry can therefore bring about what he hopes. Erricker has settled upon concepts to be studied in religious education. This has resonance with the work of Trevor Cooling and his ideas about 'concept cracking'; however Erricker does not mention Cooling in his later expositions of Conceptual Enquiry (2010). Possibly this is because of the theological gulf between Erricker's post-modern constructivist approach to religion in religious education and the theological work of Cooling. Constructivism undoubtedly presents some problems to religion and religious education as conceptualised by Erricker, highlighted in this approach by Erricker's insistence on a post-modern deconstructive perspective on religion. In my view his position on religion is fragile in the large part because of his relativist position. Furthermore, the point I want to highlight in relation to my longer argument is that therefore the conceptual enquiry approach to religious education, as presently configured, is unlikely to be able to give a strong enough account of the significance of plurality. Erricker's position on religion has both philosophical and theological problems and in turn these lead also to difficulties in relation to education as well. Thus his approach to religion, far from resolving some of the problems of representation which Jackson identified, ensures the relationship between educational subject (the child) and the new material being presented to the child is not clear. This is in a large part because the approach places such a great significance on the role of narrative, both problems from assumptions regarding the existence of grand narratives of religion as well as the lack of detail around how any of these relate to the narrative of the child.

Despite having to face critique in these three areas, the conceptual enquiry approach has several strengths. The first being that it is the only approach to religious education considered here that has systematically attempted to resolve the relationships between a conception of religion and religion in the educative context. This is because in the development of the approach educative considerations have been taken into account, especially in relation to the methodology for teaching. The conceptual enquiry

approach to religious education enabled Erricker to move the locus of religious education to the educational subject, the child, although the way in which this is argued reveals the need for further work to be undertaken regarding the relationship between the educational subject and religion. Therefore, in particular there seem to be some remaining problems within this approach in relation to both religion and education and importantly to how these positions relate together theoretically. Erricker has opened up a different set of epistemological problems from either Jackson or Wright enabling new light to be shed on existing difficulties faced by religious education. Nevertheless, I have aimed to show here that insufficient consideration of the ways in which different theoretical positions and narratives relate to each other, has made sure that considerations about why working these things out precisely might matter in the public sphere have been missed.

3.4.5 Conclusion

The conceptual enquiry approach to religious education emerged in reaction to the phenomenological approach influential since the 1970's. Erricker's foremost concern regarding the phenomenological approach however was not in relation to the representation of religion itself but to the way in which it seemed to pay 'insufficient attention to the experiences of the learner as part of the model of enquiry' (Erricker and Erricker 2000a, p. 188). Erricker's thinking as this developed into the Hampshire agreed syllabus, Living Difference (2004), therefore sought to advance a particular view of the teacher-child relationship considered necessary for good curriculum learning. The significance of identifying pedagogy and not just the knowledge to be transmitted had been recognised during the decade leading up to 2004 and was seen in the redevelopment of the English National Curriculum, and later paralleled in the non-statutory framework for Religious Education. Erricker sought, in the conceptual enquiry approach, to devise a methodology for religious education which is congruent with contemporary practice in schools, and where the epistemological and philosophical principles underpinning his analysis of religion were somehow distinct from the pedagogical processes and procedures. Erricker (2010) concludes that his approach is constructivist in a broad way; the big aim being to develop a process that is not only theoretically grounded but also in line with national thinking on pedagogy in relation to contemporary policy and practice, as well as being easily accessible for

teachers (see p. 79). It should be able respond affirmatively to the question regarding whether the pedagogy can 'translate from theory effectively into a learning process which is accessible to teachers and offer a clear definition of progression which can ensure effective planning, teaching and learning and assessment' (p. 80).

The strength of Erricker's approach is its awareness of the need to have an educative focus. Erricker gives much more attention to educative matters in his work than can be seen in the work of either Jackson or Wright. However emphasis on a constructivist approach to learning still ensures some questions remain regarding the theory of religion underpinning the conceptual enquiry approach. This is because a constructivist view of education that suggests it is possible to build different meanings is likely to lead to a relativistic view of religion in the public space. In addition to this, Erricker's intention was to keep these two significant elements of religious education apart, but in seeking to identify and separate the 'subject matter' of religious education from the process, it is possible that the process becomes far more instrumental than was intended. In addition there is a problem in the way the individual narratives of the children are given pre-eminence; I have noted that insufficient attention is given to the possibilities of the dialogue and the consequent inter-subjectivity realisations through narrative relationships. In addition to this the role of the teacher is underdeveloped. However the most critical questions for the conceptual enquiry approach to religious education, as developed by Erricker, arise principally from both the heavy reliance on constructivist model of learning as a basis of a model of education as well as reliance on post modernism as a theory underpinning the view of religion. Taken together the result is that this approach will need to respond to the challenge of relativism. And this, I will argue, can never be resolved so long as the educational and religious underpinnings remain the same. This is because the consequence is that they do not offer a good enough basis to take religious pluralism seriously. So although the conceptual enquiry approach to religious education gives a valuable framework for religious education, I assert it still needs further development of theory in relation to what it means to be religious and to actually live a religious life. This is because as it stands religion is treated in an objective manner. This objectification of religion therefore serves to constrain the ways in which this approach can be said to be educative despite the best of intentions of its author.

3.5   Overall conclusion to chapter 3

This chapter has made an opportunity for me to interrogate further, assumptions which have persisted in religious education in relation to both religion and education. I have undertaken this through a detailed investigation of three current and influential approaches to religious education each of which attempt to address problems raised by confessional and phenomenological approaches to religious education. The three proposals analysed in this chapter have each highlighted in different ways for example the consequences of religion in religious education being only partially conceptualised. My interrogation of the three approaches to religious education has revealed that each acknowledge the importance of considering carefully how religion is to be represented in the classroom. Nonetheless, since each conceptualise religion in different ways, there continues to be no agreement precisely about what is to be done in terms of that representation. Therefore one conclusion I draw from this chapter is the need to gain further clarity on ways in which religion can be conceptualised and conclude that doing so will be important for the future development of religious education.

The second concern emerging from my investigation through this chapter is a lack of agreement regarding what it is that religious education is understood to be able to do or should aim to achieve educatively. In chapter 2 it became clear that a consequence of placing knowledge at the centre of religious education resulted in a lack of focus on the educational subject. I have found that one consequence of the focus on knowledge has been that discussions in religious education have been located predominantly in epistemological or ontological discussions about religion and religious differences in terms of truth. Such discussions in religious education in general are then orientated around dealing with differences which are perceived as a difficulty or problem to be overcome by some means or other. This can be seen for example in Jackson's insistence on 'epistemological openness' (Jackson 2012a, p. 3) and Wright's resort to critical realist theory. Wright's approach to religious education has been firmly located in ontological and epistemological concerns and his educational proposals equated to a theory of learning. Erricker on the other hand seeks a resolution by focusing on difference, holding a relativist view of knowledge and positioning his work both epistemologically and educationally linked to a constructivist approach to learning.

There can be little doubt that a distinguishing element of and strength in Erricker's position, is that he places the child at the centre of his educative proposal. However there is still a weakness here. This is because the way he engages with educational theory, does not enable him to sufficiently conceptualise the educational subject or precisely engage with what it is that the teacher should do in relation to the child; leading instead to a discussion regarding learning. Overall then the big point I want to make from my investigation through the whole of chapter 3 is that mistakes made in the conceptualisation of religion have ensured discussions about education have in the main been limited to disagreements about learning about knowledge. The argument I am building here is that questions regarding clarity in relation to both religion and education must be addressed. Doing just this is what forms the next two chapters of my thesis. Although Jackson, Wright and Erricker may have sought to respond to one or other concerns to some extent, I have uncovered that each proposal is in some way incomplete because in each case there is not a thorough consideration of both and especially not in relation to each other. I conclude from this chapter that assumptions in respect of both religion and education remain and have led to lack of clarity on these matters in the different approaches to religious education. Furthermore I want to suggest that this has contributed to confusion regarding what can be said about what it is religious education should aim to achieve in the public sphere. In addition to this, and linking with chapter 2, I have observed that the assumptions which I have identified through my detailed study in the work of Jackson, Wright and Erricker are also continuing to inform current policy reports such as that of Clarke & Woodhead (2015), Dinham & Shaw (2015) and the Report of the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life (2015).

Over the next two chapters I begin to lay out my argument for a new conceptualisation of religious education, taking up first in chapter 4 the need for clear discussion about religion and in chapter 5 the need for a clear discussion of education. I proceed now in chapter 4 through considering not yet another definition of religion, but through presenting three structurally different answers to the question as to what it means to be religious. In chapter 5 I intend to bring some clarity to what it is that education should do, and, in chapter 6 I bring findings from chapter 4 and 5 together in order to first briefly re-examine Jackson, Wright and Erricker, before presenting a new proposal for what it is that religious education should aim to achieve in the public sphere.

Chapter 4: What does it mean to be religious?

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I take up the need for a clear discussion about religion. In discussing three different conceptions of religion I present three structurally different answers to the question as to what it means to be religious. The first conception sees being religious as a matter of having beliefs and asserting that these beliefs are true. The second conception sees being religious as a matter of practice, that is, as conducting one's life according to certain rules or traditions. Here being religious is not a matter of having certain beliefs, but as conducting one's life in a certain way – and in its 'pure' form this happens without ascribing to any beliefs. The third conception sees being religious in terms of existence, that is, as a particular way of leading one's life. What distinguishes this conception from the second conception is that this is precisely not seen in terms of following a certain tradition or rule, but as a way of existing and leading one's life that is beyond and without rules. What distinguishes it from the first conception is that there are also no beliefs involved, at least not if beliefs are seen as propositions (part of the difference hinges on different translations of the Greek word 'pistes' which in the first conception may be translated as [propositional] belief but in the third is translated as 'trust').

I will show below that each conception can exist in a 'pure' form, though in most cases those who consider themselves religious may have elements of each of the three conceptions in some combination and relation together. The three conceptions are also related to theological arguments. Partly theological argument is about which conception would properly count as an answer to the question as to what it means to be religious. But also, under each conception we can find different theological positions that seek to articulate different positions within each conception. I will provide examples of all of this in the sub-sections that are to follow. The point I want to reveal in this chapter, is that the way religion has been conceptualised in religious education in general has been objective. My question is whether this may have resulted in something having been missed which may be important and if so I will look to bring to my new proposal.

4.2 Religion as belief

Where religion is conceptualised as belief, what it means to be religious in the 'pure' form is understood as a matter of being in possession of a set of beliefs, a set of propositions which refer to something objective and external to the person themselves. A belief in this case understood as aiming at truth or at least as something having direct connection with an external and real state of affairs. To be religious is to believe, in the sense of having such propositional beliefs. Christianity offers several examples of this understanding of what it means to be religious. The New Testament is not only full of injunctions 'to believe' but also frequently links holding beliefs with an understanding that this is a meritorious thing to do (Cottingham 2002, p.343). In addition to this, the traditional framework of scholastic teaching within Christianity has provided patterns of legitimating belief (Williams 2005, p.11) and such authoritative positioning of belief can be found in the early creedal statements of the Church from the second century after Christ onwards. Kelly (Kelly 2006, p. 42) asserts that there is no doubt that belief was considered an indispensable precondition of baptism. This is significant, for baptism is the rite constituting admission to The Church. Therefore to require assurance of this belief in the form of a profession of belief, where belief is viewed propositionally, raises the status of adherence to the propositions. My point here is to illustrate the significance of the relationship between a way of being religious and the profession of belief. Further, I want to acknowledge there are questions regarding the origin and importance of a particular interpretation, and hence authority, regarding maintaining consistency of the set of beliefs which constitute a particular religious tradition.

It is not too difficult to see how clarifying the set of beliefs that count as forming a particular religious tradition, may become important as time distances believers from foundational moments of that religion. Lennan (1998) considers the situation of the early Christians who, following the crucifixion must have made different kinds of attempts to both express and explain the inexpressible. He suggests that they moved to do so through the use of symbols and that symbols initially enabled believers to continue to transcend propositions. However, since each particular religious tradition has a concern both to pass on the 'true' meaning of the symbols to the next generation as well as wanting to value the collective experience of the community over time, propositions also come to be important as it were to support the correct or

'authoritative' interpretation of the symbols for the next generation. In addition to this sometimes passing on the one true interpretation of the symbols can gain preeminent importance. Here questions of authority, in terms of decision making and the possibility or otherwise for interpretation in relation to that authority, will be of great importance and be open to possible contention. In the Roman Catholic Church authority has been increasingly drawn over the centuries to the role of the Bishop of Rome, the Pope, and the place of individual interpretation of the symbols has been limited. Furthermore interpretation at various challenging points in history, for example during the reformation and in the 19th century with the emergence of questions around evolution for example, even outlawed. In the Protestant Churches authority tends to lie with the scriptures and The Bible may be taken literally word by word as a collection of propositions itself. Lennan shows that he has some concern and a preference for the earlier symbolic communication of ideas since 'the power of the symbol was that it would connect the events of the past, which had formed the faith of their ancestors and the promise of the future, with the life of the people present' (Lennan 1998, p. 72). Further he suggests that 'faith expressed symbolically, communicated truth – but a truth that was as much about the way of life as it was about a formula of words' (Lennan 1998, p. 72). It is this emergence of a conceptualisation of truth as external to, but having direct correspondence with, the formula of words, with the propositions as being the actual single explanation rather than one of many possible interpretations of the symbols, that enables me to formulate and present more clearly the conception of religion as belief and consider what is understood to be religious in these terms.

What is at stake here theologically, where religion is conceived as sets of beliefs or as propositions, is a disagreement regarding the concept of belief itself. Theology when religion is conceived as belief makes certain assumptions about the centrality of these beliefs; it will take time to reflect upon, discuss and in other ways make an exploration of the formulae, the forms of words comprising the propositions. The related symbols also become an object of study and the discussion has a significant locus around their respective 'truth'. Lennan suggests that The Church 'has expressed its faith by means of formulation, the most solemn of which were defined in a concilar act' and that the 'clearest example is the Nicene Creed, often referred to as "The Symbol of Faith"' (Lennan 1998, p. 73). Here the formula, the beliefs articulated as a series of propositions, become a means of defining what religion is. In so doing what it means to

live a religious life becomes equivalent to adhering to a set of propositions, such adherence is the way by which what it means to be religious is defined. Belief is 'in' the externalised propositions and faith too is understood in this conception of religion in an abstract way, as for example in the idea of 'The Faith'. The concept of faith is forced into a relationship with an absolute conception of truth and as such open only to contention substantively. Although what it means to be religious, when conceived as belief, shifts significantly into being entirely equivalent to an acceptance of a set of propositions theologically, the emergence of this shift is not entirely simple as the concept of belief becomes problematised in relation to both truth and authority. Wilfred Cantwell Smith observes in 'The Meaning and End of Religion' (Smith, 1963) and later in 'Faith and Belief: The Difference Between Them' (Smith, 1998) that the role of belief changed in light of other shifts of conceptualisation of various key ideas between the pre and post-modern worlds. Further, from the seventeenth century Smith (1963) suggests that new ways of looking at the world emerged and in particular 'new generations took over (the concept of truth) to designate … the intellectual construct' (p.38). Even the concept of religion itself shifted to becoming an 'abstract idea' (p.38) and since there was more than one system, the idea of 'religions' which can be set one against the other also emerged and also that they 'can be regarded as true or false in an intellectualist sense' (p. 39). In addition to this, Smith suggests 'we may observe the change in application … from the dynamic of the heart to impersonal system; from singular to plural; and from a Platonic to a propositional conception of truth' (p. 39).

The point I want to impress here is that the additional complexity and significance of differing ways in which 'belief' has come to be understood, for example in relation to truth, is important. This is because it ensures a range of hidden assumptions are made about what it means to be religious, that is to exist religiously in the world. I refer to two observations about the way belief is used to exemplify my point here. The first is in Smith's observation of a shift in the linguistic use of the word 'belief' in the modern period. This linguistic shift is from a prevailing use of the first person of the verb as in 'I believe' towards a more impersonal and objective use of 'they believe'. Good (2010) notes how this has also impacted on contemporary conventions in academic writing in English where to be objective is preferred and the views of the writer tend to be expressed in the third person as for example in 'it is believed that'. Good asserts that this objectification or 'change in the subject subtly shifts the nature of the speech act

involved – from the existential to the descriptive – and alters the authorisation of the speaker' (p. 70). The second, following from this, is in relation to the descriptive and analytical nature of propositions and especially as they are conceived as being in relation to aligned concepts of 'truth' and 'authority'. This can be seen especially in religious traditions such as Christianity where religion conceived as belief seems to have had a tendency to fragment, and sometimes for quite subtle distinctions to have emerged between sub-sets of beliefs. This has come to be known as 'denominational difference'. Here discussions between subtle and precise meanings of words have led to divisions between groups of Christians. Kelly (2006) has observed that this was in part what the early formulations of creeds was designed to mitigate against (p. 211). Differences between the sets of beliefs may become the focus of attention and this can be additionally problematic if disagreements regarding what are true and also what is to be known gain in importance, leading to further disagreements regarding authority. Both observations I note here if not exposed clearly can lie underneath understandings of the word belief, and when applied to religion have the consequence of changing how what it means to be religious is understood.

In bringing this observation of a shift in emphasis in the use of belief into my discussion, I intend to shed further light onto what may become theologically significant when religion is conceived as propositional belief. I have noted that the centrality of concern moves away from the one who is religious to the propositions themselves, the beliefs. I suggest that this is significant because as the focus moves away from the subject who is religious, there is an increased objectification of the beliefs and following from this objectification of what it means to be religious. It is consequently possible for theology itself to become objective, to become an unsituated exploration of what it means to exist religiously. Theology, where religion is conceived as belief, can become more interested in the exploration of questions regarding the relationship for example between belief and 'true' knowledge. These abstract discussions are likely to become matters considered by the religious authorities as of absolute concern. Truth, as an absolute kind of external reality, becomes the reference point also for justifying of what it means to be religious. What it means to be religious where religion is conceived of as belief seems then to necessitate an engagement with the relationship between knowledge, belief and justification. Gettier's (1963) challenge to previous assumptions about what counts as knowledge and its relationship to true

belief, raises new questions for theology in this context, especially in relation to the links between justification, knowledge and belief. However, if knowledge retreats into becoming the kind of thing that requires both certitude and correctness, belief is nudged to become the kind of thing that which possibly 'implies uncertainty, error or both' (Good 2010, p. 70).

Belief therefore, in contemporary ways of thinking has come to have at least two very different possibilities of meaning. This ambiguity of meaning when located at the central point of a conception of what it means to be religious, risks forcing a divide between religious and non-religious contexts. However this range of possibility for the concept of belief is not new, it is already present in Greek philosophical thinking as seen in that made between doxa and episteme in Plato's analogy of The Cave. As Smith highlights (in Good, 2010), belief seems to imply in contemporary understandings of the word, not just part of a journey towards 'true' knowledge as in the analogy of The Cave but also to refer to something antithetical to, almost the opposite of, knowledge. Religion therefore conceived as propositional belief and relating to external 'truths', means that religious knowledge understood as having a special kind of authority, risks contributing to a kind of separation between religion the rest of intellectual life. Theological questions raised by this conception of religion can be identified within Christianity from the earliest times. For example disagreement between scholars about interpretation of the Greek term 'pistes', in particular how the term when read in several places in Paul's letters is highly significant here (see for example Botha 1987, p. 228) and I will return to when considering the third conception of religion.

Religion conceived as belief, therefore has potential to force a distinction between different statuses of knowledge and locate the discussion about religion into a conversation about truth and truth claims. Theology, where religion is conceived as belief, becomes a reflection not only on a propositional understanding of belief, but also of religion and religious truth itself. Importantly, it is also likely to discuss questions which contest conceptions of religion compromising the possibility of 'truthful' interpretations of such religious truths. Religion when conceived as belief becomes something to be held or grasped and further where propositions are usually conceived as being in a direct and correspondent relation with an external and true reality. Living a religious life may be conceived as the same as living a 'truthful life',

interpreted to mean one where the individual is living adhering to and also probably living out in some way the beliefs in their lives. The propositions become the beliefs, objectified and essentialised; and have authority in the lives of believers because they are 'true'. 'The Faith' is understood conceptually as describing the collection of propositional beliefs to be believed 'in'. Arguments manifesting in logical and reasonable ways are cited as evidence for belief, theology where religion is understood as belief will be interested discussing these arguments. Belief and knowledge are therefore sometimes used interchangeably in this religious context, counter to the oppositional usages of the concepts in contemporary use outside religion as Smith observed. This is because where religion is conceived as belief, believing something to be true is usually taken to mean the same as or at least a nuanced version of knowing it. Certainty, where religion is conceived as belief, will be applied equally to knowledge from wherever it comes from. A theological discussion where religion conceived as belief, in summary will consider theological questions problematising concepts which are of interest to and linked with propositional belief. There will be a particular emphasis on knowledge, on truth and truth claims and further, knowledge and truth themselves are conflated.

4.3 Religion as practice

The second way of conceiving religion I consider is in terms of practice. In its 'pure' form religion when conceived as practice is as a set of actions embedded into the way in which someone conducts their life. To be religious in this way of conceiving religion is simply to conduct one's life in a particular way, according to a particular rule which becomes authoritative in the religious person's life. There may be an external authority for this way of life, but its authoritativeness lies in the evidence of the lived practice rather than in a set of beliefs. Through illustrating this way of conceiving religion from Christianity, Islam and Judaism, and giving a response to questions regarding what it means to live a religious life, my point will be that is it possible to understand what it means to be religious in its 'pure' form entirely in terms of practice. In addition to this, I want to develop an argument to show that practice can also serve as a means of marking the edge between religious and non religious life. Tong and Turner (2008) discuss this in the context of Islam (see from p.41) and in particular in a discussion on veiling show how this practice (of veiling) is a means by which 'a woman's pious (religious) life style also enables her to be distinguished from the non-Muslims within

the wider society' (Tong and Turner 2008, p. 49). In this way, adoption of certain practices becomes a vehicle for being seen by others as manifesting ways of being religious and of living religiously in the world. Furthermore, there is also a strong connection between living religiously in terms of adopting certain practices and being religious in terms of becoming a better person. Therefore in this way of conceiving religion, what it means to be religious can also be about the choices one makes and can be about how one lives in every day life in order to become a better person. The practices serve to guide the individual and perhaps also the community into an understanding of piety, of what it means to be religious and live a religious life in practice.

That following a discipline of practice may also necessitate guidance is discussed by Mahony (1987 p. 19 cited in Rose 2001, p.196). When exploring Mahony's observations further, Rose notes 'three different kinds of disciplined practice, heteronymous discipline, governed by external authority; autonomous discipline, where authority exists at the very depths of one's personal being; and interactive discipline, marked by a combination of both external and internal sources of authority' (Rose 2001, pp. 20–22). The way of life for a Cistercian monk exemplifies this well. Everything about the monks' way of life in the 12th century was determined precisely by 'behaviour, liturgy, rituals, feasts, and work' (Coomans 2013, p.161), and the buildings themselves constructed in such a way as to facilitate this practice. Disciplined practice was determined in each element of the abbey 'the church, cloister, chapter house, dormitory and other common rooms' such as ' the gate house, refectory, kitchen, infirmary, guest house, storeroom, sacristy and the novice's house' (Coomans 2013, p.161). There is evidence of recognition here of how conceiving what it means to live a religious life can be determined by practice. Further, that this practice has 'apostolic authority', 'because each one of you, having chosen to practice the religious life and because the health of souls is assured by such regular practice, but because … what ever you establish by it among you who have adopted that religious practice, we confirm by apostolic authority' (Berman 2000, p. 92). The Cistercian way of living the religious life shows how a discipline may be both internally or externally organised; it may have varying sources of authority but in each case to understand the practice its purpose is significant. Since living a religious life can, in the conceptualisation of religion as tradition, be conceived as following a form of practice in a more or less

disciplined way, in this conceptualisation of what it means to be religious a variety of practice can count as religious practice. In the case of a contemporary Muslim woman beginning to wear the veil, it can be a conscious decision about identifying as a Muslim. However it may be simply about following one's mother or sister in the wearing of the veil, in much the same way that a child will pick up other ways of living in the family. Either way it is the practice that comes first.

In developing my articulation of religion as practice it is interesting to consider how in Judaism, traditional interpretations of The Law (Halakha) do not attempt to conceive of a separation between areas of religious or non-religious life. Religion is in general conceived as the practice of particular actions, and this is enough to reveal what it means to be a Jew; what it means to live a religious life as a Jew is understood solely in terms of the practices adopted in one's life. To be religious it is not necessary to believe anything in terms of propositions, neither is it necessary to access a particular kind of awareness; although each of these could also be ways of being religious in terms of Judaism. Truth, where religion is conceived of as tradition, cannot be externalised and only through the practice of tradition can truth can be conceived or conveyed. This is because the conception of truth is not external to the practice and it is not communicated in propositions. In this way it is perfectly possible to be a 'secular-religious' Jew who holds no propositional beliefs. To live a religious life in this sense is the day to day living of the practice passed down as tradition, and which has the purpose of ensuring a good life as determined by and within the tradition. Where religion is conceived as practice, living with the reality of the practice is both guide and advisor. From this position asking the question of Judaism 'what does it mean to be religious?' is capable of being answered not by looking to a set of beliefs as propositions about how things are, but instead through familiarity with the practice. This will have application in all aspects of the life but especially exemplified the keeping of Kosher, placing a Mezuzah on the door post, and lighting candles at the beginning of Shabbat. The same could be asserted in some cases for what it can mean to live a religious life in the context of Christianity; my point is that religion conceptualised as practice comes from a care for living the practice which marks the tradition, and in this conceptualisation is what it means to be religious.

To further deepen my exploration of religion conceptualised as practice, I want to note that what it means to live a religious life in this sense can be characterized by care for the practice and how this impacts significantly on the interpretation of other ideas associated with religion. Smith (see 1993) in considering the pre-modern period shows the concept 'belief' to have had different meaning at that time compared to now. I bring this into consideration to emphasise a further distinction between religion conceived as practice rather than as belief and therefore what in their 'pure' forms mark out someone as living a religious life. This leads to emphasizing the importance of exposing assumptions regarding the way for example the idea of belief is to be interpreted in this context, and the problems which result when they are used without sufficient care. This is a matter of theological concern and a theological exploration of religion as practice must be open to such ambiguity. Smith, citing for example Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales, reminds us to be aware of the way connotations of the word 'lief' in medieval English, drew the concept of 'love' and 'belief' closely together; connotations which persist but are not frequently recognised in the use of the word today. To believe something in medieval times was similar to loving and caring for it. Importance here being given to a conceptualisation that includes the idea of shared practice and living together with those who love and care for the same practices in life, and that this is understood as what holds a tradition and a people together. Consequently these practices carry authority for the community and are authoritative as spiritual guides as the example of the Cistercian rules shows. I want to emphasise here that the concept belief where used in relation to religion conceptualised as tradition has nothing whatsoever to do with propositional belief and everything to do with a love of the practice, the discipline of the tradition.

Theologically these last points reveal how an articulation of religion as practice will include reflection on all aspects of life, all behaviour. All actions, the use and design of buildings as well as ways that people live together in a particular ways are in the mix for discussion. Theology where religion is conceived as practice will investigate practice in such a way so as to understand what it means to live a religious life as practice in the present moment as well as over time. My point is also that theology where religion is understood as practice is a way of theologising that crosses conventional boundaries and can be found in all religious traditions. The context will

be important, embedded practice needing interested observation in such a way where assumptions can be exposed.

4.4 Religion as existential

Religion conceived as existential places the idea of faith as its centre. This is faith understood as trust; and brings into my discussion the second interpretation of the Greek term 'pistes'. This trust resembles revelation, and entails a willingness to be open to another kind of awareness or manner of attending. Religion so conceived stands in contrast to religion as belief where there is a tendency for beliefs to be externalised and formulated in terms of something external to the believer as 'objects of belief'. Religion conceived as existential is in intimate relation with the subject, the one who is of faith. Religion conceived as existential is therefore where faith is conceptualised subjectively and the relationship between faith and subjectivity is so close that care must be taken not to confuse it with knowledge (Kierkegaard 1974, p. 30). Theologically, the idea that moments of attentive awareness are of acute significance is central when religion is conceived as existential. What it means to live a religious life is understood as the kind of life and way of living where such attentive awareness is preeminent. This can be exemplified in the ideas of 'theoria', or 'gazing' or 'attentiveness' found and claimed as having particular importance in Orthodox Christianity.

However, although this kind of awareness is documented widely cross religious traditions, it is not exclusive to any one and can be exemplified in core teachings of many. It can be seen in for example the promises of G-d to Abram (Genesis 12), the baptism or ascension into heaven of Jesus, the account of Prophet Mohammed's (pbuh) encounter with the Angel Gabriel in the cave or the enlightenment of Siddhartha Gautama. Although these particular accounts are of privileged moments, significantly if they are only understood through the lens of religion conceived as belief, the events become formalised and their uniqueness essentialised. However there is another way of understanding these accounts. Where religion is conceived as existential such awareness exemplifies a kind of awareness and attending, in the case of Christianity, Judaism and Islam to the voice of God and in Buddhism attending to the moment. The important thing in each case, and which lies at the heart of religion conceived existentially is that this kind of attending is open to everyone and further is a desirable

state of affairs. Faith, in this case in the 'pure sense' where religion is conceived in existential terms, matters precisely because such attention and awareness reveals ultimate significance for both the unique subject and also for the intimate relationship itself. The theological discussion turns on the distinction to be made between 'faithfulness' which I consider to be equivalent to religion as existential and the use of the word 'faith in' which corresponds to the conception of religion as belief (see for example Herbert, 1955).

Simone Weil writes extensively about faith but this is never in isolation from practical and particular examples of human existence. This point is important as I move to sketch out further a conceptualisation of religion as existential. This is important because it especially shows how such a conceptualisation of faith is rooted in the lived life of the individual subject, although it has nothing necessarily to do with a discipline of practice. This is not only important but highly significant because the existential conceptualisation of religion I am seeking to outline here is one which is focused on the subjective existence of each person and one which resists essentialisation. Weil (1965) describes her vocation, as a drawing to the 'presence of God' (p. 53) and over again explains her sense of needing to remain outside 'on the threshold' (p. 43) of The Church. Her locus of concern is regarding her awareness of the relationship between God, the divine, and humanity. She is interested in the possibility of a sense of joy in suffering as emphasising the existential gulf, 'we know then that joy is the sweetness of contact with the love of God, that affliction is the wound of this same contact when it is painful, and that only the contact matters, not the manner of it' (p. 53). In order to put into words her awareness of the gulf between the finite and the infinite she compares this to the distance between the perfection of God and the 'imperfection of the creaturely' (Eaton 1984, p.14).

For Weil there was a realisation of the possibility of transformation through such an awareness as she describes. Although drawn to Christianity, Weil was had made a study of Hindu sacred works and this helped her to increase her existential understanding of Christianity. Blackburn (2007) notes Weil's exploration into Hinduism 'clearly influenced her approach' (p.262) and further that 'Weil understands the message of the Upanishads that this peace comes with the recognition that one's real self is part of the creative force of the universe, *brahman'* (p. 263). Blackburn and

others have commented on the influence of Weil's readings of Hinduism on her explicitly profound writings and reflections on her own experience of God. This sense of the presence in the world of God also led her to be committed to living a life which embodied the sense of freedom and justice she experienced. Weil was politically engaged from her early years, taking leave of absence from her position as university professor to live alongside the workers during the French general strike of 1933 and later taking part in the Spanish Civil war on the Republicans side. These examples help me show how Weil's life reveals what it means to live a religious life existentially. For Weil this life of faith was not about following a particular system of belief or tradition but grew out of an acute awareness of freedom and justice and also of suffering; of existence itself. What is important here is the consequences of her realisation; that to live in the subjective and existential moment is revealed embodied in her life.

Weil's embodiment of the existential religious life is acute and in some ways extreme. She notes how even forms of human effort and production such as hunting, fishing and gathering, appear as a 'simple reaction to the inexorable pressure continually exercised on man by nature' (Weil 1958, p.60). Nature she understands as offering another and particular opportunity for the opening an existential awareness. The concept of freedom is also important for Weil. Indeed, Weil makes an appeal for there being a strong relationship between the conceptualisations of freedom and existence, since 'each man is necessarily free with respect to other men, because he is in contact with the conditions of his own existence' (Weil 1958, p.60). For Weil it is loss of the awareness of one's existence that will result in loss of freedom. However on the other hand it is the breadth of her considerations as to what she counts as religion, as well as what she counts as being religious, that allows her to speak in the broadest terms about faith. Faith she considers as being awareness. Faith is not essentialised but to be understood as a 'cosmological relation in terms of a goodness which is beyond our power in this life to explore, but which we know insofar as our exploration reveals it' (Eaton 1984, p.15).

A relationship with nature is one way Weil considers man can both approach and be approached by God. This relationship, which is really an existential awareness, is one way for freedom to come to exist. In the essay 'Forms of the implicit love of God', Weil (1965) discusses three ways in which God is really, although secretly, present (p.

94), 'these are religious ceremonies, the beauty of the world and love of our neighbour' (p.95). However what she means by religious ceremonies is distinctive from the conception of religion as tradition, it is not the practice of the ceremony that is central here, but the existential awareness that it opens the subject to. This existential awareness and attentiveness that comes from it is the way I am understanding 'faith' lying at the heart of religion conceived as existential. Weil (1965) explains this further in her understanding of the soul, and which she sees as taking place only through grace. It is this that makes possible a course which can avoid both 'uncritical anthropomorphism and mystic silence' (p.18). In other words what makes it possible to remain a subject in the world capable of engaging with others. It is important to note that Weil has a particular idea of God. God is not essentialised and external but present in the world, and quite likely informed by her study of Hinduism. God comes into the world through the action of human freedom and she describes the awareness of God as being sensed in all things, including and especially through suffering and affliction.

Nevertheless, it is Weil's exploration of attending that I particularly want to draw into my discussion regarding religion conceived as existential. Here, as already mentioned, what it means to be religious and to live a religious life is one which is focussed on faith. However it is important to grasp that in this understanding of faith, faith can only exist in terms of the subject. Any idea of 'growing in faith', is not a developmental idea, it is not something that can be staged or 'structured'; in this context it can only be understood in terms of the subject growing in attentiveness to their existence in the world. It resembles revelation, one that leaves behind a trace or kind of memory that changes the way someone lives and perceives from thence on. Understanding this is essential to understanding what it means to live a religious life where religion is conceived as existential. It is in stark contrast to religion conceived of as belief where to be religious is understood to be adhering to a set of objective propositions and where truth is objective, external to the believer. Religion conceived as propositional belief is focussed on the object, the objective and 'true' belief. Religion conceived as existential focuses on the faith, the trust or in other words the presence of the subjective subject. The trusting-ness of the subject is as the subjectification of the 'unique one' who is existing, and this takes place through attention. It is then that faith can emerge, through grace, into the world.

Religion conceived of as existential focuses on subjective faith. But this is not just faith in one particular moment but also in time. Religion conceived as existential is in some way beyond words; it is not and cannot be accessed through a formula of words. Neither is it a system of practice, and for this reason articulating religion conceived as existential can often be in the form of analogy or metaphor. Merton (1975) has likened the religious life to a journey or passage through a door. It is not conceived of as fixed in a particular moment in time, but as a movement through and beyond time. Merton, committed to a life of silence and solitude, writes of his self-exploration in relation to what he terms 'the divine' and considers that 'his true self was empowered from beyond the empirical self in a way that was beyond the grasp of reason' (Bragan 2011, p. 36). When reaching to find words to communicate this encounter in The Asian Journal Merton (Merton 1975) writes, '(t)here is no use asking for it. Yet you must ask. Who? For what?', '(i)t is neither in this world nor another. It is not based on anything. Because it has no foundation, it is the end of sorrow' (p.154) and further '(s)uch is the door that ends all doors; the unbuilt, the impossible, the undestroyed, through which all fires go out when they have "gone out" ' (p.154). Religion conceived as existential implies that the religious life is an awakening to a new kind of awareness, and, once this way of 'seeing' has taken place, appearances will never be the same and further all action following will be different. It is similar to Levinas' assertion that it is the face of the other that announces 'the specific command: Thou shall not Kill' (Simmon & Wood 2008, p. 232) from which all things will be different. This realisation of things as 'lined up differently' (Merton 1975, p.152) leads Merton later into an exploration and particular understanding of The Gospel. However it is important to take extremely seriously that the first movement was an attentiveness to an 'existential reality' (Bragan 2011, p.37) which Merton lived within the depth of his being.

Weil and Merton begin to give us an idea of the conceptualisation of religion as existential, as a kind of progressive attentiveness. Further that this attentiveness as it emerges transforms all things and in particular the subject. This attentiveness is not bound by a particular formula of words or actions and is both in and beyond time. Where Weil has given a sense of the moment of growing awareness and gives examples of the varieties of activity in life that can enable the one living the religious life to attend, Merton takes this into a sense of timelessness. Kierkegaard can add to my discussion of religion as existential through his particular understanding of faith

and importantly in his conceptualisation of subjectivity. Kierkegaard converted to Christianity at the age of 25 and describes his life until this point as having passed through three stages; the aesthetic, the ethical and finally the position of faith. This is a journey which all men may take rather like the journey of Plato's prisoner out of the cave, however it is a journey that not all men either begin or complete; it is a journey that is one that has to be decided upon. The importance of this decision Kierkegaard explores at length in Fear and Trembling (Kierkegaard, 2008), where he uses the story of God's command to Abraham to kill his son to illustrate the difference between the position of resignation and faith. Resignation requires the courage to accept suffering whereas faith requires courage to be loved by God; this paradoxical and humble courage Kierkegaard describes as the courage of faith (Carlisle 2010, p.93).

What is important to note here is that deciding to adopt a new way of existing, is not simply a matter of adopting a new set of propositions or practices and also such awareness may first come upon the person unawares. However, many writers talk about a point where a choice is made; albeit not necessarily a rational choice. Kierkegaard for example considers the choice as something 'by which he is prepared to live, and to which he has a non-rational commitment' (Warnock 1970, p.7). Kierkegaard speaks of the illusion of objectivity and looks for a recovery of the capacity for subjectivity; subjective knowledge is that which cannot be passed on or taught and in this way resembles faith. Kierkegaard also emphasises the difference between what 'imagination gives us, and what religion … bestows upon and requires of us' (in Pattison 1984, p.7). Imagination implies a continuing objectivity and separation; it belongs to the stages of the aesthetic and ethical and is therefore limited as a means of attaining religious consciousness (see Pattison 1984, p. 8). Resignation is a giving up whereas by faith 'I acquire everything' (Kierkegaard 2008, p.35). Imagination can be an important step on the journey towards faith, but imagination keeps us in the position where there is a distance between the real and the possible. Faith on the other hand is beyond imagination in a place where it is possible to realise our 'absolute freedom and responsibility for our own existence' (in Pattison 1984, p.11) and become a 'knight of faith' (Kierkegaard 2008, p.53).

Kierkegaard explores this further; the singularity of the 'I' is his central concern and as already mentioned is particularly exemplified in his reflection of the biblical account of

Abraham's willingness to obey God's call for him to kill his own son (Kierkegaard 2008, p.4). Importantly for Kierkegaard, Abraham's response is of ethical concern since it is only in a singular response such as Abraham's utterance 'here I am' that the ethical judgment, which can be understood conceptually as existential, is made. For Kierkegaard there can be no generalisable, essential, ethical rule applicable to everyone for he contests the possibility of essentialising the subject; the 'absorption of the Other into the Same' (Simmons and Wood 2008, p. 2). An existential conceptualisation of religion will therefore be one that gives focus to the centrality of the subject. However this is not in isolation, but in relationship which adds something to this way of conceptualisation of faith. As for Weil there is the emphasis on the moment of attending as being an opportunity to 'be near to God' (Weil, 1965, p. 74) and from Merton there is the sense of this drawing into and beyond time. However from Kierkegaard I draw the most systematic exploration of religion conceived as existential. In particular it is his understanding of faith which I move to bring into my discussion now, and this understanding I will use in a later chapter to bring out a new reading educatively of Weil. Kierkegaard (1974) talks about 'impassioned interestedness' as being 'the condition of faith' (p.30) and in which 'faith can come into being'. Kierkegaard's argument for subjectivity develops in relation to this, for faith is the infinite interest of the subject and comes about because the subject is infinitely interested. Faith has no need for objective proof, were it to depend upon such objective it would not be faith. It is only when faith 'begins to cease being faith' (Kierkegaard 1974, p.31) that proof becomes necessary.

Thus the key theological questions where religion is conceived as existential are concerning faith, faith as trust in existence and attending with impassioned interestedness to the choice; to step into the unknown. A theological exploration of these questions will enable an interested, intellectual reflection; it will bring articulation to the study of matters of faith understood existentially. Faith understood existentially is intimately related to and dependant upon subjectivity and so theology where religion is conceived of as existential will also be likely to enter into an interested exploration of subjectivity. Theology of religion understood as existential will not be without paradox because at times it will be required to articulate that which is almost impossible to articulate, for this reason it is certainly associated with intellectual risk. The existential conception of religion in the 'pure' sense could mean a religious life lived with little

objectivity for where there is more objective dependability there is less inwardness and therefore less faith. Thus it is that Kierkegaard (1977) says 'the less objective dependability, the deeper the possible inwardness' and 'the corresponding passion of inwardness is faith' (p.19). It is this depth of subjective inwardness that religion conceived as existential interprets as truth, it is something probable but not certain, for where there is certainty there can't be risk upon which, paradoxically, faith is dependent. Kierkegaard describes there as being a level of absurdity about this, about the way in which these things cannot be possessed but only given the conditions in which they can emerge into the world. Theologically the study will be subjective in process, seeking not certainty but instead a life of contingent positions where the most the theologian as subject can say is perhaps only that 'he all but knows, or as good as knows, extremely and exceedingly just about knows' (p.180). Theology where religion is conceived as existential will be likely to acknowledge there is an absurdity about speaking about the object of faith, since faith can only exist in a condition of subjectivity. Faith cannot be 'had' or possessed but only lived.

4.5 Conclusion

I have discussed three different ways of conceptualising religion in this chapter in order to articulate three corresponding responses to the question 'what does it mean to live a religious life?' These articulations have attempted to outline what I have termed a 'pure' form of each way of conceptualising religion. I have nevertheless made it clear that often in reality the way in which a religious life is lived is most likely to be in some way informed by two or more ways of conceptualising religion. This will also be the case for any particular religious traditions and definitely the case when plurality within traditions is attended to. For example Islam in general makes a theological distinction between the concepts of 'aquidah' (belief) and 'ibadat' (practice), and in general most Muslims are agreed on the importance of both. However inside as well as between existing divisions, for example between Sunni and Shia traditions, 'aquidah' and 'ibadat' may be further and subtly interpreted in a range of ways.

In addition to this, and to add to the complexity of the situation it may be that inside any one sub group in any one tradition, there is a tendency to be best understood in one particular conceptualisation rather than one of the others I have discussed here. For

example the best entry point into Buddhism for example may be through an existential conceptualisation of religion, in order to best be able to understand what it means to live a religious life as a Buddhist, the same may also be for someone living life as a Hindu or Jain and yet in all cases there may be elements of tradition or even belief as well. Theologically each conceptualisation of religion is likely to bring a different set of theological questions which require a different range of investigations. This is because the assumptions made by each way of conceptualising religion with regard to what it means to live a religious life are very different.

The critical point I want to make through this whole discussion, and in order to give articulation to the different ways of living a religious life, is that it is possible to hold there are different theologies at work in these three ways of conceptualising religion. That there are different questions being responded to, and that all are likely to be important, means that it is probable all will merit inclusion in a *religious* education. My intention in this chapter therefore has been to highlight that there are more complex ways of responding to the question 'what does it mean to be religious?' than the three approaches to religious education I have discussed in chapter 3, and primarily theorised by Wright, Jackson and Erricker respectively, have been open to. In addition to this I want to make the point that the responses from all three ways of conceptualising religion should be attended to since they are likely to make a difference as to how it is understood what religious education should aim to achieve. My next step in chapter 5 is to examine education carefully, with a view to being able to bring some clarity to what it is that education should be aiming to achieve. I do this first before bringing together my findings in chapter 6, in order to address questions regarding religious education's purpose in the public sphere in a new way.

Chapter 5: What should education aim to achieve?

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I take up the need for a discussion about what education should aim to achieve. In the first of three sections I begin with a consideration of the work of Richard Peters. This is because he gives a clear articulation of what education should aim to achieve through engaging systematically with the question 'what makes education educative?' as contrasted to other kinds of things such as instruction, coercion or indoctrination. From Peters I establish education's interested position in relation to human freedom whilst recognising that Peters' conception of freedom has worked against religious education. For this reason in the second section of this chapter I consider a different conception of freedom from Arendt. Whereas Peters' conception sees freedom as highly individualized, related to a particular view of personal autonomy and aligned strongly with reason and knowledge, the alternative conception I bring to my argument understands freedom in relation to 'action'; that is to the particular way Arendt understands 'action'. In the second account freedom is not associated with 'free-will' or 'sovereignty' but as being something that exists in the public sphere, itself secured through a quality of human interaction, that is as action under the condition of plurality.

What distinguishes Arendt's conception from Peters' is that freedom, rather than understood in terms of reason and a particular view of knowledge, is understood as a 'phenomenon' (Arendt 2006, p. 144) of the public sphere. Further, it needs to make no clear distinction between belief and knowledge but is instead dependent for its existence on action in plurality. Nevertheless, Arendt thought education should be separate from the public sphere. In disagreeing with her on this point, I argue that since education has an interested position in relation to freedom and freedom can only appear where people are together, schools should be considered as 'spaces of appearance' that is part of the public sphere. From here I conclude that for this to be the case, education should bring the child to 'action'. In the third section of this chapter I consider the difference conceptualising education in relation to action rather than reason makes and present with Weil an enquiry into the role of the teacher. These three sections lead me

in chapter 6 to be able to present a new position regarding what religious education should aim to achieve, following my unfolding argument through chapters 4 and 5.

5.2 Peters, education and freedom.

In this section I first present and then discuss Peters' key ideas regarding education. I have chosen Peters' work not only because of the systematic way in which he addresses the question 'what is it that makes education educative?' but also as Martin (1981) explains, it was Peters who first captured 'our concept of the educated man' (p.97). Peters looks to distinguish between 'education' and 'the educated man', making the point that it is not enough to simply ask 'whether a person has been educated and whether he is an educated man; for the former could be taken as meaning just 'He has been to school'' (Peters 1970a, p. 17). The educated man says Peters (1968) 'is one who has achieved a state of mind which is characterized by a mastery of and care for the worth-while' (p. 46) and 'things that have been transmitted (which) are viewed in some kind of cognitive perspective' (p. 46). Elsewhere Peters (2010) makes it clear that 'our concept of an educated person is of someone who is capable of delighting in a variety of pursuits and projects for their own sake and whose pursuit of them and general conduct of his life is transformed by some degree of all round understanding and sensitivity' (p. 8). An educated person then is someone who has quite a particular understanding of things; and is not a person who just has a 'know-how or knack' (Peters 2001, p.19). Thus to be considered as educated is not a single thing, and bringing about the educated person is the 'outcome' of what ideally education is to do (see Peters 2010 p. 12). Peters (1968) offers three broad criteria for what education should do, all of which fall under the concept of education which he understands to be 'a family of tasks' (p.30). The first is that education implies the transmission of what is worthwhile, second that it must involve knowledge and understanding or some cognitive aspect that is not inert, and thirdly that education rules out some procedures of transmission on the grounds that they lack 'wittingness and voluntariness' (p. 45). Peters (2001) makes clear that the necessary connection between education and the educated person is that ''education' suggests that what develops in someone should not only be worthwhile but also involve the development of knowledge and understanding' (p.19).

5.2.1 Knowledge and reason

Peters understands there to be a strong relationship between the educated person and knowledge and, importantly, understanding. By this Peters (1968) means that to call someone educated they must not only be well informed but they 'must also have some understanding of the 'reason why' of things' (p. 30). Furthermore, this understanding cannot be 'inert', a point which he explains in two ways. First 'it must characterize his way of looking at things' (p. 31) and secondly it must 'involve the kind of commitment that comes from being on the inside of a form of thought and awareness' (p. 31). In other words, understanding knowledge must change both the educated person's outlook on things, as well as make a difference by being important to the person in some way. Peters goes on to discuss what he calls 'the cognitive requirements' (p.31) of 'being educated' as having something to do with the 'whole man'. This is in order to make a point that education cannot be tied down to a 'specialized competence' (p.32). Acknowledging this, enables him to make a clear distinction between education and training, that is to say a distinction between an educated man and one who has just been trained in some way. The difference has to do with the fact that someone who has been educated will in some way have 'much more awareness of the different facets and dimensions' (p.32) of a particular matter and be linked with 'a wider system of beliefs' (p.32) where as to be trained implies just the development of a skill or more limited competence (see p.32).

To some extent Peters' thinking developed in response to a prevailing educational focus in parts of Europe and in the United States of America in the first half of the 20th century, which he critiqued as too 'child-centered' (Peters 1968, p.35) and as emphasising 'procedural principles to the detriment of valuations about content' (Peters 1968, p.35). He argued instead that education is the kind of thing which needs to be 'achieved' (p. 24) and sought to ascertain the normative character of what counts as good education. Peters asserts a link between education being not only worthwhile but also something desirable to undertake (Warnick 2007, p. 59). Thus Peters (1968) argues that an educational situation 'is one in which an environment is specifically contrived so that what is good can be promoted and passed on' (p.195) to the one who is being educated; this is not only a worthwhile thing to do but it should be undertaken. Peters' (1968) critique of Dewey's position is that it does not address precisely what it is that needs to be achieved, for example in the difficult matter of liberty; and Peters goes on

to explain that the difficulty is that attention came only to be 'focused on the manner rather than the matter of education' (p. 35).

In order to understand Peters' interest in what it is that needs to be achieved in the transmission of what is worthwhile, it is necessary to clarify rather precisely his position on knowledge. Further, the reason why Peters' understanding of what it means to be educated is framed in terms of knowledge is highly significant. Peters' particular analytical philosophical background means he has an understanding of knowledge as being the kind of thing that someone can know for sure 'are the case' (see for example Peters 2010) in other words he means justified in some way that involves reason. Therefore, even if a belief is a shared belief and agreed between members of a particular group, it cannot have equal standing with knowledge in the educational context. This leads him to make a clear distinction between belief and knowledge. The significance of which in the context of the educated person becomes apparent when he begins to discuss the kinds of methods that are appropriate to use in education as he notes that belief, because it is less than rational, is not open to cognitive examination in the way as knowledge is.

This distinction between belief and knowledge in terms of their respective openness to reason, leads Peters to be able say that since the adoption of second-hand beliefs cannot be something a person when acting as an autonomous person would do, belief does not belong in education in the same way that knowledge does (see Peters, 2001). This is because beliefs are transmitted in a different kind of way that does not deliberately involve reason. A school, to be educative, should be engaged in the transmission of worthwhile knowledge rather than second-hand beliefs and further, it should be doing this in a particular kind of way that is not the same as instruction or indoctrination. Peters' view is that 'indoctrination occupies a kind of half-way house between conditioning and rationality' (Gatchell 2010, p. 16). Indoctrination therefore is not something that can be linked to knowledge and understanding but belongs with belief. Nevertheless Peters acknowledges that beliefs are important to the people concerned, for 'indoctrinated beliefs, if they are beliefs, must be meant' (Gatchell 2010, p. 16). However, 'what distinguishes them (*from knowledge*) is that they are irrational' (Gatchell 2010, p. 16). Nevertheless, even though knowledge is associated with reason, there is still a problem to be overcome. For so long as what is 'worthwhile' knowledge is determined from outside the student, the student will still most likely need to be

persuaded of it. Hence although indoctrination is ruled out for the reasons discussed here, questions regarding the 'how' of the transmission of knowledge still pertain. Education in Peters' understanding, cannot therefore avoid taking an interest in freedom.

In distinguishing between education and instruction, as well as excluding indoctrination from education, Peters (1970a) reiterates that 'for something to count as an educational process, then, a minimum of comprehension must be involved' (p. 42). This is because whatever is being presented to the child must be presented in a 'kind of way which he has to grasp himself' (p. 41). Peters (1968) understands this idea of 'grasping for himself' as related to the concept of autonomy which he asserts 'implies the ability and determination to regulate one's life by rules which one has accepted for oneself' (p. 197). Things like conditioning and brainwashing and probably also some forms of drilling (see Peters 1968, p. 197) must therefore also be excluded. Furthermore Peters (1968) also excludes such things as conditioning as counting as a 'technique' of education. This is because of their 'lack of respect for persons', (p. 197). Peters' links autonomy closely with reason and choosing, and further, throughout his work he brings these things together to support his perspective regarding the cognitive requirements of education (see for example pp. 30 – 35).

At this point I want to highlight Peters' understanding of a necessary connection between reason, as the ultimate controlling faculty, and autonomy. Building on Aristotle's insistence that man was rational as revealed by his capacity 'to impose plans and rules', Peters (1970b) understands there to be a direct relationship between his idea of 'the educated person' and autonomy. Such a strong connection with reason however, raises questions for education in determining which particular matters are to be regarded as more or less educationally worthwhile, that is more or less open to reason. Peters intends his argument regarding the educated person, to enable him to draw clear conclusions regarding the place of knowledge and belief in education. Thus, he concludes education should only be engaged with the transmission of knowledge and not belief; only knowledge is educatively worthwhile. This is an important point for the development of my argument and something I will take up in the following chapter.

Nevertheless Peters still needs to resolve the matter of how knowledge from outside the student is to be transmitted. In dealing with the matter of coercion Peters (1968) turns

his attention in some detail in 'Ethics and Education' to a discussion of freedom, recognising that applying principles regarding freedom in relation to education 'is not so straight forward' (p. 193). He also notes 'a case can be made in terms of liberty for such conditions of order in school which illustrates the paradox of freedom very well' (p. 194). He explains this point by saying, '(i)f the rule of law imposed impartially by those in authority is absent it is simply not the case that children are actually able to do what they individually want' (p. 194). Some conditions, he argues, must be put in place in order for the overriding aim of good education to be implemented. However freedom Peters makes clear, is an 'independent principle like justice' and therefore 'cannot be abrogated entirely for the sake of the promotion of what is good' (p.195); it has to be taken seriously. A clear argument with respect to the freedom of the teacher as well as parents also has to be found, particularly if freedom is understood in relation to freedom of opinion. So the key point Peters has to make in each of these respects, in a nutshell, is that although individual freedom may have to be compromised in some way in the educational context for the sake of other goods, freedom cannot be entirely abrogated. Whatever is put in place must at very least have the potential for the individuals to freely choose, in terms of being able to reason, and this ought not to be compromised at all.

5.2.2 Education as bringing the child to reason

A central aspect of Peters' work is the way he understands the educated person in relation to reason. Here I tease out the implications of two strands of his argument; both relevant in the development of the longer argument in my thesis. The first is regarding the involvement of reason in the distinction Peters makes between knowledge and belief. His point is that since knowledge and not belief is open to reason, and being open to reason is the most important quality of what is worthwhile, only knowledge belongs in an educative context. This has had a powerful influence on religious education and I outline the heart of the discussion here. However it is the implications of his second strand of argumentation, in relation to freedom and reason, that I go on to show in chapter 6 is more significant. Furthermore because of previously insufficiently considered assumptions made about both religion and education, I argue that this has been almost entirely missed. Peters' argument that only knowledge counts as

worthwhile in education has had significant ramifications in the development of religious education theory. Early published discussions for example between Phillips (1970) and Peters' collaborator Paul Hirst (1970), as well as more recently revisited between John White (2004 and 2005) and Andrew Wright (2004b and 2005) reveal the extent of the disagreement regarding the place of religious belief in educational contexts. Building on Peters in brief White (2004) argues that since religious belief is not open to reason, it consequently cannot be part of bringing about the educated person. Thus he concludes it has no place in schools intending to be educative.

To be sure, most religious education theory in England since the 1960's has developed in response to challenges regarding the status of religious knowledge. I mention Wright's (2004b) position here because it illustrates particularly clearly the serious implications of this for religious education. As noted by Gearon (2013), Wright's work broadly follows the same lines as Peters' rejecting 'any phenomenological setting aside or sometimes called 'bracketing out' of truth claims' (p. 123), affirming the place of knowledge and reason in educative contexts. Wright proceeds to develop his argument for critical religious education on this basis; asserting that critical thinking and reason are central as the child engages with knowledge in terms of truth and truth claims. My point is that such an emphasis limits what Wright can include in religious education. In addition to this religious education that starts from this point, although Wright (2003) recognises some dichotomy 'between rational theology and experiential religion' (p. 283), is unlikely to be able to reveal to the child sufficiently what it could mean to live a religious life. This adds to my critique of Wright's approach already discussed in chapter 3.

The second point I take up here is the way Peters conceptualises freedom in relation to reason. I have already noted that Peters needed to emphasise reason in relation to knowledge in order to make a distinction between indoctrination and education. However to articulate his position in relation to freedom in order to rule out coercion, reason is brought into play once again. Peters (2001) declares his interest in how people 'learn to be free' (p. 12) suggesting that the school has to be actively concerned with the business of advancing reason in relation to the 'transmission of various forms of skill and knowledge' (p. 116). In developing his thinking about freedom however, he explores three distinctive ways of looking at freedom discussed by Weinstein and Ben (see page 12) that he considers to be particularly helpful in the educative context. The

first is to understand freedom as a social principle that it is involved with how people live well together, second to understand man as a chooser and third to understand freedom as autonomy.

By suggesting that freedom can be understood as a social principle, Peters (2001) begins by recognising that a 'state of natural freedom is an illusion' (p.12) in the social context, since if there are 'no levelling constraints like those of law and custom, men do not in fact live unconstrained lives' (p.12). This is simply because those who are physically or psychologically weaker are likely to be 'constrained by the strong' (p.12). He therefore recognises the necessity of there being constraints on individual freedom, whilst identifying that underlying this principle is a presupposition of the notion of 'man as chooser' (p. 13). This justification is important for his whole argument as he acknowledges although people can have their options 'closed up by other men' (p. 13) so long as they are still free to make choices it is actually still possible to call someone free even when constrained. So for Peters, freedom is an idea inextricably related to the way he conceptualises autonomy and implies the necessity of the person being able to choose certain constraints.

Peters gives practical examples to show how his resolution of the paradox, which is through his understanding of freedom in educative contexts, might work out in a school. He suggests that it would be possible to identify many situations, for which I give the example of when the child would prefer to play but is in a mathematics lesson, where the child has his or her actions constrained in school yet could still be understood as remaining a chooser. Peters emphasises that the usual expectation of an educated person is that they can be a chooser. Recognising that a child may be deterred from being so by a number of things, not least by pressure from those around them, nonetheless Peters makes the point that being deterred from being a chooser is not precisely the same thing as being constrained from choosing. The child being deterred or dissuaded by her peers would not be the mark of an autonomous person, whereas the child choosing to act in a particular way, for example to sit still in a mathematics lesson, would be. Peters (2001) is interested in what it is that 'has to be added for a chooser to develop into an ideal type of character in which being free features' (p. 13) and he says that to ask this question is the same thing as to 'ask for the criteria for calling a person autonomous' (p.14). Peters (2001) argues from this that in order to call someone autonomous it is necessary for them to be a chooser, and this he explains is to

be a 'rational being' (p. 16) placed in 'the situation of practical reason' (p.16). Autonomy therefore for Peters, is inextricably linked with being in the situation of practical reason and may entail a compromise in terms of freedom. For example, the child in reasoning may choose to submit to the authority of the school, however this could only be in order to achieve a greater good; that is to become an educated, an autonomous, person.

Thus these two interwoven arguments, lead me to conclude that Peter's view on what education should aim to achieve, could be summed up by saying that it should bring the child to reason. However, in my discussion of Wright above, I have begun to show that this view is problematic. Indeed education focused on knowledge and reasoning is unlikely to be able to address sufficiently well matters in relation to the question 'what does it mean to be religious?' in all the ways explored in chapter 4. In chapter 3 I have shown that in order to defend against the challenge of indoctrination, or confessionalism Wright, and also in different ways Jackson and Erricker, tended to focus on adjusting their approaches to transmitting the content of religious education. Each, albeit in a slightly different way, argues that religious belief and practice is a kind of knowledge and therefore all their approaches to religious education are ones that give reason an important place. Each in their own way argue that religious education is to a greater or lesser extent a reasoned engagement with what is worthwhile in Peters' terms. More recent approaches to religious education seek external social justification for religious education for example with reference to ensuring 'religious literacy' (e.g. see for example Dinham & Frances 2015). However this again leads to discussion about knowledge and its transmission, and based on education understood as bringing the child to reason.

In rest of this chapter I lay out the beginning a new line of argument in which I challenge the view that the most important thing education should aim to achieve is to bring the child to reason. I begin by challenging Peters' conception of freedom as aligned with reason, proposing a different conception of freedom from Arendt. This leads me to be able to take another look at freedom in education, discussing instead the conditions under which freedom's existence is possible and thus to draw different conclusions about what education should do. In the last section of this chapter I consider the role of the teacher in ensuring education is educative and in chapter 6 move forward in building my argument regarding what religious education should do in

order to be able to fully respond to the question 'what does means to live a religious life?'

5.3 Arendt and freedom

Much of Arendt's work developed from her observations of and grave concerns regarding the Nazi holocaust, and the capacity of states seemingly to be able to make people participate in grand schemes of violence and destruction against other human beings. Young-Breuhl (2004) suggests that Arendt's work could be understood as an attempt to understand 'the deeper forces and ideas that constituted in her understanding the preconditions for the elements that has crystalised into totalitarian forms' (p. 111). Arendt's (1973) starting position, especially after the publishing of The Origins of Totalitarianism, is from questions regarding what it means for a human being to begin as a newcomer in the world of others, or in her words 'the actualizing of the human condition of natality' (Arendt 1998, p. 178). Peters conceptualises freedom in terms of the autonomous man as a chooser which Arendt understands as freedom identified with sovereignty (see Arendt 2006 p. 162 and 1998 p. 234). This identification she sees as highly problematic since freedom linked with 'the ideal of a free will, independent from others' (Arendt 2006 p. 162) is most likely eventually to lead to the opposite of a free society, evidencing that during the Nazi period human beings apparently chose freely to deny the opportunity for other human beings to begin in the world. Arendt (1968) presses her point further when she says that 'this identification of freedom with sovereignty is perhaps the most pernicious and dangerous consequence of the philosophical equation of freedom and free will. For it leads either to a denial of human freedom - namely, if it is realized that whatever men may be, they are never sovereign - or to the insight that the freedom of one man, or a group, or a body politic can be purchased only at the price of the freedom, i.e., the sovereignty, of all others' (p.163). Her view is that in order to be free it is sovereignty that must be surrendered. Surrender is necessary because it is when 'men wish to be sovereign, as individuals or as organized groups, they must submit to the oppression of the will, be this the individual will with which I force myself, or the "general will" of an organized group' (p.163). I proceed now to detail Arendt's position on freedom and then to discuss it in relation to education, moving on in the last section of this chapter to investigate when it may make a difference to conceptualise freedom as action in education, especially for the teacher.

5.3.1 Action, the public sphere and natality.

Arendt's (1968) view is that freedom and sovereignty are in fact contradictory ideas; for freedom could not exist under a condition of non-sovereignty either (see p. 168). Freedom, she says, as 'sovereignty is possible only in imagination, paid for by the price of reality' (Arendt 1998 p. 235) and that reality is that we are not all the same. In other words conceptualising freedom as sovereignty risks sameness. Whereas the reality of our uniqueness means that each of our beginnings in the world require our 'not being able to control or foretell its consequences' (p.235), were each of our beginnings to be limited by others' autonomy, uniqueness would be eliminated. Recognising the absurdity of this situation (see p. 235), she proposes another way of regarding freedom and one that allows all of our unique beginnings to survive the 'disabilities of non-sovereignty' (p.236). She proposes that freedom be considered not as a possession at all, but as 'a state of being manifest in action' (p. 161) and vitally that this can only exist under the condition of plurality.

Arendt's (1998) understanding of the relationship between freedom and the human activity of 'action' under the condition of plurality is vital to appreciate. Arendt recalls a distinction between the 'vita activa' that is the way human beings live in the world among other human beings (p.20) and the 'vita contemplativa' which can be exemplified in extreme by death or the life lived separately from others. Politically speaking, she says a life lived separately resembles death in that 'if to die is the same as "to cease to be among men," experience of the eternal is a kind of death, and the only thing that separates it from real death is that it is not final because no living creature can endure it for any length of time' (p.20). Thus she expresses her principal concern with the vita activa, that is the political life of human beings in the world, and in discussing this designates three fundamental human activities, 'labor, work and action' (p. 7). Labor is defined as being the human activity that corresponds to bodily processes, eating, sleeping and so on and the things that are necessary in order to maintain this. Work on the other hand corresponds to the 'unnatural and '"artificial" world of things' (p. 7). That is to say the things human beings make in this world that are additional to maintaining basic living, such as crafting tables and chairs, which could not exist without human activity and so are distinctively related to being human, but which none the less are not permanent.

Work is the activity that corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence as when she says 'work and its product, the human artifact, bestow a measure of permanence and durability upon the futility of mortal life and the fleeting character of human time' (Arendt 1998, p. 8). However it is action as Arendt (1998) explains, in contrast to both work and labor, that 'is the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter' (p. 7). Action is the very thing that makes the difference and is an interference with the 'general laws of behaviour' (p.8). Since it is 'men and not Man' (p.7) who live on the earth and it is action that enables each of our uniqueness to exist. We are each distinct, for 'if men were endlessly reproducible repetitions of the same model, whose nature or essence was the same for all and as predictable as the nature or essence of any other thing' we would be replicas and not human beings. So it is that she insists '(p)lurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live' (p.8).

Action can be summed up simply as human togetherness in plurality, and is the way 'men distinguish themselves instead of being merely distinct; they are the modes in which human beings appear to each other, not indeed as physical objects, but *qua* men' (Arendt 1998, p. 176). All three labor and work, as well as action 'are also rooted in natality in so far as they have the task to provide and preserve the world for, to foresee and reckon with, the constant influx of newcomers who are born into the world as strangers' (Arendt 1998, p.9). Each of us makes our beginning in the world at our births, but in that we are able to act in the world beyond our homes, to act in the public or shared realm, we are also beginners and in each moment come new and fresh into the world. So Arendt (1968) can say that it is because each one of us '*is* a beginning, man can begin' (p.166) and further to be able to begin is to act and it is this that ensures that 'to be human and to be free are one and the same' (p.166). However it is necessary to appreciate quite how important Arendt's (1998) point is regarding action corresponding 'to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on earth and inhabit the earth' (p. 7). This is because she is interested in each unique human being 'who' inhabits the earth and not just the generalised concept of 'man'. Therefore it is our unique togetherness, the unique ways in which we can be together, that is what she means by plurality and which is 'the condition … of all political life' (p. 7). Work, labor and action are all concerned with human existence, 'birth and

death, natality and mortality' (p. 8), however action, as noted above, is the 'political activity par excellence' (p.9).

Action therefore is not only the way by which the child as newcomer arrives into the world, but also the way the child begins to exist in the world as the unique subject of their own life. Freedom is hence understood as being the kind of thing that exists in the public space where people are able to appear as unique, and distinguished one from another. Arendt (1998) emphasises that although we are unique, action as distinct from work and fabrication 'is never possible in isolation' (p. 188). In fact plurality, which is being with others, is so important that 'to be isolated is to be deprived of the capacity to act' (p. 188). Indeed it is this dependence upon being with each other that 'is the price that human beings pay for freedom' (p. 244). Being with others is the price paid for 'the joy of inhabiting together with others a world whose reality is guaranteed for each by the presence of all' (p. 244). This is because 'left to themselves human affairs can only follow the law of mortality, which is the most certain and the only reliable law of a life spent between birth and death. Arendt (1998) is clear that it is the possibility that the 'capacity for action' contains within itself 'certain potentialities which enable it to survive the disabilities of non-sovereignty' (p. 236). Thus it is the 'faculty of action that interferes' (p. 246) with the laws of the world, 'because it interrupts the inexorable automatic course of daily life' (p. 246).

It is action Arendt (1998) says that 'has the closest connection with the human condition of natality' (p.9) and by this she means 'the new beginning inherent in birth' (p.9). But this may seem to be something of a contradiction since the world, where there are others, already exists. So it is that Arendt goes onto say that it is only possible that the one beginning newly in the world 'can make itself felt in the world (…) because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew' (p. 9). So action is both the way by which the newcomer comes into the world as well as the way the world, which is the space of public appearance, is sustained. Arendt (1968) asserts that the public sphere, which is the space where the newcomer comes or appears into the world, cannot 'be taken for granted wherever men live together in a community' (p.152). Indeed she traces the origin of freedom being conceptualised as sovereignty as having emerged during the early Christian era, and as this being the point when freedom came to be understood as synonymous with free-will. Arendt (1968) expresses her view that this idea of freedom is one where 'the presence of freedom was

experienced in complete solitude' (p. 156). Building on this Arendt (1968) expresses her concern that as philosophers have become interested in freedom since the Roman period, it has been the Christian view where freedom made a 'philosophic shift from action to will-power' (p. 161) that has been engaged with. Through time therefore freedom and autonomy have been inextricably linked with 'sovereignty, the ideal of a free will' (p. 246). Freedom has become aligned with the idea of human beings being 'independent from others' which Arendt warns will eventually prevail 'against them' (p. 246).

Arendt's view of freedom, it is clear, is at variance with such independence since 'all human activities are conditioned by the fact that men live together, but it is only action that cannot even be imagined outside the society of men' (Arendt 1998, p. 22). Arendt's (1968) view is that freedom is a 'supreme gift' (p.167) which seems distinct to human beings and 'develops fully only when action has created its own worldly space where it can come out of hiding, as it were, and make its appearance' (p.167). In clarifying what she means by this 'worldly space' or the 'public sphere' and how this relates to action Arendt (1968) noted that the 'distinction between a private and a public sphere of life corresponds to the household and the political realms, which have existed as distinct, separate entities at least since the rise of the ancient city-state' (p. 48). Indeed a 'distinctive trait of the household sphere was that in it men lived together because they were driven by their wants and needs' (p. 30). Arendt (1977) makes a further distinction, citing Aristotle, that practical things 'have ends other than themselves' (p.60), whereas 'action is itself an end' (p.60). She likens the difference to the making and the playing of a flute, where for the flute maker the end is the flute whereas she likens the playing of the flute in a performance to action. The performance is dependent upon there being a public space into which it is heard; furthermore the end of the performance is unknown at the beginning even though there was a deliberate choice to play. So it is with action in plurality. There does need to be some deliberate choice to make space for the newcomer to come into the world (p.60), so in the context of a school this means all students and teachers will share the responsibility for that. However with regard to Arendt's meaning of the word 'choice' it is important to note that this is something different to the way in which Peters uses this word. Arendt argues that choice is something coming out of desire rather than reason, for reason is the kind of thing that has an end other than itself. This is in contrast to action which an end in

itself. Choice is necessary 'whenever men act for a purpose' (p.61) but 'the purpose itself, the ultimate end of that act the sake for which it was embarked on in the first place, is not open to choice' (p. 61).

The public sphere then, is the place where human activities beyond the household are located, and Arendt (1998) extends her point by saying that 'the distinction between private and public coincides with the opposition of necessity and freedom' (p. 70). She asserts from this that the 'most elementary meaning of the two realms indicates that there are things that need to be hidden and others that need to be displayed publicly if they are to exist at all' (p. 70). Freedom is the kind of thing that belongs in the public sphere; indeed if it is to exist at all it is as the result of action and is the kind of thing that needs to be displayed publicly for it to have not only existence, but also meaning. Freedom, she concludes is therefore by its nature dependent upon plurality and is 'the very opposite of "inner freedom," the inward space into which men may escape from external coercion and feel free' (Arendt 2006, p. 145). Freedom, of which Arendt speaks, can only exist where the public sphere exists and both are dependent upon action for their appearance under the condition of plurality. Moreover Arendt (1998) can say that 'action is the political activity par excellence (p. 9), and how that it is natality, and not mortality, (that) may be the central category of political, as distinguished from metaphysical, thought'. In this way Arendt can go so far as to say that the 'miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, "natural" ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted' (p. 247).

In summarising this section, I have noted how Arendt through her writing has explored the absurdity of freedom conceptualised as sovereignty. She argues instead that freedom is something that can exist in the world precisely because we are all unique human beings rather than something to be possessed by individual human beings at the expense of others. This is freedom understood in relation to action under the condition of plurality. Action, summarised as human togetherness in plurality, is contrasted to labour and work. Although all three as activities of the vita activa are necessary for human natality into the world of others, whereas labor corresponds to those activities necessary to sustain our physical existence and work corresponds to those things we do in the world such as fabricating objects and so on; what really makes it possible for us to exist as human in the world is action. Action is the way of being together that

enables us to appear to each other, not as objects, but as men. This togetherness is plurality and is the condition of public life. Freedom then exists or develops only when unique human beings out of choice, through action under the condition of plurality, create the worldly space or the public sphere.

5.4 What is required of education?

I opened the discussion in this chapter by showing that education should have an interested position in relation to freedom. I have also begun to reveal that Peters' particular conception of freedom, because of its dependence on the distinction between knowledge and belief and hence on reason and autonomy, has been particularly problematic for religious education. This is because such a distinction between knowledge and belief is likely to limit the inclusion in the curriculum of the full range of ways in which it is possible to live a religious life as I have discussed in chapter 4. In the next section of this chapter and in order to resolve this problem, I have investigated a different conception of freedom. I have shown that both freedom and the public sphere, wherein freedom can 'make its appearance' (Arendt 2006 p.167), are entirely dependent upon a particular understanding of 'action'. My intention in this section is to see in light of this, what new possibilities open up for education in general and later, in the final chapter of my thesis, for religious education in particular.

The point I want to make is this. Where freedom is conceptualised as a 'state of being manifest in action' rather than sovereignty, education that has an interested position in relation to freedom should be conceptualised as being concerned with bringing the child to the kind of human togetherness that is action. This is where action itself is characterised by what Arendt (1977) calls choice (p.60), rather than reason alone. Reason Arendt sees as only one aspect of choice. In other words action is not something that happens by itself, it needs some volition of which reason is only one aspect, but sufficient to say here that choice is a characteristic of action which is understood as human togetherness in plurality. This contrasts to education where freedom is understood as sovereignty; for in this case education becomes inextricably linked to reason. Indeed there is a further problem for reason, the significance of which was identified by Arendt (1997), and this is that reason standing alone has the need of ends other than itself (p.60). This is to be compared to choice which is understood in

terms of contingency and as such an end in itself. Arendt therefore in understanding choice as part of action, ensures the possibility that action in plurality is the place of beginning. Arendt (1977) brings into her longer argument on this Duns Scotus' discussions on the limits and limitations of reason (see p. 128ff). Scotus' position is that this is in part because of human beings' physical finitude, and asserts that it is the contingency of choice that is necessary for freedom. Indeed Arendt recognises the significance of Scotus' contribution to this discussion in that it is he who has noticed the risk of necessity aligned with reason. Scotus was prepared to concede that instead it is contingency that is the price of 'the gift of freedom – the mental endowment we have for beginning something new, of which we know that it could just as well not be' (p.195).

However it is important to recognise that Arendt (1961) did not actually see education in the way I am setting out here. Although her view was that the essence of education was indeed 'natality, the fact that human beings are *born* into the world' (p. 173), her concern was that the natality of the child is a fragile process and thus risky for the child. Her conclusion from this is that education belongs to the private sphere. In addition to the fragility of natality Arendt notes another risk. As well as the physical dangers children may experience if they are let loose in the world insufficiently guided, there is the risk that the existing order of things will overwhelm and prevent the natality of the child. Arendt (1961) also wants to resist the idea that education could either become 'an instrument of politics' (p.174) or another equally dangerous possibility that political activity itself could be 'conceived as a form of education' (p.174).

5.4.1 Education as bringing the child to human togetherness: to action in plurality

Arendt's (1961) view that education and the public sphere should be kept separate, lay in her observations that countries during the 20th century have 'sought 'to equalize' or even erase as far as possible the differences between young and old, between gifted and the ungifted, between children and adults and particularly between pupils and teachers' (p. 180). This attempt at erasing difference, to understand equality as sameness, has in her view not brought about hoped-for freedom for all. Rather a consequence of this attitude to equality has been that adults have either left children to their own devices or, in totalitarian situations, a few assert extreme control over others. In common with

Peters, Arendt criticizes child-centered education, but for a slightly different reason. She suggests this is a sign that where adults let go of their responsibility for children, responsibility is also loosened for the world. In addition to this her awareness of the need to take seriously the dis-equity of relationships, leads Arendt to formulate particular conclusions about the relationship between education and political life. Arendt is acutely aware of what will happen ultimately when 'an authority' becomes dominant and uses its strength to dominate another group; in her view it leads inevitably to totalitarianism. Nevertheless, although I share her concern, her precise formulation of argument at this point is one I want to challenge. However, I do want to trust the robustness of her argument about freedom in general to support my longer argument regarding freedom in relation to education and also ultimately to religious education.

My challenge begins with Biesta's (2014) questioning of Arendt's fear regarding allowing education to be a space of natality, that is her separation of education from politics and the developmental distinction Arendt makes 'between "child" and "adult"' (p. 113). Biesta points out that elsewhere in her writing she shows interest in all children and adults, suggesting that this shows that in fact all her work reveals the centrality of the question 'what does it mean to exist politically?' (p.114) relating to everyone. Arendt's response over and again to this question is that to exist politically means to exist in a condition of plurality; and to do so in such a way that freedom can appear in the world. With Biesta I want to take this into the context of education and would want to ask Arendt what would happen if schools were seen only as places 'for the acquisition of knowledge and skills but not also as a place where freedom might appear' (Biesta 2014, p.118). Biesta continues by saying that it cannot be that children appear only at some point in the future, which is in some way to be inserted safely into the world when they reach adulthood. His point is that children must be understood as human beings, capable of making their beginnings now; that is as already existing in the world in the present. Biesta's point is that education therefore does not need to resort to a developmental understanding of children. Rather what is required instead is an understanding of what conditions school should cultivate in order for children to make their appearance in the world.

I have argued that education, and therefore an educative school should be a place of human togetherness; a place where people exist together in plurality and that it can

therefore be a place of appearance. I agree with Arendt that education should be a place of natality, however I challenge her view that education belongs in the private sphere by putting to her that surely she would not want to suggest that education cannot be a place where freedom can appear. Surely it would be far more terrifying to think of schools as places where freedom was prevented from appearing, places where there was an erasure of plurality, action therefore prevented. In moving to conclude this section I am arguing that education must be considered as a place of action (rather than fabrication or work) and that education should be regarded in terms of bringing the child to action. This is because education has an interested position in relation to freedom, which I understand in Arendtian terms. Freedom is understood here as the kind of thing that can exist in the world only under certain conditions. Therefore I conclude that education must be conceptualised as a place of appearance, understood in terms of action and concerned with human togetherness; education therefore must be considered as part of the public sphere. What education should do therefore in bringing children to action is to bring children to choice regarding human togetherness, which is distinct from simply bringing people together, in order for them to make their appearance in the world.

5.4.2   What is the teacher required to do? : attention, honesty and discernment

To be sure, the teacher has a significant role in relation to the child's education. With Arendt (1961) I note that this is a relationship that entails great responsibility 'implicit in the fact that the young are introduced by adults into a continuously changing world' (p.189). In this section I look at how the teachers' role will be understood differently depending upon what it is considered education should do. If, following from Peters (1968), education should bring the child to reason, teaching requires the teacher to 'reveal our reasons to the students and, by so doing, to submit them to his evaluation and criticism' (p. 39). Further, teaching will remain 'pre-eminently concerned … with the adoption of methods appropriate to the development of knowledge and understanding of principles' (p.40) and be focused on the production of separate autonomous individuals; located in the cognitive domain. However here I want to take up some different possibilities that an Arendtian understanding of freedom may bring to education. Although I would not want to say that reason is never important in education, what Arendt's work on freedom has revealed is that it is not the heart of

what education should do. What is at stake is not only the existence of freedom but also the possibility of the child herself beginning in the world, because the two are bound up together. There is a connection between freedom, the possibility of there being a place where the child can make her beginnings and the beginnings the child will make (see Biesta 2006, p. 47 for a similar discussion).

The educational question I am asking at this point however is what the teacher should do. And it is Weil (1965) who helps me begin to explore and also to articulate how the teacher can bring the child to a way of being with others in such a way that enables the child to appear in the world of others, not as an object but as a human being. Weil suggests that the role of the teacher is in fact not to 'do' very much at all in the sense of engaging cognition. Rather her view is that the teacher will find that 'our deep purpose should aim solely at increasing the power of attention' (p.68). She is trying to articulate precisely what the teacher should do for the child in order to 'increas(ing) the power of attention' since attention as Weil conceives it is not exactly the kind of thing that can be 'paid' (p.70). Therefore it is not related to muscular effort but in a way called forth as the teacher brings the child to attend.

In drawing my argument together and since I understand action in Arendtian terms as something that can only happen under the condition of plurality, it seems to me that the first thing the teacher has to do is to bring the child to attend not only to something but perhaps also at times to someone new. The teacher will do this in the ways she behaves, in the ways she speaks and moves with the children. Inviting the child to observe, to notice and talk to and with others enables the child to realise there are choices in terms of relationship outside the home that make a difference. As the child attends to others by choice, the risk of and possibilities from which are uncertain, the conditions start to exist under which action is possible. It is important to remember that for Arendt choice is not linked primarily with reason, but something that comes out of desire. There is a connection here with Weil's view of attending. This is because, for Weil, attention 'is bound up with desire. Not the will but with desire – or more exactly, consent' (Weil 1963, p. 107). Lewin (2014) points out that 'Weil wants to maintain some separation of attention from will' (p. 364), and this is because as Weil 'suggests that the personal will, with its concern to fix itself on a particular problem constitutes a dependency at odds with the purity of desire' (p.363). For Weil the perfect manifestation of attention is prayer, '(p)rayer being only attention in its pure form' (Weil 1963, p. 108). There is a

connection here between Weil's view of prayer in relation to attention and Arendt's view of the vita contemplativa. Arendt (1998) notes the traditional relationship between the vita activa and the vita contemplativa is a hierarchical one (p.17). However she makes it clear that she does not see the traditional hierarchical relationship precisely because of the pre-eminence she gives to the vita activa, which is action in the public sphere. Thus, with Arendt and Weil I can say that since education belongs in the public sphere it is to attention as part of the vita activa that the teacher brings the child to, and not necessarily to prayer. Nevertheless, Weil helps me to begin to articulate a strong connection between the two, for attention 'taken to its highest degree, is the same thing as prayer. It presupposes faith and love' (Weil 1963, p. 105).

So it is that as the child attends to someone outside their immediate family, most likely first another child and then the other children and to other things in the class; the important aspect here is the teacher's responsibility to ensure the actuality of plurality. Indeed as Weil suggests '(t)eaching should have no aim but to prepare, by training attention, for the possibility of such an act' (Weil 1963, p. 108). In the secondary school in preparing the conditions for the child to come to attend the teacher may set up a new display, something unusual or perhaps in some other way unexpected. This could be for example a vase of flowers or leaves, a glass of water, something that gives the young people an opportunity to pause and notice something in a new way, to notice the reactions of others and hence to regard others in the class in a new way as well. The teacher needs to bring the child or young person to attend to the existence, and the uniqueness of all others. Such bringing to attention can be understood as an interruption in the flow of the life of the child in order to make possible their arrival in the public sphere. The role of the teacher is going to be an extremely delicate one, but significant since she is part of ensuring the conditions are present through which the child begins in the world. It requires care and 'responsibility for both, for the life and development of the child and for the continuance of the world' (Arendt 1961, p. 186) and interestedness on the part of all concerned. In some respects this may not seem very different to any other lesson, where the teacher asks the child to listen before they are taught something. The point however, I am making here is that the purpose of this and what makes it educative as I understand things with Arendt, is different. And this is that the purpose here is to bring the child to action and not only to reason.

How this happens matters, for if the existing way of things is too strong, if others overwhelm her, the child's own beginning will be prevented. In recognising plurality herself, the teacher helps to bring about the conditions under which this child is able to act; to speak and to think. The child makes her beginning and so is enabled to become part of the existing 'orders', which is not a once and for all thing. The teacher will also bring the child to attend to other things and there will at times be a focus on 'the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values and dispositions' (Biesta 2014, p. 64). However, education's interest and starting point will always be in the action of the unique subject, in her natality and thus in enabling the conditions under which freedom and the public sphere can exist. In the nursery this may happen where the teacher invites the child to notice how another child is playing or drawing or riding a bike and without judgment opens the possibility of the child seeing the other in a new way. As the other child responds, interestedness begins and there is an opportunity for togetherness that was not present before. The teacher, as she calls the child to attend at times to other people and at other times to other and different things such as a bird or a flower or a falling leaf in autumn, she is ensuring human togetherness; which is action in plurality.

Attention for Weil has some relation to *intention*, in that it is not something that exactly happens by accident, but is also not precisely in the choosing, in terms of the will, of the child or teacher. Rather it 'consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty and ready to be penetrated by the object, it means hoping in our minds, within reach of this thought, but on a lower level and not in contact with it' (Weil 1965, p.68). Although attention is something we have to do *for* ourselves, Weil's point is that it is something we are unlikely to do without, at least at the beginning, the guidance of a teacher. The teacher first calls to the child, and waits for the child to respond; indeed attention could be thought of as a kind of gift the teacher offers to the child, but a gift that is not possessed either by the teacher or the child. It could be considered to exist in the response of the child and lies somewhere in between them. The child has the opportunity and with the teacher's careful observations and comments may be brought to attend to the possibility of suspending day to day business (the kinds of things that Arendt may term work or labor), for even just a moment, and instead 'waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive … in its naked truth' (Weil 1965, p. 72).

This way of looking at the role of the teacher is what I want to term as existential rather than instrumental. This is because it is focused on how the teacher exists with the child, and not only with what the teacher wants to bring about at some point in the future. The teacher brings the child to the point of attention in this moment, but of course there needs to be something to which the child can choose to attend. As the teacher calls the child's attention to the world, the teacher's attentiveness over time enables the child to 'hold' their own attention independently; the child can make her own beginnings in the world and will not be overwhelmed by the world. The teacher brings the child to attention, and as I have already noted the teacher in a way cultivates a kind of desire in the child for 'attention is bound up with desire. Not with the will, but with desire - or more exactly consent' (Weil 1963, p. 106). This more resembles faith than free-will in the way that Peters' means consent. Consent, in this way of considering things with Weil, is something that exists in the relationship between the teacher and the children; I would want to propose it resembles the kind of human togetherness that is action, and is only possible under the condition of plurality.

But although this kind of attentiveness is important, it is not enough. The teacher needs to invite an intellectual engagement with the world in a way that Weil (1963) calls the 'virtue of humility' (p.116) and which I want to term intellectual humility. The power of attention is for Weil a part of the intellectual order (see p. 116) and should lead towards another aspect which the teacher needs to draw the child towards and this is the capacity for discernment. After a while the child led by her own desire, becomes able to discern through intellectual humility what is desirable from what she desires. None of this is the same as applying reason because is not a matter of choosing one thing over another, but rather of arranging things in a particular, that is in an attentive, humble and discerning, way. 'Intelligence can never perpetrate the mystery (that is the world), but it, and it alone, can judge of the suitability of the words that express it. For this task it needs to be keener, more discerning, more precise, more exact and more exacting' (p.118). Without any doubt the teacher also has to be attentive to the child. Furthermore the teacher, as a representative of the existing order of things, must herself be open to change to discovering new ways of existing in the world. And then, with intellectual humility, so also come to discernment.

5.5 Conclusion

In developing my argument for what education should aim to achieve, I have started with affirming the interested position education has in freedom. However I have argued with Arendt that freedom is the kind of thing that can only come to exist in the world in human togetherness, which is action under the condition of plurality. Education then should bring the child to action. In doing this, and as the child makes her first beginnings into the world of others, the teacher should be there to bring the child to attend to others and to other aspects of the world. This is so that there can be recognition of plurality and hence human togetherness. To imagine children coming into the world separately, into a world where things remain the same; of children being forced into the existing order of things without question would be the opposite of what I argue education should do. Arendt describes this as 'alienation – the atrophy of the space of appearance' (Arendt 1998, p. 209), and belongs in a labouring society where 'all activities are leveled down to the human body's metabolism with nature and where no exchange exists but only consumption' (Arendt 1998, p. 209). Under these conditions children become producers, and their outcomes products. In this situation it would be as if all people were alike. Sameness not plurality would be the prevailing way of things for the 'sameness prevailing in a society resting on labor and consumption and expressed in its conformity is intimately connected with the somatic experience of laboring together, where the biological rhythm of labor unites the group of laborers to the point that each may feel that he is no longer an individual but actually one with all others' (p. 214).

Arendt has already noted that education is unlikely to be possible when it starts by taking 'into account only the group and not the individual child' (Arendt 1961, p181). Furthermore she says, '(t)his unitedness of many into one is basically anti-political' (Arendt 1998, p.214). In chapter 6 as I develop my argument for what religious education in particular should aim to achieve, I want to begin to identify the significance of education that brings a range of ways it is possible to live a religious life into the educative discussion. In the epilogue to Eichmann in Jerusalem (see Arendt & Kroh, 1964), the reader is offered the opportunity to give some consideration to the matter of whether legally one can be regarded guilty for a crime that one did not intend to commit. It is concluded that not being aware offers neither defence nor gives claim to innocence. Moreover, Arendt gives me cause for grave concern that education

cannot be considered as simply part of the man-made world that is a place only of work and labour. Indeed if it is not considered as a place for action and speech, education will be 'as in despotically ruled communities which banish their subjects into the narrowness of the home and thus prevent the rise of a public realm' (Arendt 2006 p. 147). In such a situation freedom has no worldly reality, it cannot and does not exist. Taking this principle into my argument for what it is education should aim to achieve, I would want to say that an adult participating in 'work' or 'labor' with children can only have an outcome of replication of sameness and this must be considered as anti-political. This is also anti the public sphere and cannot be called education. Thus, although there is much from Peters that I would agree with, my proposals are quite different in the way of defining the educated person in terms autonomy. For in my proposal autonomy is understood in relation to action rather than reason. This is action under the condition of plurality rather than autonomy understood in terms of the choosing of a rational being. Further my proposals are different in another way, since an important point I want to make is that understanding what education should aim to achieve in terms of reason alone would not preclude labor or work being confused with education. Labor or work manifesting under the guise of education, I would argue with Arendt, would only serve to perpetuate the possibility of the banality of totalitarianism; risking the future of all children, those here and now and those yet to come.

So it is that in addition to this, my argument develops in such a way to enable me to conceptualise teaching as best understood as a form of patient waiting. A kind of patient waiting which allows for the attentive one, who is the teacher, to perceive and ask the other, who is the child, 'what are you going through?' (Weil 1965, p.72). So it is that Weil (1965) can say, as paradoxical as it seems, that 'a Latin prose or geometry problem, even though they are done wrong, may be of great service one day, provided we devote the right kind of effort to them. Should the occasion arise, they can one day make us better able to give someone in affliction exactly the help required to save him, at the extreme moment of his need' (p. 76). The child can be active in this process, bringing their own new observations into the educative context, for if it is only the teacher who is bringing the world to the child, there is a danger that the teaching becomes part of the existing order overwhelming the child. But for this to happen something else needs to be taken into account, something which Weil missed and which Arendt enables me to take account of. This is freedom, understood in relation to

action, and upon which the rest of my thesis depends. Teaching in religious education I will argue in chapter 6 should also be seen as a form of action, enabling the natality of the child, the new to appear. And religious education in Arendtian terms will be understood as having a particular possibility of enabling the miracle that could save the world. Motivated by this observation, I take the argument formed in this chapter for what education should aim to achieve on into chapter 6 and in bringing chapters 4 and 5 together I make clear my proposal for what religious education should aim to achieve.

Chapter 6:   What should religious education aim to achieve?

6.1 Introduction:

This chapter is in four sections. First, in light of my discussions in chapter 4 and 5, I revisit my critique of the interpretive, critical realist and conceptual enquiry approaches to religious education.   Sections 6.2 and 6.3 give a systematic analysis of the three proposals, highlighting the extent of difficulty religious education faces in relation to two persistent problems. That is in relation to assumptions made about what it means to be religious and in relation to a lack of precision regarding what education should aim to achieve. In section 6.4 I present my proposal for a new approach to religious education, and bring together the elements of my argument as it has developed through the proceeding chapters. Finally in section 6.5, following clarification of why this approach is both significant and distinctive from what has gone before, I move to concluding why it is important for the world that religious education is considered in this way. My point is that something important has been missed both in terms of what religious education should aim to achieve as well as an in particular, in terms of what the teacher of religious education should do to make that possible.

6.2 Naming the problems in religious education

 As I have already discussed in chapter 2, each of the three theorists of religious education discussed in chapter 3 was chosen because of the particular way they are continuing to have considerable influence in contemporary religious education. Two issues emerged from my investigation as persistently problematic. The first of these is the different ways in which religion is conceptualised and indeed precisely because 'how the nature of religion is construed' (Barnes 2014, p. 233) remains contested, that there is persistent disagreement about exactly what is to be done in religious education. In spite of this however, my research in chapter 3 revealed there is nevertheless agreement about the importance of religion being represented well in the classroom. Indeed as Barnes has recently noted, 'the controversial issue is not that religious education should aim to reflect the nature of religion' (Barnes 2014, p. 233) but continuing and persistent disagreement about the nature of religion, remaining in recent

reports, ensures there can be no agreement about what counts as the best religious education. This observation determined my next step in chapter 4. This was an enquiry not in order to find yet another definition of religion, but rather an investigation into three structurally different ways of answering the question regarding what it means to be religious. I wanted to show in this chapter that hitherto something has been missing in discussions regarding religious education and that taken together with my findings from chapter 5 regarding what education should achieve, that I can offer a way of moving forward from the impasse of disagreement.

The second issue I observed in my research in chapter 3 is that each of the three theorists showed a lack of precision about what education should do in the public sphere. It is possible that this is a legacy from the 1930's when, as I noted in chapter 2, religious education at this time had a protected position because of its links with the churches and did not engage with wider educational developments of the period. Other writers that informed Jackson, Wright and Erricker's work, such as Grimmitt (see for example 1987b), also have limited their investigations into what education should do, leaving their ideas on religious education to rest on broad assumptions about education. The key problem is not so much that there is disagreement between the different approaches to religious education I discussed in chapter 3, but rather there is wide variation of substantial engagement with the matter of education. As a consequence in my view many assumptions were, and continue to be, made. In the case of Wright his engagement with education amounted to little more than discussion of a 'learning theory' as if this was equal to a full exploration of what education is or should do. In chapter 5 therefore I undertook an in depth enquiry, not into the abstraction of education, but an enquiry regarding what education should aim to achieve. In doing so I identified some problems in the work of influential thinkers in the philosophy of education during the 20th century such as Richard Peters, and in particular problems that Peters' arguments present to religious education.

I proceed in the next three subsections to briefly recap the work of Jackson, Wright and Erricker and their respective approaches to religious education, interrogating them in light of my observations in chapters 4 and 5. I then move on to dig deeper into these assumptions in 6.3 before laying out my new proposal in section 6.4.

6.2.1 The interpretive approach

The interpretive approach to religious education drew on, and developed from, a number of sources. These included most significantly, anthropological writings from Geertz as well as the writing of Smith and Edward Said (see Jackson 2012b) and anthropological research methodology impacted this approach in at least three ways. First it was a means of accessing information about religion at the beginning of the development of this approach. Secondly it greatly informed Jackson's development of a theory of religious education and thirdly informed the materials which developed to support this in the early days. However this approach has broadly ensured that what is brought to be represented in the religious education classroom has been limited to religion understood as what I have termed in chapter 4 as belief and especially tradition. I have discussed Jackson's (1997) claim to 'epistemological openness' (pp.122-126) and more recently (see Jackson 2009) he made clear once more that the approach 'is not relativistic in relation to truth, aiming for a procedural epistemological openness acknowledging varying and often competing truth claims' (p.25). This has been explained elsewhere as meaning that students have 'a right to study *different* views of truth represented within and across religious traditions as well as considering the functions of religious activity in people's lives' (Jackson 1997, p.126).

Jackson's (1997) view then, is that religious education processes should not take on a particular position in relation to truth, hoping that the projects' ethnographic approach will assist with this distancing (see p. 126). In addition to this there is an intention that religious education will contribute to the development of students' sensitivity (see p.47) and is entailed in the work of reflexivity and edification within the theory. Jackson cites Said's praise of scholars who he admires, for example that there is always a 'direct sensitivity to the material before them and then a continual self-examination of their methodology and practice' (Jackson 1997, p.47). Furthermore there is an intention, when this is brought into religious education that this same sensitivity can be cultivated in the child through a religious education programme based on this method. Nevertheless, I have critiqued Jackson's work in two ways. First asking whether it is able to be open to the range of ways it is possible to be religious that is whether the ethnographic process is as able to ensure religion is as distinguishable from culture as Jackson hopes. Secondly and most importantly in light of my work in chapter 5,

whether he is precise enough about how he understands what education should aim to achieve in the public sphere.

Indeed, Jackson (2004b) in suggesting that religion is just one of other 'subjects of study' (p. 26) reveals assumptions being made about religion as well as about education. Although various reasons are given for why religious education is particularly distinctive and valuable, the limits put upon his analysis of religion by his recourse to anthropological and political scholarship ensures Jackson's work may be closed to acknowledging the full range of ways in which it is possible to live a religious life as I have discussed in chapter 4. As a consequence of this, the interpretive approach remains vulnerable to the challenge of whether its proposals actually differ from something like cultural learning. Although Jackson recognised the need for further research in this area (see for example Jackson 2004a, p.158ff), elsewhere it is clear that the need for clarification of how the terms 'religion' and 'culture' may or may not be used interchangeably remains (see for example Jackson 2006, p. 295ff.). The interpretive approach therefore has limitations, because of its emphasis on anthropological ethnographic theory and research, in its ability to express the ways in which it is possible to live a religious life. Although Jackson (see for example 1997) recognises the dangers of objectifying religion and treating it either as something to be believed or not believed (see p. 52) and identifies theoretical and practical problems with the phenomenological approach (see p.53), Jackson does not ask educational questions about religious education. This means the justification for religious education lies in a cultural interpretation of religion, the consequences of which I explore further in section 6.3.

6.2.2 The critical realist approach

Wright, in developing the critical realist approach to religious education, has been writing in reaction to the confessional religious education of the mid-20th century and responses to this from the phenomenological approach. Wright seeks a religious education that enables pupils 'to wrestle with ultimate truth' (Wright 2007a, p. 7). The approach to religious education he has developed focusses on religious truth claims (see for example Wright 2007a) which I would suggest relates to what I have in chapter 4 termed religion as belief. Arguably religious education limited to an investigation of

truth in the way Wright proposes is open to the critique of being unnecessarily narrow. This is not only in its conception of religion but also the ways in which distinct religions can be represented in the classroom, and this is because of its focus on the singular and particular rather than the general (see for example the discussion between Jackson 2008 and Wright 2008).

Teece (2005) points out in addition to this that it is important 'to recognise that, as far as it is possible to talk about religions as ideological or theological systems, the particular claims to truth *that are deemed significant* by religious believers vary both between traditions and within traditions' (p.36). Further, that care should be taken 'not to impose an interpretation of religion that is essentially western and rationalistic on the way that religions are understood in religious education' (p.36). Wright's particular emphasis on reason, as a necessary strategy for engaging with truth and truth claims, limits the possibilities for exploring what it means to be religious in religious education, however it also presents a further problem. Wright does show an interest in freedom in so much as he gives an extended exploration (see especially 2007) to discussions that have been had regarding distinctions made between comprehensive and political liberalism in relation to education. However there is a distinction between Wright's approach and the approach I have taken. This is that I begin with a precise discussion of educational theory starting from Peters. So where Wright's view is that reasoning will enable the child's reflection on the importance of truth in their own life, in light of my work in Chapter 5, I can show clearly now that this reveals assumptions Wright is making about what education should aim to achieve. And further, I can show why the leap Wright makes to learning theory, based on knowledge, in writing about what it is that the teacher should be doing in religious education so conceived is in my view flawed.

6.2.3 The conceptual enquiry approach

By way of contrast to Jackson and Wright, Erricker's (2010) proposals which form the basis of the Hampshire Agreed Syllabus for religious education 'Living Difference' (2004) and 'Living Difference revised' (2011) and as discussed in chapter 3, are focussed around a process that the teacher should undertake with the children. Children are invited to 'communicate' their responses to a concept and then the teacher enables

the students to 'apply' the concept to their lives before 'enquiring' more carefully into what the concept might mean for other people. The next step is for the concept, as understood by others, to be presented to the students in the form of a case study; that is in a real life 'contextualisation'. Following this students are invited to 'evaluate' the concept both from within and outside the context. This in order to determine how or why the concept is important for a particular group exemplified in the context, before also evaluating whether the concept could have any importance or significance to them or to someone who was not of that particular religious tradition.

Important to note here for my longer argument that Erricker (2000) is critical of Kohlberg's emphasis on reason and reasoning (see for example p. 87), preferring a relational approach to the work of the classroom community, citing Gilligan and Benhabib (see p. 115). Indeed the conceptual enquiry approach is a model for teaching which intends to 'contribute to overall educational goals based upon the development of young people' (p. 67). It is also important to note Erricker explains how his work was framed to a large extent in response to the phenomenological approach to religious education. However in contrast to Wright or Jackson, Erricker sought to ensure an educative aspect to his work asking educational questions from the beginning and discussing this in terms of 'pedagogy' (see Erricker 2010 pp 35-42). Nevertheless, in light of my discussion in chapter 4, questions remain about whether a relativist approach to religion as implied by Erricker in the conceptual enquiry approach to religious education, has sufficient scope to be open to all ways in which it is possible to live a religious life as I have discussed in chapter 4. That is to say for a person who understands themselves to be living a religious life, recourse to relativism is not likely to be a satisfactory way of explaining religious plurality.

Nevertheless Erricker does discuss his interest in another area of human life which he terms 'spirituality' (see Erricker 2001). However the relationship between spirituality and religion, although discussed (see especially Erricker and Erricker 2000b), is never precisely explained in terms of what the teacher should do. Furthermore, and connected with this, Erricker insists that there is a strong relationship between religious education and religious studies (see 2010). Erricker therefore reveals his position on religion and he does this in two ways. First is that he sees religion as separate from 'spirituality' and secondly therefore that the core work of religious education is an enquiry into religion understood only as belief and practice. In the following section 6.3, I go on to

unpick some of the consequences for religious education where assumptions about religion only in terms of belief and practice are made.

6.3 Interrogating problems and discovering new possibilities

I have so far shown that all three of the approaches to religious education hitherto discussed each have a clear and particular way of conceptualising religion. Further in each case the conceptualisations Jackson, Wright and Erricker developed in their respective approaches to religious education have been in response to developments in the history of religious education. To be sure, the ways in which religion has been conceptualised has led directly to particular approaches to the study of religion in religious education. Further, what has been common to most, except perhaps for the interpretative approach where there is an overlap with religion and culture, is the tendency to assume that the boundaries of what counts as religion are clearly defined and that there is another kind of thing that is not religion. Therefore to resolve the issues presented by both specific definitions of religion as well as ones where there may be confusion with culture, instead of seeking a definition of religion or addressing the question 'what is religion?' my approach in chapter 4 has been to explore different ways of responding to the question 'what does it mean to be religious?'.

My intention in this section is to show that something important has been missed or at least remained weakly articulated in religious education where religion is objectified as a consequence of particular definitions of religion being adopted in religious education, as well as where there is confusion between religion and culture. Through asking the question 'what does it mean to be religious?' in chapter 4, a different question to the one asked by Wright, Jackson and Erricker, I have noticed some new possibilities opening up which in my view seem likely to be important. I have found that the question 'what it means to be religious?' has revealed it may not always be necessary to make a categorical distinction between religion and non-religion at all. This distinction is only needed when religion for example is understood as propositional belief (as with the critical realist approach) or where there is uncertainty about the overlap with religion and culture (as for example in the interpretive approach). In the case of where religion is understood only in relation to belief, 'truth' is understood ontologically as an absolute external reality and the reference point for explaining what it means to be religious. This has had serious consequences for religious education. For where religion

is limited to being understood in terms of propositional belief, the key questions asked of religious education tend to be epistemological. Educational questions are either missed altogether, or in some way 'bolted on' after the epistemological questions have been addressed.

Erricker (2000) recognises that there is more to religious education than the study of beliefs and traditions, and opposes 'the idea that values can only be derived from religious truth claims in particular, or from epistemologies in general' (p.58). However because he does not ask the question 'what does it mean to be religious?' the vehicle by which he introduces another dimension is through reference to 'spirituality' in religious education. In particular he explores historic discussions that have taken place regarding 'spiritual development' in education in general and religious education in particular (see pp.36-58 and Ericker 2001). Erricker's point is that where religious education is only understood as objective beliefs it will be impossible for young peoples' contribution to be 'positively received if they (have to) ascribe to an agenda that is already predetermined' (p.58), in other words he has a concern for how the young person with their own new ideas can come into a world where everything is already decided. Although Erricker's concern is an important one, and one I recognise and identify with, his resort to a particular way of understanding spirituality as a means of bringing this dimension into religious education is liable to the same charges that I have noted in chapter 3.

I noted in chapter 3 that the move to a spiritual approach to religious education in the 1970s emerged from the phenomenological approach, and is therefore also vulnerable to a charge of confessionalism. Erricker (2010) recognised that what became known as the experiential approach to religious education was 'usually understood as a type of phenomenological/psychological method' (p. 51). However, acknowledging the 'existential overtones' (p.51) of this approach, Erricker was clear he wanted somehow to draw these overtones into religious education. Nevertheless instead of addressing or looking for it in religion itself, he does this by looking to research on spirituality in education. In addition to this, and in taking care to avoid coercion or indoctrination, Erricker (2010) recognises that indoctrination can take place in many aspects of life not only in the context of religions (see p. 14). However, Erricker does not make a rigorous analysis of freedom and offers no explanation of it either in relation to education as a whole or in particular in relation to religion and religious education in particular. As a

consequence the conceptual enquiry approach relies entirely on a particular approach to enquiry in order to ensure there is no indoctrination. This approach is broadly based on the three stage constructivist approach to learning developed by Grimmitt (see Grimmitt 2000a and 2000b).

The critical point here is that although Erricker identifies that religious education has a problem in relation to the relationship between the subjective and competing sets of claims to objective truth, instead of asking further questions of religion or other educational questions in order to interrogate what education should do, he moves to understanding the matter as an epistemological problem that can be resolved by turning to a constructivist approach to learning. He does this because he limits his understanding of what it means to be religious to religion as belief or practice. The subjective has been positioned as an educational concern by asserting that the cultivation of spirituality is an educational purpose rather than as a way of existing religiously in the world. He then looks for epistemological solutions, asserting that 'it is necessary to present the case for a pedagogy based on relativism' (Erricker 2000, p. 58).

To be sure as already discussed in chapter 4, Wright also understands the matter of competing truth claims in religion as principally raising epistemological questions for religious education. And Wright, as I have already noted, turns to critical realism for resolution. Jackson (2004) in also engaging with this discussion, notes that there has been a 'radical questioning of the nature of knowledge' (p.11) in religious education. However, Jackson critiques Erricker's relativist position on knowledge, noting it has important consequences. One being that this can lead in religious education to a 'tendency to be eclectic and to gather beliefs from a variety of sources … such combinations seen as tentative and open to modification' (p.12). Such epistemological disagreement has led in part to the existence of different and conflicted approaches to the teaching of religious education. Nevertheless the bigger problem here is in relation to the problem of representation. This is because for someone for whom what it means to be religious is adhering to a set of propositional beliefs holding them as special religious knowledge and as true, representing them in a relativist way in the classroom is untenable. It is for this reason that Wright and Jackson reject the post-modern, relativist approach adopted by Erricker. Erricker (2000b) makes it clear that he sees 'no hard and fast distinction between the terms' (p.69) relativist or postmodern because

of the 'considerable overlap between and significant diversity among the writers in this category' (p. 69). Jackson on the other hand has already made clear that the interpretive approach to religious education takes a neutral position epistemologically in much the same way as an ethnographer should. A persistent impasse exists therefore between the original authors of the three approaches to religious education I have interrogated in my thesis, about the problems raised by what they each in different ways term 'plurality' in relation to competing truth claims (see Jackson 2004, Wright 2007 & Erricker & Erricker 2000).

Plurality understood only in terms of difference, continues to present dilemmas for religious educationalists (see for example Skeie 2007, Jackson, R., & Fujiwara, S. 2013& Baumfield, V. M., Conroy, J. C., Davis, R. A., & Lundie, D. C. 2012). Much theory in religious education, as I have already shown, tends to look to epistemological questions leading in turn to epistemological investigations and proposals. However with regard to the matter of plurality, I have begun to develop my argument instead from an educational question, and ask when does plurality matter in education, or put in another way how does plurality effect what education should aim to achieve? I have already articulated a response to this question in chapter 5 and conclude with Arendt that plurality matters very much in relation to the unique child; that is the child who is in, or the subject of, the educational context. I have spelled out that plurality effects education in a very particular way. In fact plurality rather than being a problem is central to ensuring education can achieve what it should aim to achieve.

To be sure, much work in religious education has until now been more or less consciously influenced by the thinking of writers such as Peters. This has led to an emphasis on defending religious knowledge as being in some way worthwhile drawing on long standing assumptions about religion being in some way good for society and people. A critique of this thread of discussion can be seen through this thesis. Further and since Peters' arguments as previously discussed lead to a view that education should bring the child to reason, religious education has become centered on ensuring children are reasoning in some way about this knowledge; whilst usually recognising that there may be some difficulties about this for the person of religious faith. My point is that since plurality has by and large been regarded in religious education as an epistemological problem, this has ensured that religious education has been interested mainly, but in different ways, in engaging with and resolving questions about

competing truth claims. This in turn has ensured that the representation of religion in the class room has been limited to belief and practice. Taken together with a focus on advancing the child's capacity to reason, in my view religious education has been incomplete in two ways. Incomplete both in terms of its account of what it means to be religious and incomplete educatively. Instead in the proposal I lay out in the next section, I begin with an educational question about how education is conceptualised in relation to plurality. And from here, with Arendt, I take a look at what effect recognising the importance of plurality should have in religious education that is educative.

I have already noted in Chapter 2 concerns raised regarding the confessional approach to religious education at the end of the 1960's, and in particular accusations of indoctrination. It is widely agreed therefore that secular religious education must be alert to the risk of, and has no part to play in, indoctrination. Further, I have already argued for education as having a position in relation to freedom, therefore for religious education to be educative it too must have an interested position in relation to freedom. Nevertheless, and as I have also noted earlier in this thesis in chapters 2 and 3, religious education because of its historical concerns regarding confessionalism has its own particular and distinctive reasons for wanting to ensure that freedom is taken seriously. In addition to this, I have shown that Peters understanding of freedom not only has general educational consequences but also has particular and significant implications for religious education in relation to knowledge. Therefore, rather than moving to Peters for a proposal regarding freedom to counter indoctrination in education, I move to see what happens for religious education when freedom is conceptualised from Arendt and religion is conceptualised not in only terms of belief and practice but also existentially in terms of faith. In the next section I show that taking these elements together where plurality is understood not as difference in terms of different truth claims, but in terms of the uniqueness of the child, the educational subject, something new is possible.

My research in chapter 5 has shown that in order to ensure education is educative it is fundamental to ask questions in relation to education. In my view this has been insufficiently tackled by those working in the field of religious education theory. In chapter 4 I have shown that when what it means to be religious is understood in terms of existing in the world in a particular way, as when religion is conceptualised as faith,

what counts as living a religious life is no longer bounded by knowledge and tradition. Thus it can be seen that conceptualising religion in a limited way unnecessarily constrains what is possible in religious education. I proceed now in section 6.4 first by recapitulating my discussion regarding freedom in relation to education. I show why this is particularly important for religious education by revealing connections between an existential response to what it means to be religious and what education should do; that is to say where education is conceptualised in relation to action in plurality with Arendt, rather than reason. With Weil I then go on to argue quite precisely what the teacher of religious education should do. The new possibilities for the religious education which follow from this I argue can respond to my overarching research question lying at the heart of this thesis.

6.4 A different option for religious education

In this section I present my argument for an existential approach to religious education. My proposal in short is that religious education, in order to be educative as discussed in chapter 5, should be understood as a 'place of appearance' (Arendt 1998, p. 199), where people are together 'in the manner of speech and action' (Arendt 1998, p. 199). My argument proceeds first by recalling that my research has shown that numerous problems face religious education where religion is only assumed as being propositional belief or practice. I propose that theologically there is another, as yet unconsidered, option where religion instead of being conceptualised as belief or practice, is conceptualised existentially as faith. My proposal for an existential approach to religious education lies in bringing religion conceptualised as faith together with my response to the question 'what should education do?', to which I have responded with Arendt in chapter 5 that education should bring the child to action. I undertake this presentation by developing my argument in two key interconnected steps. The first is to explain why it is important that plurality is understood in a particular way in religious education in order for religious education to be educative and the second step following from this is to explain the central importance of conceptualising religion in religious education as faith. In drawing these two steps together I am able to explain why I conclude that an existential religious education will have clarity of educative purpose in the public sphere in terms of aiming to bring the

child to action, why therefore it will have an interested position in relation to human freedom and importantly be able to explain clearly what it is that the teacher of religious education should do.

I begin explaining the first step in my argument by recalling that Arendt conceptualises freedom as something that manifests itself in relation to action. Action is only possible under the condition of plurality, and through which means the public sphere can come to exist. I want to make it clear therefore that it is significant that plurality, in my proposal for religious education, refers to the plurality of the children in the class. In so doing, discussions about what religious education should aim to achieve will be securely understood in relation to something that happens to the child. Further, Arendt's work has revealed a different relationship between plurality and freedom that is important in my argument and which I suggest also opens new possibilities regarding what religious education should be aiming to achieve. It is also important to appreciate fully the significance of freedom not being understood in relation to reason and autonomy, that is freedom as sovereignty in Arendtian terms, but in relation to action. This is not to say that reason is not important in religious education, neither is an existential religious education disinterested in religion conceptualised as belief or practice. However, since what is at stake here is the life of the child, the critical point of my argument at this stage comes from Arendt's view that plurality is the condition under which freedom can come to exist in the world. Thus plurality needs to be understood in relation to the subject of education – the child - and not religious belief or practice.

Plurality in religious education, rather than being understood in relation to religion as belief or practice and therefore presenting an objective problem in religious education needing to be resolved because of competing truth claims, can now be understood as being the condition under which human action is made possible. Indeed action, which Arendt (1998) suggests 'is, in fact, the one miracle-working faculty of man' (p. 246) and understood as human togetherness, is dependent upon plurality. The possibility of natality that all human beings 'are capable of by virtue of being born' (p. 247), is what enables each of our beginnings in the world of others. This way of looking at things ensures that the unique child is placed at the center of educative concern. However, this is not the individual autonomous subject who is similarly marked one from another by difference, but rather the unique subject who is dependent on the other for their

existence as free in the public sphere, which itself is brought into existence through human togetherness. What is highly significant about this way of viewing plurality in religious education, and which I will draw out further in my conclusion, is that it makes it possible for the unique child to make her beginning in the world of others in a way that is inextricably linked to freedom and the possibility of the public sphere existing at all in the world.

My second step is to explain the central importance of religion being conceptualised as faith in my proposal for religious education. Religion conceptualised existentially as faith recognizes theologically and has particular interest in, as well as an intimate relationship with, an exploration of human subjectivity. Indeed, religion conceptualised as faith across all religions as noted in chapter 4 has a concern for existence because human subjectivity is at its heart. Because of this, religion conceptualised as faith draws into religious education the subjective, an existential response to the question what does it mean to be religious. My point is that this matters not only because religion conceptualised as faith draws the subjective in to religious education. It matters also because religion conceptualised as faith has the capacity to play a significant role in making it possible for plurality to be taken seriously. Therefore religious education conceptualised existentially can make the difference between a group of people merely being together in a school and the educative possibility of existing in human togetherness.

Faith translated from the Greek 'pistes' as 'trust', is where what it means to be religious is understood not as something for which there is an object, as is the case where religion is conceptualised as belief. Rather what it means to be religious is understood in this case as a mode of existence, and for which Kierkegaard (see 2008) explained is something 'one is willing to live or die' for. Religious education which begins from an existential conceptualisation of religion can be understood as education into a mode of existence, which is action. It is an invitation to make a subjective response directly to the question 'what does it mean to live a life?' religious or otherwise. Religious education in this way of looking at things has the purpose of bringing the child to a mode of living in the world where the existence of freedom is possible. A critical point that follows from this and which lies at the heart of my proposal is that religious education where religion is understood as faith can contribute to bringing about the conditions where freedom can exist. This is freedom understood in terms of action

under the condition of plurality. In section 6.5 I go onto show that religious education understood in this way has the capacity to address the persistent problems it has faced in terms of teachers not understanding what it is that they should do. In the rest of this section I look directly at what it is that the religious education teacher should do, noting that it is likely that bringing the child's attention to others, in order to bring the subjectivity of each child to action, will be central in this new understanding.

6.4.1 What should the teacher of religious education do?

My overarching research question was developed from the question Cox (1983) identified as 'what is religious education essentially trying to do at this point in history?' (p.115), rephrased as 'what it is that religious education should aim to achieve?' My third research question had two parts the second of which was 'what should the teacher of religious education do?' In this section I bring the findings of all that has gone before in my thesis to bear on this question to determine a response. In asking this question I want to emphasise the role of the teacher in religious education and do so through reflecting on what might happen if teachers are enabled to appreciate three particular points. The first point is appreciating that plurality in religious education should be understood in terms of the unique educational subject, that is the particular children in a particular classroom. Secondly that what education should aim to achieve is conceptualised as bringing the child to action and that there is a relationship between this and plurality. These two points taken together link with my third point regarding religion being conceptualised not only as belief and practice but as existential in relation to faith understood as trust. An appreciation of these three elements together will, in my view, help the teacher begin to understand what she should do in religious education in the public sphere in a new way.

Rather than focussing on the object of study as being something to be learned and the teacher's role as being in some way concerned with facilitating the child's learning of that, in my proposal here the teacher's role changes. The teacher's attention will now be with the child. What the teacher needs to do is to bring the child to attend and the teacher needs to consider how she will do that in relation to something new to the child. For example, it may be that the child is exploring the idea of 'special' before perhaps moving on to exploring special places from the perspective of the Jewish tradition. The

important thing will be to find a way of opening the conversation in a way that cultivates the desire in the child to attend. I have noted that neither Jackson nor Wright considered in any great detail what the teacher should do. Erricker (2010) in contrast has however developed a clear a method of enquiry which prescribes, building on Grimmitt (2000), step by step the journey the teacher should take with the child. I have argued however that Erricker's relativist, post-modernism position leads inevitably back to a focus on knowledge. The consequence of this and the point I want to make is that in fact in some respects there is less distinction between the three approaches than at first may seem to be the case. I look instead to Weil to help me explain more carefully what it is that the teacher should do in religious education. I pick up the discussion I began in chapter 5 examining here the difference bring her thinking on attention makes for religious education, that is where religion is conceptualised as faith and education conceptualised with Arendt in relation to action.

Religious education as I am proposing it, is best understood as the cultivation in the child of a mode of being in the world. This mode of being is close to what Arendt explores as human beings existing in the world in such a way so as to be able to make their beginnings in the world of others. This does not mean that religious education is without content, but that transmission of knowledge and cultivation of reason are not sufficient educative purposes or things to be achieved alone. Weil brings an existential view to my proposal for what the teacher of religious education so conceptualised should do, and can be understood as three steps in relation to any particular piece of material in a practical unit of work. Weil's idea of 'attention' is the link in my argument between religion conceptualised as existential and education conceptualised in relation to action. The teacher must first act in such a way as to interest the child in something new something from outside the child that they would perhaps not otherwise meet. The teacher secures the conditions for action by calling the child to attend first perhaps to the other children but she must also call the child to attend to the world, so ensuring the child's beginning in the world is possible. In a class with seven year olds this may begin perhaps with a glass bowl of water on a low table placed centrally when the children come into the room. The teacher invites the children to sit around the table in a circle perhaps first in silence, before bringing the children to attend to what happens when the water is moved by a hand, or more water being poured into the bowl or by the movement of breath on the surface of the bowl. The teacher will open a

conversation between the children about what they have noticed, perhaps agreeing and disagreeing with each other about this water and other examples of water they have met in their lives. However the important thing here is the attention, agreeing and disagreeing is important in so much as it advances the depth of attentiveness. There would be no particular time limit set for this step.

Secondly the teacher needs to bring the child to a kind of intellectual humility. I understand this to be a step that follows bringing the child to attention, and means bringing the child to a point when she not only attends to what is brought to her, but also engages with, explores and enquires into it further; but without prejudgement. At this point if the teacher has begun to bring some additional content to the child for her to attend to, there will be intellectual engagement with the material, but with a degree of humility (for further exploration of what Weil means by humility and why it is important in this context see for example Weil 2003 pp.138-141) or open mindedness. It could be here that the teacher brings to the child the range of ways water is understood by people living a religious life as Christian in baptism; and at this point many possibilities could be explored. The important thing is that at every step the child's attention is deepening, and which Weil has helped me to understand is the purpose of teaching (see Weil 1963, p.108).

The third and final step is one of discernment, and this where the teacher ensures that the child's enquiry reaches some kind of a resolution, albeit contingent, about the importance of something. However this is not simply to reach a judgement. What is required is to weigh things up and to be able to discern by delving into the matters that have been considered before perhaps to rescuing something that seems to be of value lying in what is being explored and enquired into with humility. This is something important for the child herself, for others and even for the world. Opportunities for young people to attend to and dialogue with their peers, understood with Arendt as action, will have consequence for the existence of the public sphere. What is at stake here is the life of the child and freedom of the public sphere, and bringing into the public space things of value. Education understood only in terms of knowledge and bringing the child to reason alone cannot secure freedom. The teacher of religious education in bringing the child's attention to the way in which she herself exists in the world, is explicitly enabling her to find her own life view so she can make choices about how to live. However, because this is undertaken in the condition of plurality and

because educatively religious education is understood in terms of action where the child is able to make her beginnings in the world, this is an uncertain but not accidental outcome. Nevertheless it is indeed precisely the thing that religious education should set out to achieve.

The acquisition of knowledge alone is insufficient for freedom to exist in the world. Instead children and young people through action can begin to find reflected positions on and the importance of what it means to live their own life, and in so doing secure freedom of the public sphere. By way of closing this section and before moving onto the final section of this chapter, I note how Arendt exposes some possible consequences for the world if (young) people, in or out of the public educational contexts, are not able to think for themselves and which I discus in the next section before taking this up again in the conclusion to my thesis.

6.5 When might it matter that religious education is understood this way?

I have tried to show, especially in chapters 2 and 3, that there needs to be greater precision about the use of the term 'religious education'. I look now at how my proposal put forward in this chapter is distinctive as compared to the proposals for religious education made in the interpretive, critical realist and conceptual enquiry approaches by Jackson, Wright and Erricker respectively. In so doing I seek to highlight the difference it makes that religious education is conceptualised in terms of action and where religion is conceptualised existentially, not limited to religion as belief and tradition. Furthermore I consider the difference it makes when the teacher of religious education's role is understood as bringing the child to attend, to intellectual humility and discernment. I approach this task by comparing in each case first between my proposal regarding plurality and bringing the child to attend, secondly with my proposal regarding intellectual humility and thirdly my proposal for discernment before in each case reaching a conclusion regarding its distinctiveness. I close this section through a consideration of some implications of my approach in relation to action.

6.5.1 The interpretive approach

In the interpretive approach as proposed by Jackson, plurality is understood as meaning 'religious plurality'; indeed Jackson states in several places the interpretive approach to religious education 'aims to help children and young people find their own positions within the key debates about religious plurality' (see Jackson 1997, 2004a and 2005). Although he is interested in the children 'finding their own positions' this is limited to 'the key debates about religious plurality'. In my view, this is problematic for two reasons both of which relate to his understanding of plurality. The first is that Jackson's starting point is with the plurality of religion rather than the plurality of the children and linked with this Jackson's conceptualisation of religion as limited to belief and tradition. The implication of not interpreting plurality in relation to the classroom community is, from an Arendtian point of view, the loss of the possibility of the children making their beginnings in the world. My position on plurality in relation to religious education turns things around. Instead of asking questions first about religious plurality I have begun with an educational question 'when does plurality matter educatively?'

In responding to this question, I have not looked at plurality in terms of religious plurality but on the plurality of the unique children in the class. This has enabled me to shift the discussion away from knowledge and through introducing a third way of conceptualising religion has also opened up the possibility of discussing subjectivity. Hence my approach lends itself to an understanding of religious education in direct relation to the conditions required for action. The significance of this move has been that I am able to place human existence and freedom at the heart of my proposal for religious educational rather than epistemological conundrums about truth. Jackson's focus on religious plurality, especially where religion is restricted to being understood in terms only of belief and tradition, makes it more likely that the discussion will be oriented around knowledge and not to a focus on the unique child. This leads me to conclude that Jackson's approach despite the best of intentions ensures that it will be extremely difficult to understand how a young person would in actuality be able to 'find their own position(s) within key debates about religious plurality'; and in particular how this can have any meaning in the public sphere. The reason why this is the case is explained further by the second problem I identify.

The second problem regarding Jackson's focus on religious plurality is that he does not write precisely about how, in order to avoid charges of indoctrination, it is that the teacher is to interest the child in what is to be represented. The interpretive approach is understood as having four steps in order to overcome problems of representing religion in the classroom, and the first of these is representation. Although consideration about the importance of representing religion accurately in the classroom is discussed in the literature extensively (see for example Jackson 1997, 2000, 2004a, 2010), as already discussed the use of ethnographies of religion serves only to emphasise further the weight the interpretive approach gives to conceptualising religion as belief and practice. This, taken together with a focus on the plurality of religion rather than on the plurality of the children in the classroom, serves to limit the way this approach can demonstrate that it, or more particularly the teacher could really be interested in the child's perspective on things. This is in contrast to the approach I am advocating where what it is that the teacher is to do is made clear; that is to bring the child first to attend. I have argued that it is through being brought to attend, at least to the others in the class, that the condition of plurality can be ensured; my point is that in my proposal plurality as a condition for action is taken seriously. Jackson, aware of the issues of the relationship between the child and the religious material to be represented in the classroom, insists that the interpretive approach neither 'privileges the individual nor the religion but is concerned with the hermeneutical relationship between the two' (Jackson 2011a, p. 192). His turn to hermeneutics is interesting, but not something he expands upon, either in general or in terms of how it would enable him to describe what it is that the teacher should do in relation to the child. Nevertheless, since the understanding of plurality in the interpretive approach is only in terms of religious plurality this places weight upon the content of religious education. Therefore and despite wanting to discuss the relationship between the child in the educational context and the religious content, the position regarding plurality ensures there are limitations to this intention. This is not only regarding the extent to which the child will in fact be able to interpret what is brought to them but also a further significant implication lies in the way in which the possibility of the existence of human freedom and the public sphere is constrained.

The next steps in the interpretive approach are interpretation and reflexivity. Jackson (2000) makes clear this is in order to ensure there is reflection which ensures a

'relationship between the experience of the students and the experience of the insiders whose way of life they are attempting to interpret' (p. 134). Citing strong influence in his understanding of interpretation from Geertz's writing on ethnography (p.134), Jackson explains that the 'interpretive methodology of the project was not just influenced by discussions of theory and methodology but informed by the project team's own experience or ethnographic fieldwork' (p.134). Sensitivity is regarded as a prerequisite on the part of the students in this process, but Jackson does not give advice to the teacher as to either precisely what they should seek to achieve or precisely what they should do. In the proposal I am making in this thesis, Weil's discussions on bringing the child to attend, and through this to intellectual humility, help to explain what it is that the teacher is to do in order to bring the child to action in plurality. The problem with the interpretive approach however, lies in the fact that the conceptualisation of religion is focussed on belief and practice ensuring religion remains only an object of study. Jackson is not inviting the children in the religious education class to become ethnographers themselves, but to study others' ethnographies. Because of the emphasis on knowledge of beliefs or a tradition this approach serves to further orient the focus on to the religious material and away from the child. The child's intellectual life is confined to one of 'understander', that is one who has to understand something; which is in contrast to the approach I am advancing in my thesis. By recognising another way of conceptualising religion, that is religion conceptualised as faith, I open the possibility of an exploration of subjectivity. What is at stake here from an Arendtian point of view is the loss of plurality. What is significant in this is that where plurality is lost, so also is lost the possibility of action and thus the possibility of the child making her beginning in the world and the possibility of the existence of the public sphere.

The final step in the interpretive approach is edification, Jackson (2000) sees that this 'broadly resembles Grimmitt's idea of learning from religion' (p.135) and broadly speaking can be understood as some kind of reassessment of prior understanding. To some extent there is an element of similarity here between Jackson's idea of edification and what I have termed discernment. However there are at least two significant differences in my understanding of discernment. The first is that edification is something that Jackson hopes will happen to the child through her encounter with the religious material with limited consideration of what the teacher should do in relation to

this. The second significant difference compared to my proposal and in contrast to the interpretive approach is that of discernment. Discernment I understand from Weil is something the teacher needs to bring the child to. Further it is a particular way of seeing that is related to her understanding of choice, and is in a particular relationship with how one lives their life. Discernment cannot be left to happen by itself; it involves the teacher in coming alongside the child and is also related to a quality of attention. It is a deepening of the quality of attention that for Weil makes discernment possible. Discernment however, is not the same as reasoning nor is it the same as making a judgement. But importantly it cannot happen without the effort of attention. The teacher in bringing the child to discernment may ask simply 'after what we have been exploring in this time together, how this might change what you do tomorrow?' Signalling to the child that there may be something to consider in relation to how one lives a life. In my view this is important because in contrast to this Jackson, drawing from anthropological literature, assumes that something edifying will come out of the encounter the child has with the relations material as if by itself and without any particular effort. This understanding of edification, and that what comes through it could be something valuable, is only possible because Jackson in general makes theoretical assumptions about the inherent goodness of religion. Again something that from Arendt I would not want to assume at all.

In conclusion to this section I note that a critical distinction between the approach I am proposing and the interpretive approach is because the focus in the interpretive approach is on religious plurality. This limits the possibility of action and hence limiting the possibility the child making her beginnings in the world. The difference this makes at best is that it will be impossible for human freedom and the public sphere to exist in the world because these are both dependent upon the condition of action in plurality. At very worst the opposite is possible, and this is the possibility of the emergence of totalitarianism.

6.5.2 The critical realist approach

Wright (2007) envisages that critical religious education will be 'as a series of conversations between pupil's horizons of meaning and the worldviews of a range of discrete religious traditions' (p. 207) and by plurality Wright (see for example 2008) in

general means religious plurality. Wright (2007) sees his work as part of the heart of the 'original vision of liberal education' (p.207) citing the view of Hirst (p.31) that education is largely about the pursuit of knowledge. Hence his focus in the critical realist approach to religious education is centred on the plurality of religious knowledge, and most especially of religion understood as propositional belief (p.209), within the context of liberal education. This therefore places his discussion about the complexity of competing truth claims securely in the area of epistemology. I have already explored problems that locating the discussion in the sphere of epistemology raises for religious education, but here I would like to highlight the particular and distinct implications of this focus in relation to the capacity of Wright's approach to be able to take plurality seriously. The problems the critical realist approach faces are similar to that of the interpretive approach in that its focus is on religion as propositional belief. However the implications are even stronger for the critical realist approach because of the clear epistemological focus taken alongside a narrow conceptualisation of religion. The critical realist approach to religious education has reason and the formation of a 'cognitively coherent world view' (Erricker 2010, p. 59) as a central expectation of the approach leaving it open to critique from Arendt regarding the cultivation of freedom understood a sovereignty, and hence limiting the possibility of human action.

Wright turns to the variation theory of learning in order to explain what will take place in a religious education classroom, however this taken together with the focus on knowledge and Hirst's advocacy of liberal education means that any attempt at offering an explanation of what it is that the teacher should do in religious education is limited to bringing the child to reason. From this I conclude that the critical realist approach to religious education also limits the possibility for action in the Arendtian sense, because there is no recognition of the plurality in relation to the children in the class. What I mean by this is that because the focus in the critical realist approach is on reasoning about truth, this places the locus of attention well outside the subjectivity of the child. Furthermore the task of the teacher understood as bringing the child to reason has implications I have already discussed in chapter 5 and will return to shortly. Wright (2007) however does explore Smart's discussion regarding the relationship between the teacher and the child in 'liberal religious education' (p. 85) as being the 'relationship between subjectivity and objectivity in the study of religion' (p. 85). Indeed this is the

critical question at the heart of the phenomenological concern going right back to Husserl. However in both Smart's and Wright's work this discussion takes place in the context of a conceptualisation of religion understood only as belief or tradition. Therefore, and hence for Wright at least, the subjective - objective relationship because of its focus on the religion as propositional belief focusses only on the object of religion, not on the relationship between the child and the object. Therefore, in my view, there is insufficient attention paid to the child as unique subject of education. The critical realist approach risks becoming one mainly of ontological and epistemological concern rather than an educational concern. Nevertheless, Wright discusses the necessity of bringing the 'subjectivity of pupils into conversation with the objective truth claims of a range of religions and secular traditions' (p.85). However this remains quite distinctive from approach I take from Weil, of bringing the child first to attend. My approach has emerged from a question regarding what is it that the education should do, and taking into account my discussion in chapter 5 with Arendt, has significant implications in relation to the possibility of the existence of freedom and the public sphere.

Wright makes it clear that the critical realist approach to religious education is set within a view of education that 'rests on the cultivation of academic freedom in the classroom' (p. 86). My reading of Wright's (see especially 2007) conceptualisation of freedom is that it is quite explicitly close to Arendt's understanding of freedom as sovereignty and thus vulnerable to the full weight of her critique and the implications Arendt sees for this in terms of the possibility of ensuring the conditions for action. The academic freedom upon which Wright's approach to religious education is dependant is also at variance with the intellectual humility which I propose the teacher should bring the child towards. Hence I conclude that Wright's proposals are probably the furthest away from my understanding of what religious education should do educatively, in terms of bringing children to action in the condition of plurality. This has significant implications for the possibility of religious education being interested in the cultivation of a mode of existence dependent upon human freedom. The critical realist approach, with such a view of what should take place in the classroom and such a limited understanding of what the teacher should do herself, I conclude with Arendt would be more likely to create the conditions for totalitarianism than freedom. This is

as a consequence of his theoretical proposals as well as uncovered assumptions being made about both religion and education in the critical realist approach.

6.5.3 The conceptual enquiry approach

Erricker (2010) holds that religious education 'is derived from religious studies' (p. 95) which is a 'multidisciplinary endeavour' (p. 95) and he adopts a relativist, postmodern perspective on the representation of religion in the classroom. His view is that religious education which emerged from a 'descriptive phenomenological approach concerned with religious representation' (p. 94), placed an over emphasis on the content of the curriculum is something he sees as having been problematic for religious education. Instead Erricker developed an approach to the teaching of religious education based upon 'a methodology for conceptual enquiry' (p.82); the intention being to place the educational interests of the child at the centre of the enquiry. However the point I want to make is that Erricker's focus on religious plurality understood as difference (see for example Erricker 2001b and 2006) rather than the uniqueness of each child, still raises some problems. What is at stake here is that where plurality is seen in terms of the plurality of religion to be represented in the classroom, rather than actual human plurality, there is the possibility of each unique child's new beginning in the world being lost and subsumed into sameness. However I think this is not what Erricker intended, but may be a possible consequence of him taking a relativist position in relation to religious belief. Arendt (1998) explains why this matters and presents such a very dangerous situation 'where nobody can any longer agree with anybody else' (p.58). Each person is 'imprisoned in the subjectivity of their own singular experience' (p. 58) which she continues by saying 'is usually the case in tyrannies' (p.58). If the conceptual enquiry approach were to find a way to include a broader understanding of religion, where religion as existential can be included, then the orientation may shift away from the material and open the possibility of children's subjectivity being taken to the heart of the proposal.

The implication of this not happening, but remaining with a relativist and postmodern approach to religion is that rather than the conceptual enquiry approach being able, as is intended, to 'support students in developing their own pattern of values and principles' (see for example 2004 & 2010) it is likely to have the opposite effect. This is because

the plurality of religion is understood as only in terms of belief and practice. Erricker (2010) explains that the first steps of his approach, in the 'communicate' and 'apply' steps, are where students are 'engaged in an enquiry into and reflection upon their own *experience*' (p.83). However, this taken together with the fact that the plurality of the children in the class is not being mentioned at all, seems very well to support Arendt's observations of the imprisonment of each 'in the subjectivity of their own singular experience' (Arendt 1998, p. 58). In contrast to this, I have argued that what is educatively significant is precisely the plurality of the children; the teacher's role is to bring each child to attend. Here the teacher has something important to do that is not accidental. In my view were the communicate and apply step to be understood in terms of bringing the child to attend, as Weil has enabled me to articulate, then the role of the teacher in this approach would be understood in a particular way very close to my proposal in this thesis. If instead, rather than the teacher bringing the religious matter to the child with an acceptance of relativism and individual difference, the first steps of the cycle of enquiry were to be understood as opening up the classroom to the plurality of all the children's subjectivity and as bringing the children to attend, something different would become possible. The approach to religious education argued for in this thesis, has an existential focus which is made possible by including religion conceptualised existentially as faith. In this conceptualisation of religion, theologically, subjectivity is something that can be explicitly discussed and explored. This is significant in terms of the possibility of religious education being educative because attention to the other, as I have proposed, is what can ensure plurality which is itself a condition of action.

Erricker's next step of 'enquire' is where a religious understanding of the concept being enquired into is brought to the students in a way which Erricker (2010) explains corresponds to 'Grimmitt's second stage' (p.85) of constructivism. Erricker highlights that Grimmitt 'makes the point' (p.85) that the students are to be invited to be constructivist themselves in response to the new information the teacher introduces to them, however precisely what this means is not fully explained. Grimmitt's third stage of constructivism is to be understood in relation to the 'contextualise' and 'evaluate' steps (p. 84). Grimmitt (2000) explains his work on constructivism has largely been drawn from the work of von Glaserfield (p. 210) and is used with the broad intention of 'showing how a constructivist approach to teaching and learning about religions in RE

differs from an instructional approach' (p. 211). My problem with this is that the focus remains on the material being brought to the students, and without sufficient care being given to the attitude necessary on the part either of the teacher or the student. The assertion from Grimmitt is that this constructivist approach will be able to promote complex and sophisticated forms of learning (p.223) and further will enable pupils to engage critically in the process of meaning making 'through consideration of the inescapable, ultimate questions that arise from reflecting upon the human condition (p.224). My suggestion is that if an existential conceptualisation of religion was included in how religion was conceptualised, and if the communicate and apply steps were understood in terms of bringing the children to action through bringing them to attend then this approach would be similar to that which I am proposing. Further, the 'enquire' and 'contextualise' steps could be understood as bringing the child to intellectual humility.

A concern I have with this approach as it stands is that what is missing is a view of plurality understood in terms of the children in the class, further in the absence of the role of the teacher being understood as bringing the child to attend is that this approach is likely to be far more coercive than Erricker or Grimmitt would want or intend. In my view this is because the educative nature of religious education has not been sufficiently explored by Grimmitt (see 1987a and 1987b) upon which Erricker built his understanding of constructivism in his proposals. The approach I have proposed in this chapter is that through understanding the role of the teacher in terms of bringing the child to attend building on Weil, an attitude of intellectual humility will emerge on the part of both the teacher and the student. My understanding of humility has come from Weil and is the mode of existence necessary in order for the child to be sufficiently open to something new. My point is that the steps in the conceptual enquiry approach are in fact incredibly helpful in expressing what could be happening in an existential religious education. They would nevertheless require the inclusion of an existential conceptualisation of religion as faith taken together with education understood as bringing the child to action under the condition of plurality, rather than to reason.

It is out of a deepening of the capacity to attend that discernment grows, and I want to make some observations about this as compared to the final step in the 5 steps of the conceptual enquiry approach, which as it stands is the 'evaluate' step. I do this by seeking some clarity of the difference between discernment and evaluation. The first

distinction between discernment and evaluation is that for Weil discernment is something subjective and not an objective judgement based upon reason. However being subjective does not make it any the lesser a part of the intellect, this is because for Well the intellect is not only bound by reason. Furthermore, this is also because for Weil knowledge is not attained only through reason but rather through attention. Indeed as Pirruccello (1997) has noted, Weil's view seems to be that the best human beings can do in terms of gaining knowledge about the natural order will be in terms of a 'discernment of a balance or equilibrium in the midst of continual change' (p. 75). My proposal then sits well with the final step of the conceptual enquiry approach, but requires the addition of discernment to the evaluation as initially envisaged by Erricker. In my view this would bring something important to the approach. The most important thing is in the inclusion of religion conceptualised as faith into the way of understanding religion and a movement away from understanding religion in a relativistic way. This opens up the possibility for the child's subjectivity in religious education and a different way to understanding the importance of the responsibility of the teacher to bring the child to attend. Another possibility is that the cycle should always continue round through a second communicate and apply step, where once more the subjectivity of the child and children together in the class would be brought to the fore.

The implications of my analysis and comparison of the existential approach to religious education I am arguing for here and the conceptual enquiry approach as it stands, is that most critically although the conceptual enquiry approach intends to place the child at the heart of the enquiry, this intention remains problematic because of the focus on plurality in terms of religious difference. This leads to religious matters being the focus of the enquiry, and the skills based method for teaching religious education becomes a systematic way of bringing the child to engage rationally with the material. Were there to be the inclusion of religion conceptualised as faith and an educative discussion where the plurality of the children was taken into account then this would open the conceptual enquiry approach to reinterpretation in line with the proposal I am making here. Communicate and apply already bears some resemblance to what I have termed bringing the child to attention, and enquire and contextualise to what I have termed bringing the child to intellectual humility. Were religion conceptualised as faith to be included into the discussion then the inclusion of the child's subjectivity becomes

possible. A discussion of the subjective becomes possible; a critical aspect of religious education so configured. Where religion is conceptualised as faith, the subjective is taken seriously, the plurality of the students at the heart of the educative proposal for religious education, religious education becomes a place of appearance, where children and teachers can be together in a manner of speech and action.

In concluding this section, in my view the conceptual enquiry approach to religious education is the closest to the existential approach I have argued for through my thesis. Indeed with some adjustments to the theory underpinning the conceptual enquiry approach the two could be well aligned.

6.6 Conclusion.

At the beginning of my enquiry, I set out to bring greater precision in terms of a response to the question Cox (1983) identified in terms of 'what is religious education essentially trying to do at this point in history in the culture in which pupils and teachers are living?' (p.115). I have taken matters a step further however and through the investigation which constitutes my thesis, have set out to discover what should be the purpose of religious education in the public sphere. I have set about this by identifying three research sub questions the first of which was 'what counts as religion in religious education?' and which I investigated in chapter 4. My second research question was 'what is it that education should do or aim to achieve?' and I followed a line of enquiry with Arendt and Weil in chapter 5. My third research sub-question enabled me to bring together the findings from chapters 4 and 5 in order to address my overarching enquiry question. In addition to this I have also developed my argument through chapters 4 and 5 to be able to present a response to the question 'what should the teacher of religious education do?'

My investigation in chapters 2 and 3 identified that there have been assumptions lying underneath many proposals for religious education around questions of what is meant by religion and also by education. In addressing these questions in chapter 4 and 5 I have been able to move to make a presentation for a new approach to religious education in my closing chapter. In chapter 4 I developed a reconceptualisation of religion through asking not 'what is religion' but instead what does it mean to live a religious life and, in chapter 5, I developed educational theory to advance my argument

in chapter 6 for an existential approach to religious education. Here I have argued that religious education should be understood as a 'place of appearance (Arendt, p. 199), and where people are together 'in the manner of speech and action' (Arendt 1998, p. 199) and children brought to action. It is in this way that with Arendt I understand the links between religious education and the public sphere and its particular contribution to even the possibility of both freedom and the public sphere existing.

This is important because the public sphere, as discussed in chapter 5, cannot be taken for granted to exist 'wherever men live together in a community' (Arendt 1998, p. 152). Perhaps the most critical point I have to make in my thesis, in addition to the need to conceptualise education with Arendt as bringing the child to action, is that religious education where religion is understood existentially as faith, rather as only belief or practice, has a particularly significant contribution to bring to education as a whole. This is because of the way in which religion as existential opens the possibility for an exploration of subjectivity in such a way to enable action under the condition of plurality. A consequence of this new way of conceptualising religious education, in my view, means it could have a particularly important role to play in the existence of freedom and the public sphere in just the way Arendt understands.

In addition to this the teacher's role also becomes clear in educational terms, and it is with Weil that I am able to spell out what it is that the teacher should do in order for religious education understood existentially to achieve what it should set out to achieve. This is through bringing the child to attention, to intellectual humility and to discernment. Another point I want to make at this juncture however, is that it is not that reason is never important in religious education. Rather it is that reasoning is not what religious education should aim to achieve as an end in itself. This is because, as Arendt has helped me to explain, reason always has another end outside itself. Instead my proposal for an existential approach to religious education understands education first as bringing the child to action and is open to a conceptualisation of religion as existential, as faith, as well as religion as belief and practice. What is at stake here for an existential religious education, one which has learned from other approaches to religious education, is that it can make the difference between a group of people merely being together and the educative possibility of them existing together in human togetherness and further make a difference to the possibility of people existing as free in the public sphere. My hope is that the findings of this research opens some new

avenues of investigation which others may take up, both in terms of what religious education should aim to achieve, as well as in terms of what the teacher should do and hence also for research in teacher education.

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